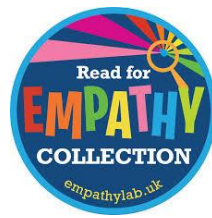


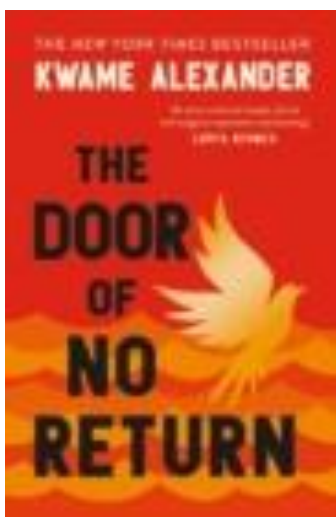
HGS Book Recommendations

June 2025



Empathy is our ability to experience and understand someone else's feelings. It creates stronger, kinder communities. People won't thrive without this crucial life skill, and developing it improves wellbeing, reading for pleasure and active citizenship. Research shows that empathy is a learnable skill, and that books play a key role in developing it. When we identify with book characters, we learn to see things from other people's point of view. As we read, we are building our empathy skills.

Read for Empathy Collection 2025



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The #1 New York Times bestseller. Shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal for Writing.

Eleven-year-old Kofi Offin has dreams of water, of its urgent whisper that beckons with promises and secrets.

He has heard the call on the banks of Upper Kwanta, West Africa, where he lives.

He loves these things above all else: his family, the fireside tales of his father's father, a girl named Ama, and, of course, swimming.

But when the unthinkable – a sudden death – occurs during a festival between rival villages, Kofi ends up in a fight for his life.

What happens next will send him on a harrowing journey across land and sea, and away from everything he loves.

Yet Kofi's dreams may be the key to his freedom...



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ANTON AND HIS FRIENDS ARE THE KINGS OF YEAR 9. They're used to ruling the school and Anton wears the crown.

The other kids run away when he's about but that's the way he wants it - he's got a reputation to live up to after all. So when he gets into serious trouble at school, he doesn't really care, but his mum most definitely does.

She decides it's time for Anton to make some new friends and join the Happy Campers, a local activity group.

Anton would quite literally rather do anything else, especially when he finds out Matthew, the biggest loser in school, is also a member. But after Matthew unexpectedly saves Anton's life, Anton figures maybe this kid is worth a shot.

Teaching him some game is the least Anton can do to repay the debt. As the boys strike up an unlikely friendship, Anton finds himself questioning everything he thought was important.

Does he want ruling the school to be his crowning glory or should he set his sights on better things?



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Tuva is starting seventh grade, and her checklist of goals includes: writing a diary, getting a cool look, building the best fort in the woods with her BFFs, and sharing EVERYTHING with her best friends.

But when she starts school, nothing is how she hoped it would be. Seventh grade has split her friends into rival factions: Team Linnea and the girls who fall in love and Team Bao and the girls who are still playing.

Linnea has a boyfriend, Bao hates everything related to feelings.

Worst of all, Tuva is expected to choose a side! Then Mariam shows up and suddenly things begin to make a little more sense.

But with all her friends fighting, this is one part of growing up that Tuva isn't quite sure how to share ...



KS
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It's not easy to fit in when you're the boy in the suit... Ten-year-old Solo - embarrassingly, that isn't short for anything - just wants to be normal. He wants a name that doesn't stand out. He wishes he had a proper school uniform that fitted him.

He dreams about a mum who doesn't get the Big Bad Reds, like his mum Morag. But most of all he longs to stop crashing funerals for the free food. But when Solo and Morag crash the funeral of a celebrity and get caught, the press are there to witness their humiliation.

The next day it's splashed across the papers. Before Solo knows it, he becomes a viral sensation, and life may never be normal again. Solo's uphill pursuit of security, community and connection will break your heart and then mend it.



Frankie Parsons is twelve going on old man, an apparently sensible, talented boy with a drumbeat of worrying questions steadily gaining volume in his head: Are the smoke alarm batteries flat? Does the cat, and therefore the rest of the family, have worms? Will bird flu strike and ruin life as we know it? Is the Kidney-shaped spot on his chest actually a galloping cancer? Only Ma takes seriously his catalogue of persistent queries.

But it is Ma who is the cause of the most worrying question of all, the one that Frankie can never bring himself to ask.

Then the new girl arrives at school and has questions of her own: relentless, unavoidable questions.

So begins the unravelling of Frankie Parsons's carefully controlled world. A perfectly crafted novel, funny, compassionate, rich in characters.



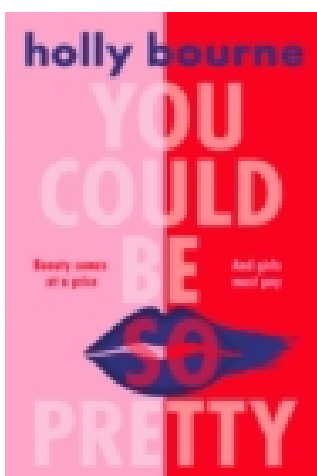
Nell is working as a scullery maid in the kitchen of the Big House.

Once she loved school and books and dreaming. But there's not much choice of work when the land grows food that rots in the earth.

Now she is scrubbing, peeling, washing, sweeping for Sir Philip Wicken, the man who owns her home, her family's land, their crops, everything. His dogs are always well fed, even as famine sets in.

Upstairs in the Big House, where Nell is forbidden to enter, is Johnny Browning, newly arrived from England: the young nephew who will one day inherit it all. And as hunger and disease run rampant all around them, a spark of life and hope catches light when Nell and Johnny find each other.

This is a love story, and the story of a people being torn apart.



BEAUTY COMES AT A PRICE. AND GIRLS MUST PAY.

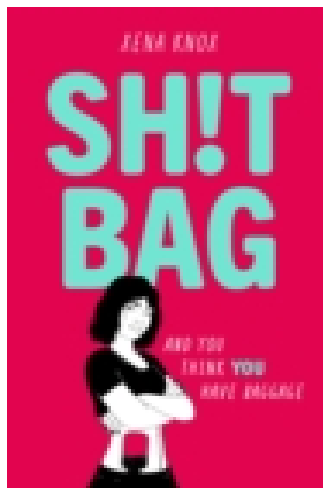
In Belle and Joni's world there are two options for girls:

One, follow the rules of the Doctrine like Belle: apply your Mask, work hard to be crowned at the Ceremony, be a Pretty.

Or two, fight the rules like Joni: leave your face bare, work hard to escape to the Education, be an Objectionable.

But maybe there is a third option... Change the rules. Reclaim your power. If you can... What would you choose?

Uglies meets The Handmaid's Tale for the new YA generation in this mind-blowing novel from bestselling queen of YA Holly Bourne.



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Come along with me on this sh!tty ride or bail out now. It's your choice . . .

When Freya collapses and wakes up with a temporary ileostomy bag on her stomach, her dreams of the perfect summer go down the toilet.

Instead of partying in the Algarve, she's packed off to 'Poo Camp' - a place for kids with bowel disease to 'bond'. And things can only get worse. Someone has started calling her 'Sh!t Bag' . . . and it's catching on. Freya decides to live up to the nickname, raging at her friends, her ex and the world.

Only her campmate Chris seems to see past her new attitude . . . Can Freya get her sh!t together or will she end up with just her bag by her side? A fresh, fierce and funny story about what happens when life literally goes to sh!t.



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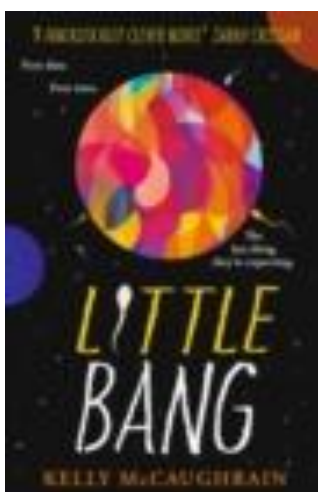
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Two boys can't remember the last time they had a hug. Meet Finlay. He's studying for his nursing degree at Glasgow University, against all the odds.

But coming straight from care means he has no support network. How can he write essays, find paid work and NOT fall for the beautiful boy at uni, when he's struggling to even feed himself?

Meet Banjo. He's trying to settle in with his new foster family and finish high school.

But he can't forget all that has happened, and his anger and fear keep boiling over. How can he hold on to the one good person in his life, when his outbursts keep threatening his already uncertain future? Can Finlay and Banjo let go of the past before it drags them under?



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Beneath the New Year's Eve fireworks, shy science-nerd Mel and slacker songwriter Sid get pregnant on their first date.

Any sixteen-year-olds would expect trouble – but this is Northern Ireland 2018, where abortion is still illegal.

Mel's religious parents insist she must keep the baby, whilst Sid's feminist mum pushes for a termination. Mel and Sid are determined to do this together, but they soon discover that pregnancy is totally different for boys and girls.

When their relationship starts to fall apart under all the pressure, Mel finds herself feeling alone with the impossible dilemma of the Little Bang growing inside her.

