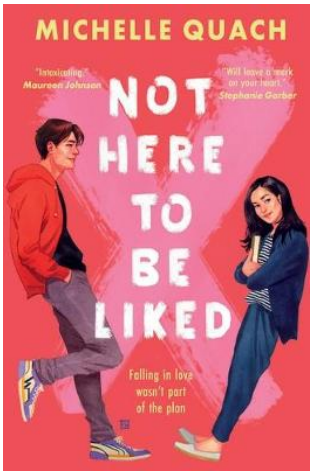
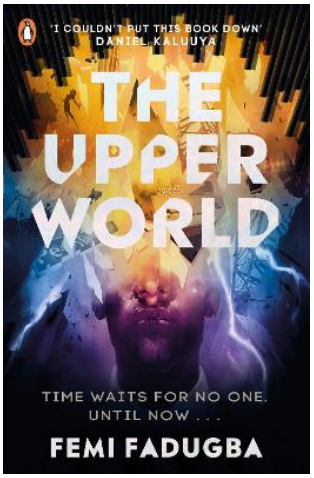
Find our recommendations for books to encourage reluctant readers in Key Stage 4. Page-turners with a strong, gritty or humorous storyline.



Not Here To Be Liked

Author: Michelle Quach **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 16/09/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

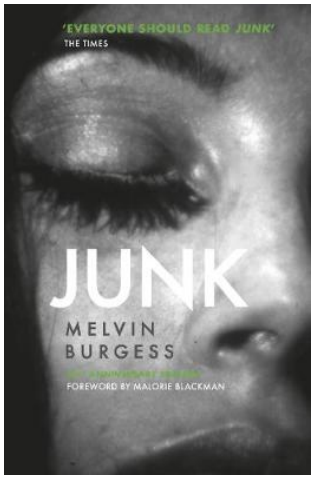
October 2021 Debut of the Month Refreshing, funny and packed with essential feminist themes, not to mention an authentic, engaging protagonist in Eliza Quan (a no-nonsense teenager who doesn't give two hoots about what people think of her), Michelle Quach's Not Here To Be Liked is at once deliciously entertaining and empowering. With pithy observations like "Girls get judged for their past; guys get judged for their potential", it's also a thought-provoking reminder (if one were needed) that there's some way to go before patriarchal structures are disassembled - thanks goodness, then, that Eliza is on hand to speed up the process. Oh, and the novel features a whole lot of cute kissing to boot. Eliza is set to be the new editor-in-chief of her high school newspaper. Firstly, she's the most qualified candidate. Secondly, she's the only candidate...until former baseball player Len joins the paper for want of something better to do and winds up winning the vote. Justifiably angry that he - male, handsome, popular and utterly inexperienced - was picked over her - Eliza's venting inspires a feminist movement that exposes the gulf between those who want - and recognise the need for - gender equality, and those who think she's just annoyed about being overlooked. Alongside exploring such pertinent themes in slick style, the novel also sees Eliza face the ultimate conflict when she finds herself falling for Len. Fast and furious, Not Here To Be Liked flies in the face of anyone dumb enough to think that books about feminism (and feminists themselves) can't be smart and funny.



The Upper World

Author: Femi Fadugba **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 19/08/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3

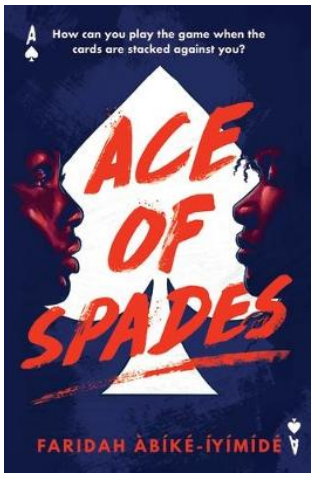
September 2021 Debut of the Month | A Julia Eccleshare Pick of the Month August 2021 This gripping thriller with a high octane plot and full-on characters takes its readers on an amazing journey across two time frames and in and out of real science and maths while also vividly capturing contemporary teenage life. Esso and Rhia, from different times and, in reality, from different generations, are brought together by chance and, from then on, must work out how best to understand the Upper World and all its secrets. Femi Fadugba's debut novel will delight and challenge readers.



Junk 25th Anniversary Edition

Author: Melvin Burgess **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 01/07/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

Bold and brutally, brilliantly honest, Melvin Burgess's multi-award-winning (and multi-layered) Junk presents the definitively frank account of why young people might head down a drug-taking path - and remain there. A love triangle, of sorts, between its two main characters and their addiction to heroin, once read Junk is never forgotten. It strikes deep with unflinching power, never shirking from truths that need to be told, which it does from multiple compelling viewpoints, and with incredible empathy. Smart and thoughtful Tar has been blighted by abuse at the hands of his parents. In contrast, middle class Gemma has attentive parents, which has driven them to strictness, and drives her to leave home. Both on the streets of Bristol, Tar and Gemma fall in together, and fall in love, though it's not long before they tumble into a spiral of drug-related devastation. In a novel packed with agonising episodes, perhaps most poignant of all is witnessing Tar and Lily convince themselves they're in control of their heroin addiction, but since it's exactly that - an addiction - they are not, and their story will cut to your soul.

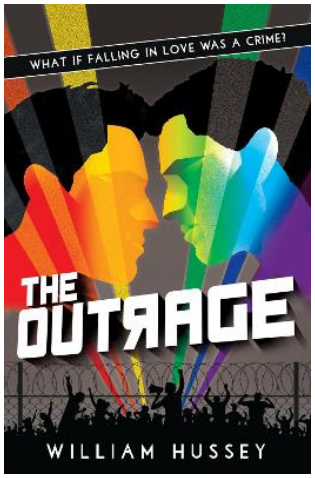


Ace of Spades

Author: Faridah Abike-Iyimide **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 10/06/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

June 2021 Debut of the Month Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé's Ace of Spades is an explosively exceptional debut. An incisively subversive, edge-of-your-seat thriller that takes the genre to jaw-droppingly unexpected extremes as it exposes horrific, deep-rooted institutionalised racism. The action centres around an elite high school in the white part of town. It has an all-white student population, except for our two principle characters - musician and scholarship student Devon, and privileged aspiring Yale alumnus Chiamaka. Devon (Von to his proud, hardworking Ma) can't wear his hair in twists or cornrows here, and Chiamaka, of Nigerian and Italian heritage, feels compelled to hide her natural hair, and has adopted a "kill or be killed" stance - to achieve the success she's set on, Chiamaka knows she'll have to be tougher than tough. Devon and Chiamaka are sent reeling when an anonymous texter, Aces, starts revealing their deepest, darkest secrets, and it doesn't take much to realise why they're being targeted - the colour of their skin. And so a cruel cat-and-mouse game unfolds - two mice trapped in a destructive nightmare and a malicious cat motivated by racism, with homophobia weaponised too. While there are shocks aplenty (of the rare, ingeniously interwoven variety), the story is compellingly complex, with finely considered character exposition, and no simplified, clear-cut dichotomies drawn between who we can trust, and who should be top of our suspect list. The mounting tension is powerfully palpable, as is the embedded racism Devon and Chiamaka are subjected to - it runs deeper

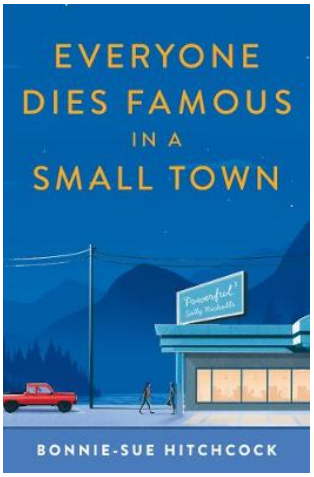
and wider than they (or readers) can possibly anticipate. Turns out, no one can be trusted; that there's more than one cat in this hideous game. Oh, and there are romantic entanglements too, all of which means Ace of Spades delivers on all fronts - mystery, romance and tackling important issues in explosive style. What more could a reader ask for? *** Find a must-read letter from Faridah to her readers, attached to the extract.



The Outrage

Author: William Hussey **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 13/05/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

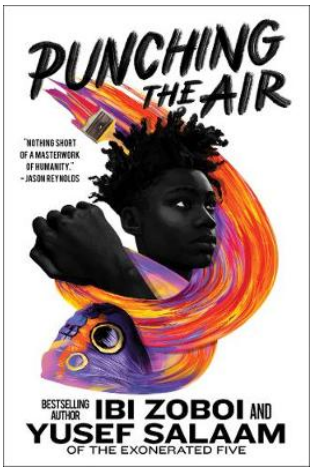
Potently pertinent, William Hussey's The Outrage wears its messages loud and proud on its sleeve. Think a YA LBGTQ+ version of The Handmaid's Tale meets The Wizard of Oz; speculative fiction underpinned by aspects of present-day realities, and a belief in the importance of representation: "To see yourself reflected as a human being, with worth and dignity? I really think that has the power to change minds. Even save lives." Deeply in love with his boyfriend Eric, the son of the chief inspector of Degenerate Investigations, aspiring filmmaker Gabe doubts he'll ever be able to make the kind of movies he loves. Not in this England. Not living in the aftermath of the Outrage. In this society, it's illegal to be gay, libraries have been shut down, and families who've contributed to the country have been put on "repatriation trains". Sound familiar? The Outrage's version of England certainly chimes with recognisable elements of the current political and cultural climate. And, through their discussions of trans rights, Windrush scandal-esque "send them home" policies, and the effects of climate change, the characters are powerful mouthpieces for big issues as they journey the gripping plot. Talking of which, Gabe, Eric and their fellow Rebel friends attend Mosley Grammar school. Though they're excused from national service as a result of their Special Educational Exemption, they have a whole lot to hide when Protectorate Investigations arrive for their "annual scare-the-shit-out-of-the-kids assembly". Then, everything unravels when Gabe and Eric are seen doing a whole lot of stuff they shouldn't have been doing - under this regime, at least. A spirit of resistance surges as Gabe fights for a freer future in this most hostile of environments. Oh, and if that's not enough, there's romantic love, movie love, parental love, and love between friends who'll always have each other's backs, plus a powerful, heart-melting Wizard of Oz motif replete with Toto, Scarecrow and a quest to reach the Emerald City of the Emerald Isle - where the grass really is greener. All in all, a thought-provoking, page-turning reminder that "difference is good...defiance is essential" from the inventive author of Hideous Beauty.



Everyone Dies Famous in a Small Town

Author: Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 20/04/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

Longlisted for the UKLA Book Award 2022 ages 11-14 Exhibiting the same intense sense of place as in her highly acclaimed debut, The Smell of Other People's Houses, and set once again in Alaska and the American West during the 1990's, this collection demonstrates absolutely remarkable storytelling and authenticity. Every word in each short story counts in bringing another character so vividly to life that we become completely immersed in their lives. These troubled teens encounter love, loss, coming of age, grief, abuse, and friendships with the minutiae of daily life often revealing or foreshadowing a deeper and darker truth. All the narratives share the backdrop of an increasingly devasting forest fire and the history of a little girl's disappearance. Each story relates to these major events in different ways and the links between the individual stories and these shattering events gradually become apparent. What is also revealed is the universal dichotomy of small communities, where everybody knows everybody and yet does not actually know them at all. The struggle to get your voice heard and for people to accept your truth is at the heart of these beautifully crafted stories. This is a book which should be garlanded with awards and will definitely linger long in the reader's mind.

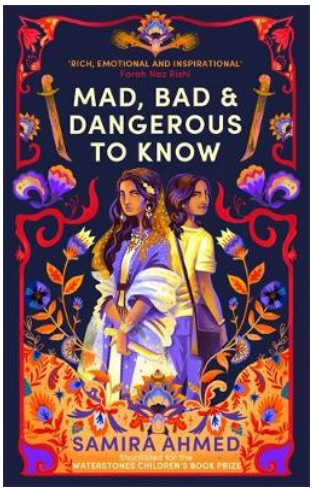


Punching the Air

Author: Ibi Zoboi, Yusef Salaam **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 01/09/2020 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Longlisted for the UKLA Book Award 2022 ages 11-14 | September 2020 Book of the Month Co-written by award-winning novelist Ibi Zoboi and Dr Yusef Salaam, a prison reform activist, poet and one of the Exonerated Five, Punching the Air is a timely, heartachingly powerful free verse novel. Through its shatteringly succinct lyricism, Amal's story is a mighty call to action that rouses readers to question the deep-rooted and damaging consequences of racially biased societal systems, while radiating the light and hope of art and Amal himself. Sixteen-year-old Amal is a talented poet and artist, but even at his liberal arts college, he's victimised by destructive preconceptions, deemed disruptive by people who "made themselves a whole other boy in their minds and replaced me with him." Amal's budding life careers off-course when he's wrongfully convicted of a crime in a gentrified area. Even in the courtroom it feels to him "like everything that I am, that I've ever been, counts as being guilty". Standing before judgemental eyes in his specially chosen grey suit, he's aware that "no matter how many marches or Twitter hashtags or Justice for So-and-So our mind's eyes and our eyes' minds see the world as they want to/Everything already illustrated in black and white." In the detention centre, Amal considers his African ancestry: "I am shackled again," he says. "Maybe these are the same chains that bind me to my

ancestors. Maybe these are the same chains that bind me to my father and my father's father and all the men that came before." He expresses society's double standards with searing clarity too - Black boys are "a mob/a gang ghetto/a pack of wolves animals/thugs hoodlums men" while white boys "were kids having fun home loved supported protected full of potential boys." But through the beatings and despair, through anger and frustration, Amal finds solace in the supportive letters he receives from a girl in his school, and his "poet, educator and activist" teacher. By turns soul-stirring and inspiring, this sharp exposure of injustice and testament to the transformative power of art comes highly recommended for readers who love the work of Jason Reynolds and Elizabeth Acevedo. Find a selection of recommended books that celebrate difference in our blog, Diverse Voices.

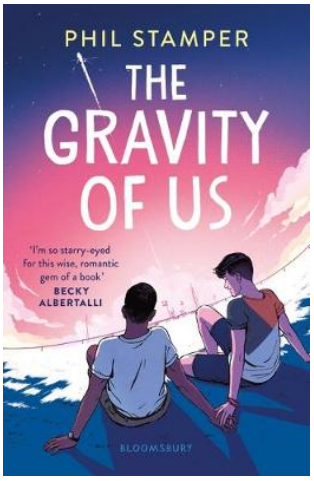


Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know

Author: Samira Ahmed **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 20/08/2020 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Shot-through with a vital message about the importance of giving voice and rightful representation to women who've been silenced by centuries of patriarchy, this smart novel melds an intriguing art history mystery with Parisian amour. While Khayyam is clear about what she wants to do with her life - become a respected art historian - her identity is more complex. She's "French American. Indian American. Muslim American. Biracial. Interfaith." As such, "Others look at me and try to shove me into their own narrative to define who and what I am. But I'm not a blank page that everyone else gets to write on. I have my own voice." This statement weaves through the whole novel, which sees Khayyam in Paris for the summer, still reeling from a relationship gone awry back home in Chicago, and from her Young Scholar Prize essay being dismissed as "the work of a dilettante, not a future art historian". When she happens to run into a cute Parisian boy, who happens to be a descendent of bi-racial French writer Alexandre Dumas, Khayyam and said cute boy (also called Alexandre) embark on an intellectual voyage that leads them to Leila, a nineteenth-century Muslim woman connected to Dumas and Byron. Leila's forgotten life and silenced voice is revealed through her letters, with Khayyam frequently asserting her desire to right the wrong of "the entire world dehumanizing and erasing this woman who had a life, who mattered." Through Khayyam the novel also addresses issues around representation and cultural appropriation as she wrestles with determining who has the right to tell Leila's story, including herself. As Khayyam's findings hot up, so too does her love life. First there's the spark between her and Alexandre, then there's the simmering presence of her Chicagoan ex. With Paris vibrantly evoked as her stage - its history, architecture, secret gardens and food - Leila's personal life and intellectual prowess combine to create a life-changing summer. This comes hugely commended - and recommended - for its portrayal of an intelligent young woman who refuses to bow to expectations, and who's determined to give voice to the voiceless. Like Khayyam, it's smart, thoughtful and inspirational. For more books with a

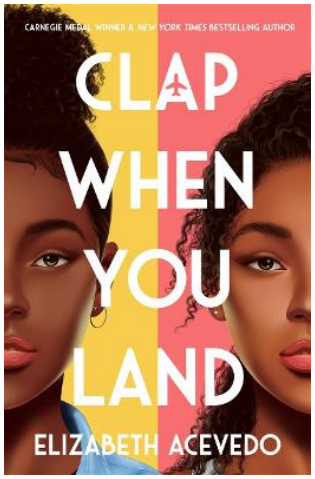
strong, feminist theme, visit our Girl Power feature.



The Gravity of Us

Author: Phil Stamper **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 14/05/2020
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

June 2020 Debut of the Month At seventeen, Brooklyn hipster Cal is a successful social media journalist accustomed to living in the public eye, with a whopping 435,000 followers on the FlashFame app. But even Cal isn't ready for the unforgiving media storm he's thrust into when his pilot dad is shortlisted for NASA's Orpheus mission to Mars. Initially dead against leaving Brooklyn, Cal begins to wonder whether "maybe Clear Lake, Texas, has a story out there just waiting for me to uncover." And then there's handsome Leon, one of the other "Astrokids", who's set his heart pounding before they've even met. On arrival, and immediately thrust into the spotlight by StarWatch reality TV show, Cal finds himself "admitting I like our new home, even this town", which in turn "feels like I'm abandoning my old life." Maybe this is down to his contradictory nature - Cal is anything but a straightforward teenager. He doesn't think like one. He doesn't speak like one. Indeed, his thought processes and dialogue can seem out of kilter with his age. He needs everything just-so, but at the same acts impulsively. For example, he can't stop himself from broadcasting news about his dad to his followers, which - as predicted - results in him facing the wrath of StarWatch. Cal's settling-in has a lot to do with his rollercoaster romance with Leon. It's starts out with the thrust of a rocket launch ("This crush is strong. This crush is too powerful. This crush will be the end of me"), and then comes a crash to earth alongside tragedy striking the mission. In the aftermath of this, Cal finds himself working to expose Starwatch's agenda, both to clear his name and save the mission, and the truths revealed sure ain't pretty. Covering mental health issues (via Leon's depression and Cal's mom's anxiety) alongside a whirlwind coming-of-age gay love story, The Gravity of Us is an entertaining YA debut that gives many underrepresented folk a chance to see themselves on the page, with the added kick of space exploration and media ruthlessness.



Clap When You Land

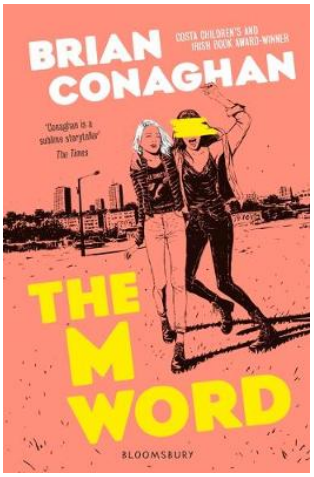
Author: Elizabeth Acevedo **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 05/05/2020 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Shortlisted for CILIP Carnegie Medal 2021 - Shortlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2021 From the multi-award-winning author of The Poet X and With the Fire on High comes Elizabeth Acevedo's exceptional dual-voiced novel about loss, love and sisterhood across the sea, a story partly sparked by the fatal crash of a flight from NYC to Santo Domingo in 2001. Camino Rios has always lived in the Dominican Republic with her aunt Tia, "a woman who speaks to the dead, who negotiates with spirits", a woman who's like a mother to her: "Even when Mama was alive, Tia was the other mother of my heart." Life's not easy for them on the island, but they have it better than their neighbours as a result of Camino's beloved Papi working in the US for most of year. To Camino, Papi is a "A king who built an empire so I'd have a throne to inherit", and she lives for the summer months when he comes home to them. But all life is thrown into terrible disarray when she goes to meet Papi at the airport and learns that his plane has fallen from the sky, and then: "I am swallowed by this shark-toothed truth." This story is blessed with such divinely piercing language throughout. At the same time, across the Atlantic, Yahaira Rios learns that her hero Papi has died in a plane crash. She already knew he had a wife on the island (but not of his secret daughter), and has always longed to reconcile her Dominican heritage with her American life: "Can you be from a place you have never been? You can find the island stamped all over me, but what would the island find if I was there? Can you claim a home that does not know you, much less claim you as its own?" When it emerges that Papi wishes to be buried back in DR, Yahaira's Mami insists that she will never let her "touch foot on the sands of that tierra." But Yahaira has other plans, not least when she's contacted by a girl named Camino Rios who bears an undeniable resemblance to Papi, and to her too. As well as being exceptionally affecting on grief, forgiveness and family secrets, Clap When You Land is also devastatingly sharp on the exploitative tendencies of tourism. In Camino's words: "I am from a playground place…Our land, lush and green, is bought and sold to foreign powers so they can build luxury hotels...Even the women, girls like me, our mothers and tias, our bodies are branded jungle gyms…Who reaps? Who eats? Not us. Not me." Overflowing with truths of the heart, and truths about inequalities that need to be broken, while also addressing the complexities of what it means to be of a place, I can't praise this highly enough.

Gemma's Not Sure

Author: Gill Stewart **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 30/04/2020 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Following on from Lily's Just Fine, this Scottish seaside-set romance tackles issues of self-confidence and coming-of-age confusion with a lovely lightness of touch. Alongside a sweet rollercoaster romance, the author explores how difficult it can be to find your way in the world, how difficult it is to make life-changing decisions. Gemma is one of life's self-doubters. Painfully unsure of herself, she's the polar opposite of her super-confident, super-enthusiastic best friend Lily, whom we met in the first of this four-book series. A talented musician, Gemma's been offered an audition at the prestigious Glasgow Conservatoire, but she's not sure she can face it, or if this is what she really wants. Meanwhile, Lily's ex-boyfriend is already at uni in Glasgow. Confident coaster Jamie seems to have the world at his feet, but beneath his happy-go-lucky exterior, Jamie's struggling - failing his assignments and only on this course due to parental pressure. As it all gets too much, he and Gemma strike up an unlikely friendship - and more - when Jamie convinces her to form a band with him. The path of their romance is far from smooth, with Gemma doubting herself at every turn, and Jamie struggling to find a new life course, but the cute couple carry readers with them every step of the way. You can't help but root for Gemma to be happy, to feel at ease, to find her way in the world. And Jamie too. Far from being the cocksure young man people take him to be, he's also a lost soul, floundering to find his way. With a sweet sub-plot about mentoring and empathy alongside the romantic drama, this a fun summer read with emotional wisdom.

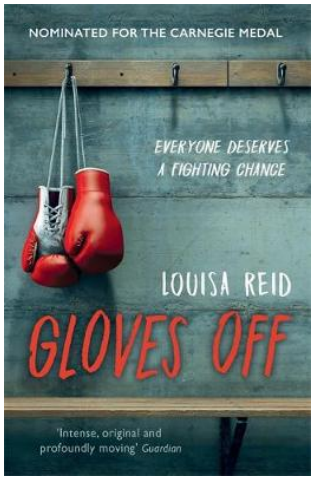


The M Word

Author: Brian Conaghan **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 02/04/2020 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2021 Hitting rock bottom, hanging on, and coming back from the edge. Brian Conaghan has an incredible talent for telling it like it is. His characters are authentic and absorbing; flawed underdogs with serious troubles, like 17-year-old Maggie whose dad "drank his liver into a spreadable pâté", and whose laid-off dinner lady mum is "gifted in the art of attracting pure dickheads". And Maggie? Maggie's "an island: the way I dress; the music I listen to; the patter my brain discharges; everything". Maggie's struggling to deal with the tragic loss of her best friend Moya whose death she feels excruciatingly guilty about. Moya was a "mad riot" of a girl, but as Maggie "couldn't be arsed with all the love-struck vom" Moya was spewing, because she didn't speak out against the Internet trolls, she believes she was a "failure friend". Alongside her grief, guilt and self-harm, Maggie struggles with her mother's severe depression, but also tingles with the hope that comes from starting art college: "now's the time to make something of myself." Indeed, she soon forms

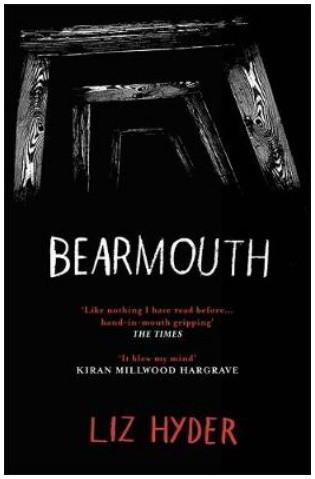
a band with new friends. Throughout, Maggie's love of bands like The Smiths looms large, as does her relationship with her depressed mother. Maggie's rage at her mother's condition derives entirely from her primal love for her. She's desperate for Mum to be happy, and her scheme to help her find happiness is heart-achingly poignant. Grief, depression, self-harm, online abuse, this novel is no walk in the park, yet it never drags the reader down. On the contrary. It's sensitive, insightful, funny (Maggie is a master of biting one-liners), and genuinely uplifting as Maggie and Mum begin to find their way back to the world, with glinting prospects of love and new life.



Gloves Off

Author: Louisa Reid **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 05/03/2020
Year Groups: Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

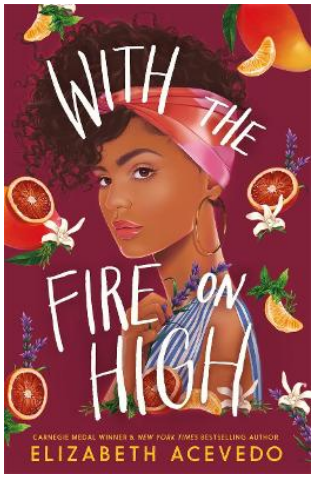
Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2021 | Selected for The Book Box by LoveReading4Kids In English teacher Louise Reid's first venture into the verse novel, she uses the form magnificently using layout and different font sizes and styles to show as well as tell Lily's story. We meet her in the opening poem, Roadkill at her lowest ebb. Bullied at school and battered and abused outside it, betrayed by childhood 'friends' and mentally trapped in a self-critical prison. This is an unflinching portrait of a girl who does not fit in and who hates herself. But it is also a picture of a family in poverty and the link between poverty and obesity is well known, but not often acknowledged and 'fat shaming" is a particularly insidious and dangerous form of bullying where the victims are often blamed. The author also gives a voice to Bernadette, the loving mother equally trapped in her own misery, overweight and virtually housebound and to Lily's feelings for her which veer back and forth from love to shame and blame. The layers of characterisation and backstory are subtly and delicately revealed in this beautifully paced narrative. Equally touching is the depiction of her father, quiet, loyal and desperate to help. It is at his suggestion that Lily takes up his old hobby of boxing. With training and the gym comes fitness, but more importantly other support structures and tentative friendships and Lily's bravery helps Bernadette take some positive steps too. Their journey is not easy but never anything other than utterly convincing and psychologically authentic. This important novel has home truths for both sexes to ponder and a cleverly neutral cover and the highly accessible verse format means that it can be promoted to even the most reluctant of readers. We explore the powerful themes in Louisa's follow-up verse novel Wrecked in a Q&A with the author.



Bearmouth

Author: Liz Hyder **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 06/02/2020 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Shortlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2021 | Winner of the Branford Boase Award 2020 | March 2020 Debut of the Month |Winner of the Older Readers' category of the Waterstones Children's Book Prize 2020 Told in narrator Newt's distinctive phonetic English, this dark debut dazzles with originality and delivers a potent case for combatting inequality. Bearmouth is home to a grim mining business, where men and children labour under inhumane conditions to make their Master wealthy. They work under the earth, under the omniscient Mayker who - so workers are told - "sen us down into the dark Earf/To atone for the sins o our forefarvers an muvvers". Naïve Newt hasn't seen daylight in years, but takes pride in being taught to read and write by fatherly Thomas, blithely accepting this lot until the arrival of new boy Devlin. Devlin's talk of "revolushun" makes Newt feel that things are "unravellin slowly slowly lyke a bootlayce comin all undun." Life in Bearmouth is beyond bleak, but the sparks of Devlin's revolutionary spirit catch light and drive Thomas to ask the Master for "more coinage" for the workers, to question why they must pay for essential clothes, to demand to know when the promised safety lamps are coming. Then when tragedy strikes, Newt too realises that things "ent bloody well ryte" and takes on Devlin's insurgent tendencies, with explosive effects. Emotionally engaging, this searingly original novel about standing up to abuses of power and fighting for freedom is radiant with story-telling excellence. The Branford Boase judges said : 'Astounding!'; 'I loved every single second'; 'plot, story and voice are superb'; 'I was totally invested in the characters'; 'interesting, challenging and original'.

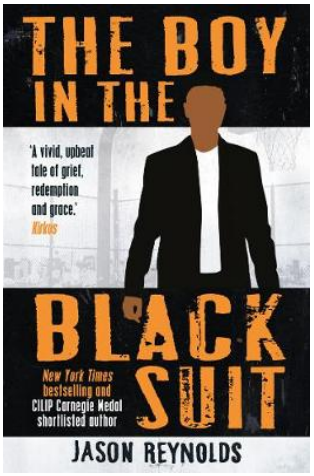


With the Fire on High

Author: Elizabeth Acevedo **Format:** Hardback **Release Date:** 19/09/2019 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

From the one-of-a-kind author of The Poet X comes a one-of-a-kind novel suffused in YA's finest features - friendship, shifting family relationships, fighting to find your voice, romantic passion – and more besides, thanks to the exuberant drive of its teen mom protagonist. Emoni has an extraordinary gift for creative cooking and a complicated home life. Her mom, whose family is "straight-from-the-Carolinas Black" died in childbirth, which caused her grief-stricken Puerto Rican dad to head home to his island. As a result Emoni was raised by his mother, the fabulous 'Buela. Emoni is used to hearing other people's problems with her dual heritage ("it's like I'm some long-division problem folks keep wanting to parcel into pieces, and they don't hear me when I say: I don't reduce, homies. The whole of me is Black. The whole of me is whole"), but since falling pregnant in her freshman year she has a new set of struggles to contend with. It's not easy being a teenage mom while also

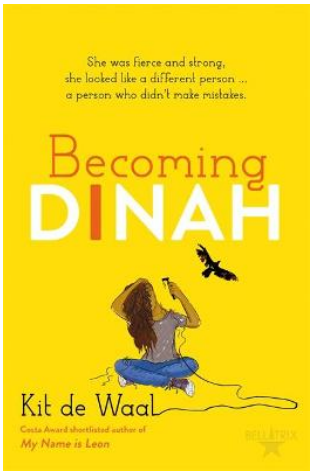
studying, working and dealing with Babygirl's judgmental paternal grandmother, but somehow Emoni keeps it all going, finding soulful solace in the kitchen: "I'm happier in the kitchen than anywhere else in the world…my food doesn't just taste good, it is good – straight up bottled goodness that warms you and makes you feel better about your life". Enrolling on a culinary arts class makes Emoni even more determined to accomplish her gastronomic career goals, and also brings her heatedly close to new boy Malachi. But with multiple obstacles at every turn, when life reaches boiling point her best friend and family step-up as supporting sous chefs. Spiced with inspirational wisdom ("Taking risks and making choices in spite of fear – it's what makes our life story compelling" says one of Emoni's teachers; "The world is a turntable that never stops spinning; as humans we merely chose the tracks we want to sit out and the ones that inspire us to dance," says Emoni), this luminous novel challenges multiple stereotypes and dances to its own love-infused, inspirational beat.



The Boy in the Black Suit

Author: Jason Reynolds **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 01/08/2019 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Jason Reynolds is the master of giving voice to children and teenagers who exist - and often struggle - on the margins of society. Against tough competition, this exceptional novel might be his finest yet. Matt has recently lost his beloved mom and feels excruciatingly lonely in his grief. By page two, when Matt comes home to a house that was "totally silent. And it had no smell," the author encapsulates the raw invisibility of grief with visceral power. Haunted by how his mom made him feel "like the luckiest kid in the world...like I was somebody important", and needing something to occupy his mind (and some cash), Matt takes a job helping family friend and funeral director Mr Ray, and unexpectedly finds that attending funerals and witnessing the grief of others makes him feel less alone. With his dad otherwise disposed after seeking solace in whiskey, Mr Ray is heart-meltingly supportive, reaching out to Matt while his "old man is getting himself together". It's at one of his work funerals that Matt begins to form a beautiful bond with Lovey, a young woman who's experienced more pain and loss than even Matt can imagine. As Lovey opens Matt's world and heart, they discover that they're also bonded by a tragic moment that shaped both their lives. Readers will hope with all their hearts that Lovey and Matt's futures are presaged by Bob Marley's "every little thing gonna be alright" lyrics that ring out during a momentous shared taxi ride. Boldly honest and bathed in empathy, Matt's all-consuming, touching tale possesses a rare power to leave a lasting imprint.



Becoming Dinah

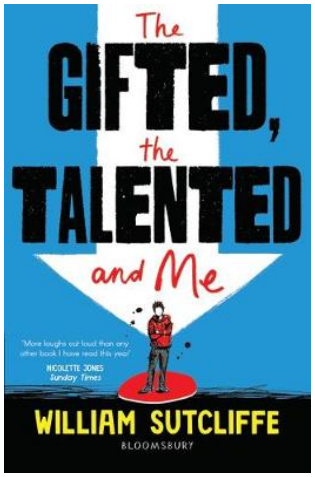
Author: Kit de Waal **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 11/07/2019
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

Shortlisted for the Children's Book Award 2020 | August 2019 Debut YA Book of the Month This unique, incisive novel is an emotionally engrossing road-trip reinvention of Moby Dick with female characters, and a gripping mystery about what main protagonist Dinah is running from to find her place to call home. Seventeen-year-old Dinah has lived her whole life on a commune and now feels compelled to flee everything she's ever known. After being home-schooled, a recent period in mainstream schooling has turned her world upside-down, as has turbulent upheavals at home, and then there's the mystery of what happened between Dinah and new friend Queenie. She shaves off her hair, adopts a new name and flees, illegally driving a VW campervan (her version of Moby Dick's Pequod ship) with a cantankerous one-legged neighbour for company. While driving, Dinah confronts her many demons, most of which stem from her confusing sense of identity. She's mixed race, but feels neither black nor white, and she's attracted to boys and girls. The road is bumpy, with many revelations and confrontations along the way. Eventually, though, Dinah realises that "the road that took you away has led you all the way back home". This is a smartly-crafted novel with real resonance, a story that honestly and empathetically imparts an uplifting message to "Always be yourself first...find yourself and be yourself".

The Switch Up

Author: Katy Cannon **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 13/06/2019
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

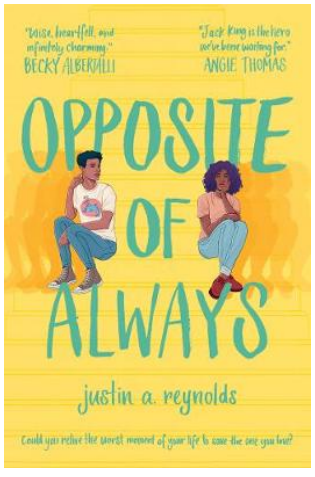
Optimist and aspiring actress Willa is the privileged daughter of separated actor parents. Her plans to spend summer in London are scuppered when her parents decide to ship her off to rural Italy to stay with an aunt she's never met, which is what brings her to LA airport and into contact with Alice... Glass-half-empty-Alice has lost her mum and her marine biologist dad is sending her to stay with his new girlfriend in London, the prospect of which fills her with horror. When the girls meet in the airport lounge, they're envious of each other's summers. Alice would love to visit Italy to fulfill a dream of her mum's, while Willa is desperate to attend a London theatre course. While Willa and Alice live worlds apart, they look remarkably alike and so they switch identities to experience a summer holiday like no other. With slip-ups and suspicions aroused from the off, the fast-paced escapist action escalates into a flurry of comic capers and cute crushes, plus there are plenty of heart-melting moments too. Alice gets to visit the worry-purging waterfall her mum never saw, while Willa reassesses her ambitions, and both find new friendships.



The Gifted, the Talented and Me

Author: William Sutcliffe **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 02/05/2019 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2020 | May 2019 Book of the Month “I am normal. I like being normal”. Such is the mantra of fifteen-year-old Sam. But when he’s uprooted from his Stevenage comp and thrust into the North London Academy for the Gifted and Talented being normal just doesn’t cut it. Simple as. No ifs or buts. To fit in at this “poncey arty farty school” for “Exactly the Kind of People [Sam] Instinctively Hated”, a person needs to stand out. Gel one’s hair in eight directions. Be the offspring of, for example, an Argentinian tango dancer, or a French electro-pop pioneer. The comic characterisation of Sam and his family is as impeccably tuned as a Primrose Hill piano, from his mum’s foray into Hampstead yummy mummy blogger-dom, to his unicorn-obsessed little sister. Sam’s hilariously honest, self-deprecating tone is utterly engaging and put me in mind of an older incarnation of Luke from David Solomons’s fabulously funny Superhero books. Talking of funny, Sam’s turning point turns out to be his talent for comedy (“making people laugh was a thrilling buzz”), and so he finds himself in the unlikely position of performing in the school play. This entertaining romp around pressures to fit in and teenage boy-dom in all its involuntary undercarriage-twitching awkwardness truly shows the diverse talent of its author, whose previous YA novels are every bit as brilliant, but have heavier themes. This is a laugh-out-loud witty wonder of a book.

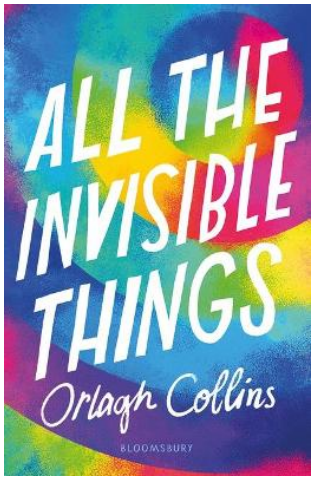


Opposite of Always

Author: Justin A Reynolds **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 04/04/2019 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

May 2019 Debut of the Month Reader, prepare for your heart to quicken, pound and swell with love, for this is a truly intoxicating tale of friendship, romance, seizing special moments and being willing to do anything – anything – for the people you love. Jack King - one of the most authentic and charming characters to have stepped off a YA page - and his best-friends-since-childhood Franny and Jillian are on the brink of a new chapter in their lives, picking out colleges, planning their careers, while having fun hanging out. And then Jack meets Kate at a party and falls for her big-time. They’re soul-mates who bond over their love of cereal until, all too soon, Kate dies. But this tragic event turns out to be the beginning of their story, for Kate’s death flips Jack back in time and he meets her again, as if for the first time, with Kate sensing that she knows him from somewhere: “The way you look at me. Like we’ve been doing it our whole lives.” Jack sets about trying to change the course of history, firstly so Kate doesn’t die, and then also to swerve bad stuff away from his friends. But, in classic time travel tradition, this has dangerous effects. Cue Jack wryly referencing Back to the Future and Groundhog Day while up to his neck in serious complications. Take

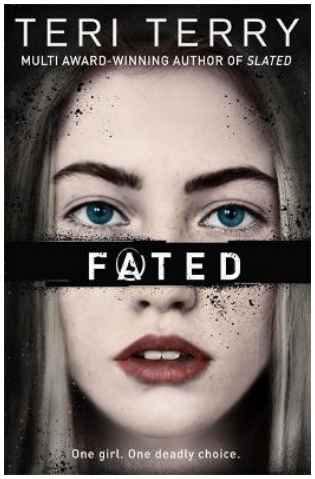
away the pulse-quickening time travel element and you'd still have a novel heated by much heart and humour. With it, this is a firework of urgent, impactful YA fiction, a book that's ablaze with tough choices and all kinds of love. Throughout there's a whole lot of heart-melting cuteness - the trio's friendship, the sweet relationship between Franny and Jillian, Jack's parents' perfect marriage. The plot progression and developments revealed through the various play-outs of the past are brain-flippingly smart, with twists wending through to Jack's desperate need for "one more re-set to undo this tragedy". Reader, I cried on the bus.



All the Invisible Things

Author: Orlagh Collins **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 07/03/2019
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

This authentic YA page-turner about making sense of the whirlwind that is growing-up fizzes with heart, humanity and honest true-to-life experiences.For the past few years Vetty, her dad and little sister Ariel have been living with her aunt, trying to get themselves back on track after the death of her mum. Now they're moving home to Camden, Vetty is hopeful that "soon I'll be back to me", not least because she'll be reunited with best-friend-since-childhood Pez. But on her return, things are agonizingly strained between them. "It's like we've skipped from kids to something else but it's not at all clear which steps we've missed". On top of this painful gulf, Vetty is struggling with her sexuality, trying to make sense of the fact that she's attracted to boys and girls, while Pez is consumed by a struggle of his own that's effecting all his relationships. Sexuality, love and friendship are explored in all their giddy complexity as Vetty, Pez and their wider circle of friends try to make sense of the world and their place within it. Every bit as life-affirmingly authentic as the author's debut, No Filter, this comes thoroughly recommended for fans of Holly Bourne, Sara Barnard and Non Pratt.



Fated

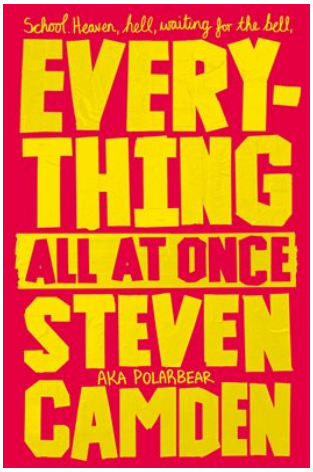
Author: Teri Terry **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 07/03/2019
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

Don't miss this prequel to the multi award-winning SLATED trilogy by Teri Terry, queen of the teen thriller! I'm just one girl. What can I do? Sam's cosy life as daughter of the Deputy Prime Minister is about to end. These are turbulent times. Borders have closed and protests are turning violent. The government blames the country's youth, and is cracking down hard. Mobile phones are blocked, gatherings are banned and dissent is brutally crushed. Sam is torn between family loyalty and doing what is right. When she meets Ava and Lucas her mind is made up. One girl, one choice. She can make a difference: she must. Even if her life - and her heart - are on the line ... A red-hot thriller packed with secrets and revelations that shines a new light on the award-winning SLATED trilogy.

Night Flights

Author: Philip Reeve **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 07/02/2019
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

Short Stories set in the post apocalyptic world of the Mortal Engines world - setting the scene for a whole new reading experience. Wonderful greyscale illustrations.



Everything All at Once

Author: Steven Camden **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 12/07/2018 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

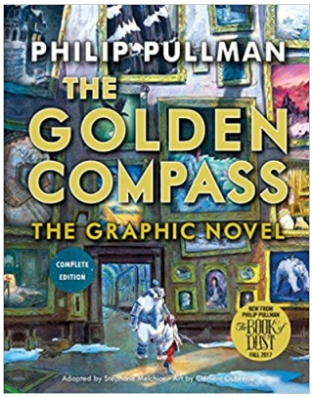
Longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards 2020 | Winner of the CLiPPA 2019 | One of our 2018 Books of the Year These poignant, punch-packing poems explore the varied emotional lives of secondary school pupils facing the giddy transition from being “the biggest to the smallest...in the secondary school jungle” like “gazelles in a field full of lions”. Complex tangles of feelings are laid bare with heart-rending authenticity, from the headiness of he-said-she-said gossip, to the bewildering “who the hell do you sit with?” loneliness that strikes when your best friend’s off school (Thanks a lot, Belinda). Vending Machine is an incredible piece of writing, encapsulating the anguish and anger of

betrayal, of having your heart trampled on, and then the bliss of recovery when your heart feels “a little lighter”. Another personal favourite is the sublime Dear Mum, BTEC about a student “drawing different plans” after realising they are ill-suited to exams - plans they hope will make Mum proud. There are jubilant themes too, such as the breathless, time-stopping “WHAM!” of instant attraction, the jangling joy of being at the bottom of a celebratory pile-on after you’ve scored, and the magic of those inspirational, unforgettable teachers who take time to share a book they think you “should try”. A chorus of entertaining, emotionally-charged insights and observations sing and dance through these tender, playful pages, with each short verse alive with empathetic, true-to-life experiences.

Second Best Friend

Author: Non Pratt **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 15/01/2018
Year Groups: Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

A sharp, well-observed teenage drama that is bang up to date. Life for teenagers these days can seem like an endless popularity contest, everything played out in the spotlight of social media. Just-dumped Rob hits a nerve when he tells Jade that everyone fancies her best friend more anyway; comparing herself to Becky, Jade is horribly conscious of coming second in everything. It’s a toxic atmosphere, intensified when the two girls find themselves leading rival parties in the school election, and it leads Jade to do something almost unforgivably cruel. Pratt leads the field in authors writing for a young adult audience: setting, voice and storyline are completely authentic, and this will score zillions of ‘likes’ from its readers. ~ Andrea Reece Particularly suitable for struggling, reluctant or dyslexic readers aged 13+ Barrington Stoke is the foremost publisher of dyslexia friendly books and those for reluctant readers. Here on Lovereading4kids we are constantly selecting new titles and refreshing our special dyslexia friendly category. Click here to view our current selection which is broken down by age range.



The Golden Compass Graphic Novel, Complete Edition (His Dark Materials)

Author: Philip Pullman **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 27/09/2017
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

Graphic novel version of Pullman's His Dark Materials with stunning visual interpretation - will appeal to those who struggled with th length of Northern Lights.