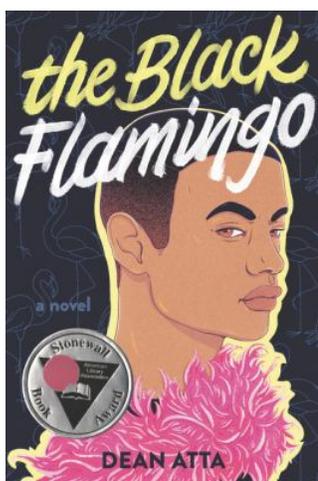


National Poetry Month Reading Recommendations for Teens

This list is not exhaustive nor completely representative of all of the amazing poetry and novels in verse available for our youth. It is, however, what we hope will be a jumping off point for our middle and high school students, and even adults, to seek out other titles like these.

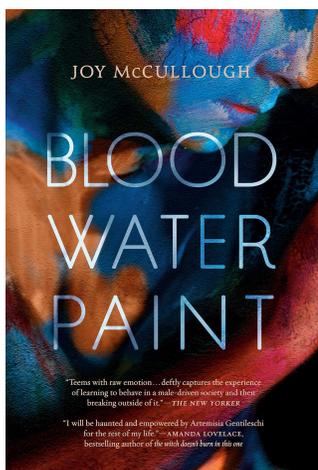
Please note: if a title you are interested in has a wait list, please don't hesitate to place a hold on it; holds lists are reviewed to ensure that items will most likely be available to borrow sooner than the wait time estimate given.



[The Black Flamingo by Dean Atta](#)

*'Don't let anyone tell you / that you are half anything.
You and Anna are / simply brother and sister.
Don't let anyone tell you / that she's your half-sister.
Don't let anyone tell you / that you are half-black
and half-white. Half-Cypriot / and half-Jamaican.
You are a full human / being. It's never as simple
as being half and half.'*

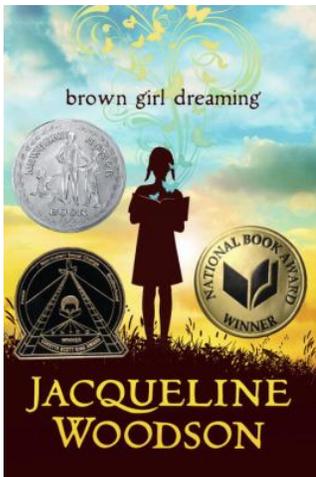
Michael is a mixed-race gay teen growing up in London. All his life, he's navigated what it means to be Greek-Cypriot and Jamaican--but never quite feeling Greek or Black enough. As he gets older, Michael's coming out is only the start of learning who he is and where he fits in. When he discovers the Drag Society, he finally finds where he belongs--and the Black Flamingo is born.



[Blood Water Paint by Joy McCullough](#)

*He will not consume
my every thought.
I am a painter.
I will paint.*

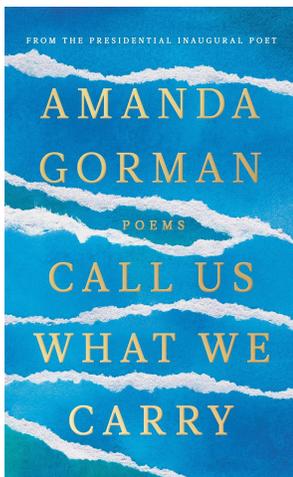
By the time she was seventeen, Artemisia did more than grind pigment. She was one of Rome's most talented painters, even if no one knew her name. But Rome in 1610 was a city where men took what they wanted from women, and in the aftermath of rape Artemisia faced another terrible choice- a life of silence or a life of truth, no matter the cost.



[Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson](#)

*I am born on a Tuesday at the University Hospital
Columbus, Ohio / USA—
a country caught / between Black and White.*

Raised in South Carolina and New York, Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement. Touching and powerful, each poem is both accessible and emotionally charged, each line a glimpse into a child's soul as she searches for her place in the world. Woodson's eloquent poetry also reflects the joy of finding her voice through writing stories, despite the fact that she struggled with reading as a child.



[Call Us What We Carry by Amanda Gorman](#)

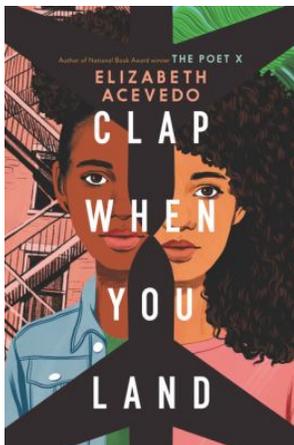
The luminous poetry collection by presidential inaugural poet Amanda Gorman captures a shipwrecked moment in time and transforms it into a lyric of hope and healing. In *Call Us What We Carry*, Gorman explores history, language, identity, and erasure through an imaginative and intimate collage. Harnessing the collective grief of a global pandemic, this beautifully designed volume features poems in many inventive styles and structures and shines a light on a moment of reckoning. *Call Us What We Carry* reveals that Gorman has become our messenger from the past, our voice for the future.



[Chlorine Sky by Mahogany Browne](#)

*She looks me hard in my eyes
& my knees lock into tree trunks
My eyes don't dance like my heartbeat racing
They stare straight back hot daggers.
I remember things will never be the same.
I remember things.*

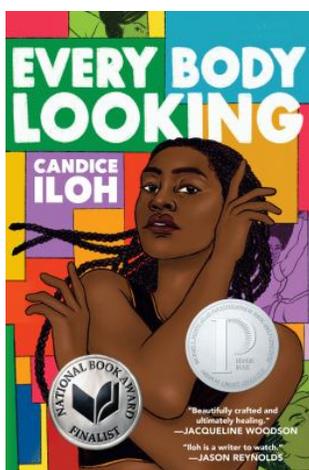
With gritty and heartbreaking honesty, Mahogany L. Browne delivers a novel-in-verse about broken promises, fast rumors, and when growing up means growing apart from your best friend.



[Clap When You Land by Elizabeth Acevedo](#)

An airline employee / & two security guards / approach the crowd like gutter cats / used to being kicked. / & as soon as the employee utters the word accident / the linoleum opens / a gnashing jaw, a bottomless belly, / I am swallowed / by this shark-toothed truth.

Camino Rios lives for the summers when her father visits her in the Dominican Republic. But this time, on the day when his plane is supposed to land, Camino arrives at the airport to see crowds of crying people. In New York City, Yahaira Rios is called to the principal's office, where her mother is waiting to tell her that her father, her hero, has died in a plane crash. Separated by distance--and Papi's secrets--the two girls are forced to face a new reality in which their father is dead and their lives are forever altered.



[Every Body Looking by Candice Iloh](#)

We pull into my high school's parking lot for the last day I will ever have to smile at these people like I ever belonged here / for the ten minutes it takes Mama and me to get to the stands along the football field, a place she has never seen / I imagine the sounds of our heels to be / like a song we are for once dancing to together / today / I'm not angry / at her slurred speech / I'm not angry / at her missing teeth / I'm not angry / at her fuss / I'm not angry / that she looks nothing like / the last time I saw her / or that / I don't know when the next time will be / for the ten minutes it takes Mama and me to get to the stands along the football field / I'm just happy we're both here / alive

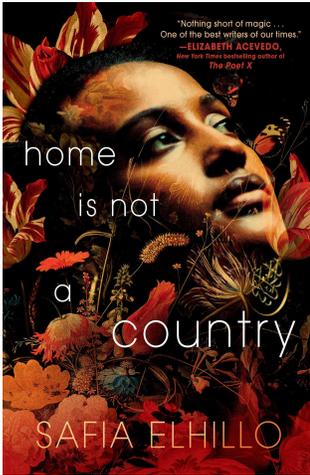
When Ada leaves home for her freshman year at a Historically Black College, it's the first time she's ever been so far from her family--and the first time that she's been able to make her own choices and to seek her place in this new world. As she stumbles deeper into the world of dance and explores her sexuality, she also begins to wrestle with her past--her mother's struggle with addiction, her Nigerian father's attempts to make a home for her. Ultimately, Ada discovers she needs to brush off the destiny others have chosen for her and claim full ownership of her body and her future.



[For Every One by Jason Reynolds](#)

THIS LETTER IS BEING WRITTEN from a place of raw honesty and love but not at all a place of expertise on how to make your dreams come true.

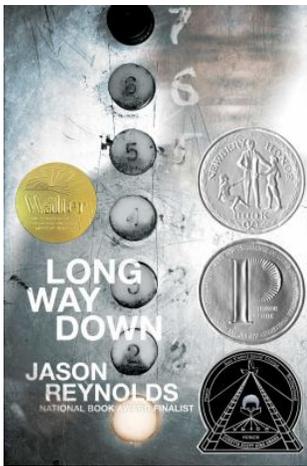
For Every One is just that: for every one. For every one person. For every one dream. But especially for every one kid. The kids who dream of being better than they are. Kids who dream of doing more than they almost dare to dream.



[Home is Not a Country by Safia Elhillo](#)

*my mother meant to name me for her favorite flower
its sweetness garlands made for pretty girls
i imagine her yasmeen bright & alive
& i ache to have been born her instead*

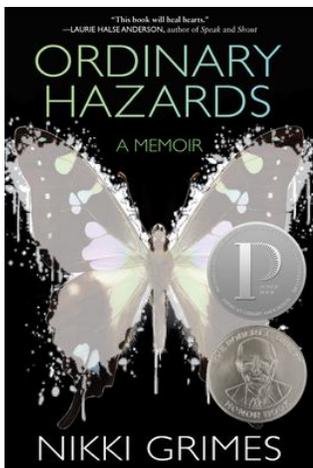
Nima wishes she were someone else. She doesn't feel understood by her mother, who grew up in a different land. She doesn't feel accepted in her suburban town; yet somehow, she isn't different enough to belong elsewhere. Her best friend, Haitham, is the only person with whom she can truly be herself. Until she can't, and suddenly her only refuge is gone.



[Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds](#)

*A cannon. A strap.
A piece. A biscuit.
A burner. A heater.
A chopper. A gat.
A hammer
A tool
for RULE*

Or, you can call it a gun. That's what fifteen-year-old Will has shoved in the back waistband of his jeans. See, his brother Shawn was just murdered. And Will knows the rules. No crying. No snitching. Revenge. That's where Will's now heading, with that gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, the gun that was his brother's gun. He gets on the elevator, seventh floor, stoked. He knows who he's after. Or does he? And so it goes, the whole long way down, as the elevator stops on each floor, and at each stop someone connected to his brother gets on to give Will a piece to a bigger story than the one he thinks he knows. A story that might never know an END...if Will gets off that elevator.



[Ordinary Hazards by Nikki Grimes](#)

*No one warned me
the world was full of
ordinary hazards
like closets with locks and keys.*

Growing up with a mother suffering from paranoid schizophrenia and a mostly absent father, Nikki Grimes found herself terrorized by babysitters, shunted from foster family to foster family, and preyed upon by those she trusted. At the age of six, she poured her pain onto a piece of paper late one night - and discovered the magic and impact of writing. For many years, Nikki's notebooks were her most enduring companions. In this memoir, Nikki shows how the power of those words helped her conquer the hazards - ordinary and extraordinary - of her life.



[Punching the Air by Ibi Zoboi & Yusef Salaam](#)

*The story that I thought
was my life*

didn't start on the day

I was born

Amal Shahid has always been an artist and a poet. But even in a diverse art school, because of a biased system he's seen as disruptive and unmotivated. Then, one fateful night, an altercation in a gentrifying neighborhood escalates into tragedy. "Boys just being boys" turns out to be true only when those boys are white. Suddenly, at just sixteen years old, Amal is convicted of a crime he didn't commit and sent to prison. Despair and rage almost sink him until he turns to the refuge of his words, his art. This never should have been his story. But can he change it?