

# JAY GATSBY IN TODAY'S YA WORLD

Using Young Adult Novels  
in Book Clubs



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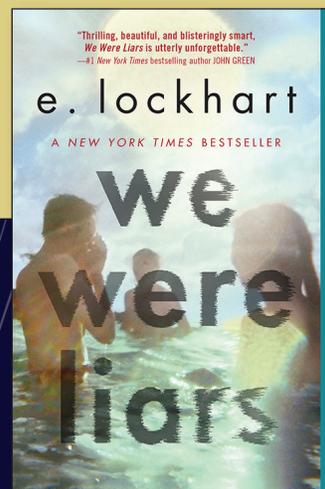
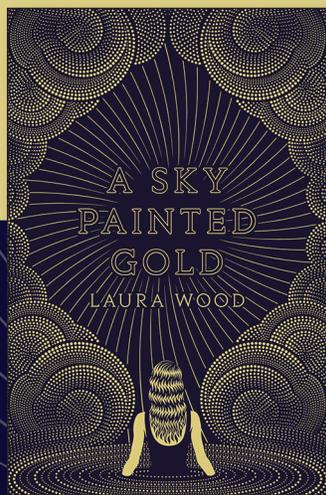
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## English teacher Kim Herzog on using young adult novels in book clubs:

As English teachers, we understand the value of the classic canon, but we also understand that these texts often provide a narrow, usually privileged, view of the world; I have found it useful to supplement the texts in the curriculum. By doing so, I can introduce a variety of genres and levels of difficulty to the classroom, and encourage my students to have meaningful conversations in book clubs. These small-group conversations add a rich layer to our full-class discussions throughout the year. Book clubs ensure that students continue to analyze and compare texts long after we have finished focusing on the core text, allowing for deeper text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections.

All book clubs read the same anchor texts: *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald), *A Sky Painted Gold* (Wood), and *We Were Liars* (Lockhart). However, each group will focus on a specific aspect of the texts and be responsible for a particular follow-up assignment. All students will participate in a full-class seminar at the conclusion of the unit.

An alternative to the book club study with the three texts is to read any of these texts independently, and focus on one of these book club topics or questions. Overarching questions for each text have also been provided.



In this guide, we've included Laura Wood's novel *A Sky Painted Gold* and E. Lockhart's novel *We Were Liars* alongside F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic *The Great Gatsby* as an example of how to use young adult novels in classroom book clubs.

# Book Club 1: The Value of Voice

Students will consider these questions, citing specific incidents from each text in their answers.

- Whose voices are heard?
- Whose voices are silenced?
- Which stories within the larger narrative are given precedence, and why?

If you would prefer to provide particular incidents for the groups, here are sample passages for comparative analysis: *The Great Gatsby* (Chapter 7, the fight scene at the hotel); *We Were Liars* (p. 30); *A Sky Painted Gold* (pp. 272–273, p. 328).

## Follow-Up:

Have students research the time in which each text was written and set, and then discuss whose voices are privileged and why. For example, *A Sky Painted Gold* is historical fiction. What modern values has the author included that would not necessarily be the focus of a novel written in the late 1920s? If possible, help them find other texts to supplement their understanding of the context and any issues at play. You can have each student in the book club find a different type of texts (music, art, poetry, play) to analyze alongside the anchor texts. As book club members share their findings, the rest of their group should take notes, and then respond to the following question in writing: What is gained by seeking more context from additional texts?

# Book Club 2: A Place of Their Own

Discuss the following in relation to each text.

- How does place define character?
- How are characters influenced by their surroundings, including both physical settings and people?
- How does going to new places affect the characters?
- Would the characters and stories be different if they were set in a different time or place? Why? Imagine a conversation involving characters from all three texts.

## While Reading:

Ask students to find a passage in which place reveals character and annotate it, focusing on literary devices. Some examples are:

imagery	symbolism	syntax
personification	diction	punctuation
metaphor	hyperbole	color
simile	understatement	connotation

If you would prefer to provide these passages for the group, here are samples for comparative analysis: *The Great Gatsby* (Chapter 1, when Nick first sees Daisy and Jordan, and Tom enters; Chapter 2, the valley of Ashes and Myrtle's apartment); *A Sky Painted Gold* (pp. 2–3, p. 12, p. 189); *We Were Liars* (p. 152, p. 162).

## Follow-Up:

Students will choose a place that defines them, and using two literary devices highlighted in their annotated passage, write a short piece to show (rather than tell) the ways in which this place reveals something about their character.

## Book Club 3: Feminist Lens

**In this club, students will study the voices of the female characters in each text using these prompts:**

- How are gender stereotypes reinforced or contradicted by the women in this text?
- How does the author investigate gender roles? How is perspective used to explore social expectations?

If you would prefer to provide passages for the group to study, here are sample passages for

comparative analysis: *The Great Gatsby* (Chapter 1, “a beautiful little fool” discussion with Nick); *We Were Liars* (p. 4, p. 46, p. 161); *A Sky Painted Gold* (p. 176, p. 340, p. 344).

### Follow-Up:

Students should analyze how the characters reflect or distort society’s understanding of gender roles, both in their context and our own.

## Book Club 4: Wealth and Privilege

**Students will consider the following in relation to each text.**

- Who has power and privilege and who doesn’t?
- What role do power, money, and class play in this work?
- What conflicts are caused by characters having different amounts of money or power?

If you would prefer to provide passages for the group, here are samples for comparative analysis: *We Were Liars* (p. 3 and p. 154); *The Great Gatsby* (Chapter 8, Gatsby’s Past); *A Sky Painted Gold* (pp. 344–345).

### Follow-Up:

In *A Sky Painted Gold* and *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator is speaking from (or claims to be speaking from) a position of lower class and less wealth than some other characters in their texts; the opposite is the case in *We Were Liars*. Using inspiration from the narrators’ sense of wonder at the party scenes in *A Sky Painted Gold* (p. 91, p. 125) and *The Great Gatsby* (Chapter 3), imagine a scene from Lockhart’s text told from the perspective of Gat. Some scenes to consider include his arrival at Beechwood Island or his first family dinner at Clairmont House.

## FULL-CLASS SEMINAR:

At the conclusion of the book club work, the class will reconvene for a full-class seminar. Each book club group will be responsible for coming up with two higher-order questions based on their area of study. The responses should require textual support and discussion of multiple texts. This will give students an opportunity to explore the areas their peers have been analyzing throughout the unit and to expand their thinking about these texts. Students are encouraged to prepare notes ahead of time in response to the questions, which will be shared before the seminar. They are also encouraged to make connections to other areas studied this year, to other classes, and to the real world.

Depending on class size, running a “fishbowl seminar” can be more effective than a full-class seminar to ensure all students have the opportunity to speak. In this activity, there is an inner and an outer circle of students, with representatives from each book club group in each circle. For the first half of class, the inner circle discusses. Meanwhile, the outer circle has been assigned a buddy to track during the conversation, writing down the following:

- One interesting comment my buddy made was . . .
- One idea I had not thought of before was . . .
- My thinking shifted, changed, or was reinforced when . . .

When students track a buddy and respond to their comments, they are practicing active, engaged listening. Halfway through the class, the circles switch, so the outer ring now discusses, and the inner ring takes notes on their buddy and the conversation as a whole. The students’ independent notes become their exit ticket at the conclusion of the seminar.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These overarching questions can be addressed as a whole class or in the book club groups.

## *We Were Liars*

1. Cadence states: “I am the eldest Sinclair grandchild. Heiress to the island, the fortune, and the expectations.” (p. 7) What expectations? How might the pressure to live up to expectations affect her?
2. Why do you think E. Lockhart shifts from first person singular point of view (“I,” Cady’s point of view) to first person plural point of view (“We,” the Sinclairs)? (For example, see pp. 37–38.)
3. Track when Cady gets her migraines. How does the author use Cady’s migraines as a motif to illuminate character, conflict, or theme in this text?
4. Compare the fairy tales Cady creates throughout the text. Why is she creating these fractured fairy tales? What might be their purpose?
5. Why does Cady discuss the potential of various selves living alternative realities? What is the effect of her thinking this? (See p. 142 for context.)
6. How might the Liars’ intention for the fire be both “punishment” and “purification through flames”? (p. 175)

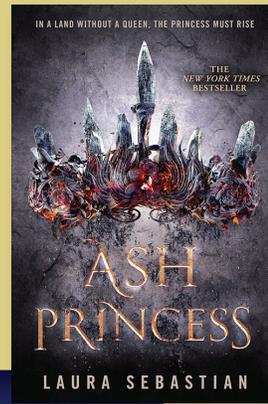
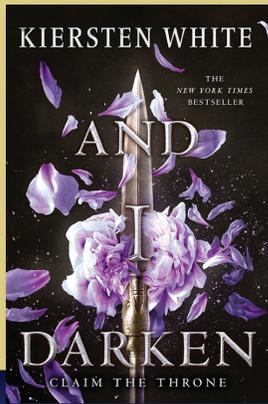
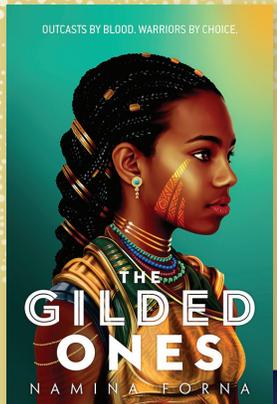
## *A Sky Painted Gold*

1. Each part of *A Sky Painted Gold* begins with an epigraph from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Keeping in mind that the purpose of an epigraph is to draw comparisons and suggest themes, what do the epigraphs draw attention to and why?
2. What is the effect of one’s past on one’s future? Consider both Lou’s circumstances and those of the Cardews.
3. How is wealth both a privilege and a burden for characters in *A Sky Painted Gold*?
4. What is the meaning of Caitlin saying “People can be unhappy anywhere”? (p. 114) The sentiment is repeated on pages 121 and 345. How does its meaning change, both to readers and to characters, throughout the text?
5. Compare Lucky and Laurie. What can we learn about the setting by doing so?
6. Why has Wood chosen to tell this story from the perspective of Louise, rather than another character?

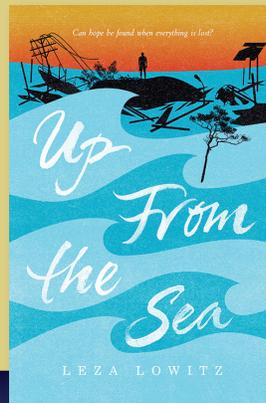
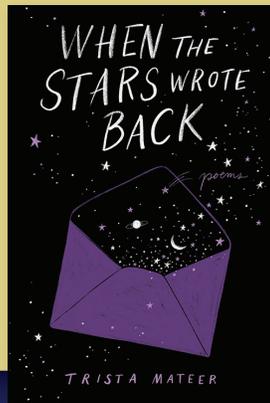
## *The Great Gatsby*

1. Nick Carraway is the narrator of this text. How would the story be different if it were told by another character?
2. Why did Fitzgerald choose to avoid introducing his titular character until chapter 3, instead introducing him through gossip?
3. How does greed affect one’s motivations and actions?
4. Note the location and description of the billboard with the eyes of T. J. Eckleburg. As you read, track the contexts in which the billboard appears. What might be its purpose in relation to setting, characters, and the text as a whole?
5. How do the characters in *The Great Gatsby* view the American Dream, and to what lengths are they willing to go to achieve their version of it? How might one’s ethics be affected by chasing their dream?
6. What message is Fitzgerald trying to share in the final passage of *The Great Gatsby*? Is this message applicable today? Why or why not?

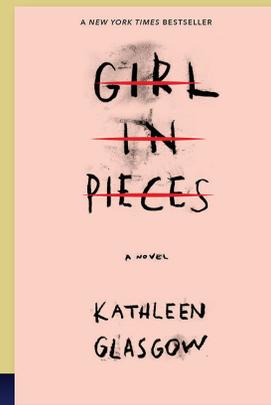
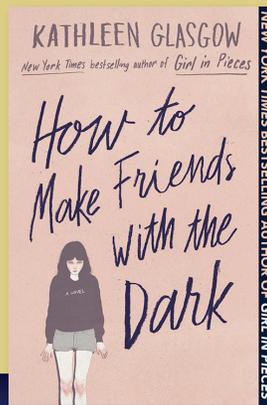
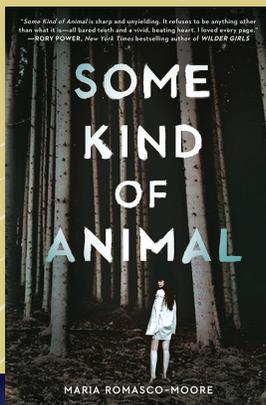
# RECOMMENDED NEW YOUNG ADULT TITLES



Female warrior stories like Joan of Arc's

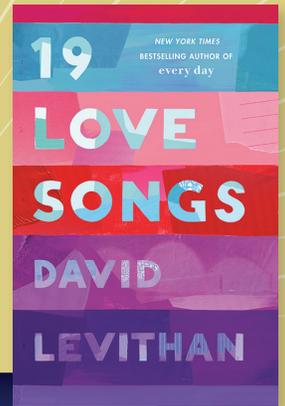
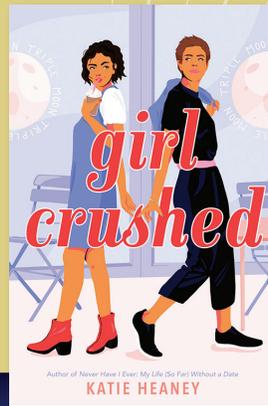


Poetry to use with Emily Dickinson and E. E. Cummings

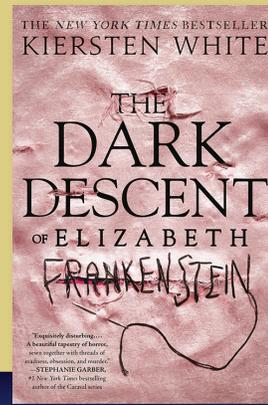
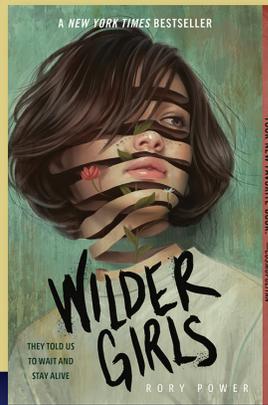
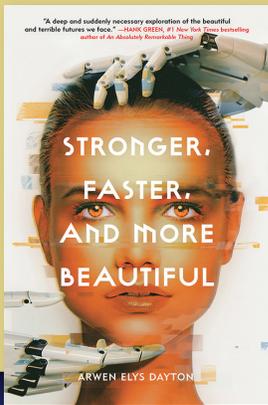


Survival and mental health stories to use with books like *The Bell Jar* and *The Catcher in the Rye*

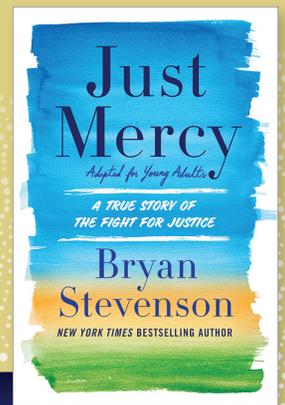
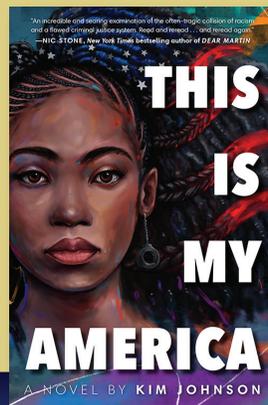
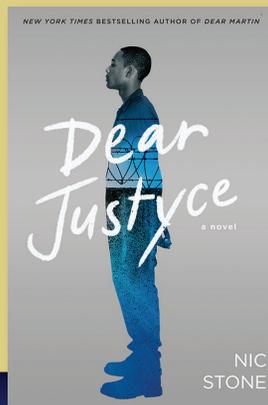
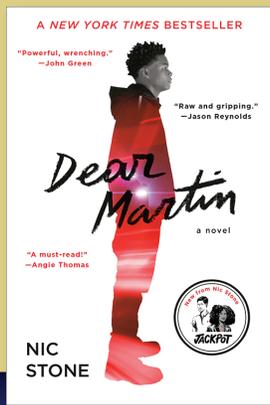
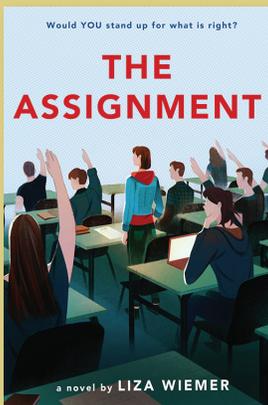
# IN CLASSROOM LITERATURE BOOK CLUBS



Relationship stories to use with books like *Pride and Prejudice* and *A Separate Peace*



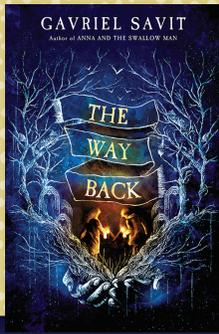
Utopian and dystopian stories to use with books like *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Road*



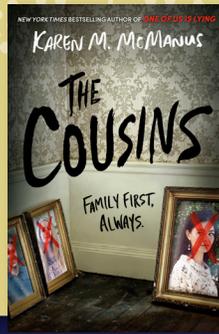
Social justice and discrimination stories to use with books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Outsiders*

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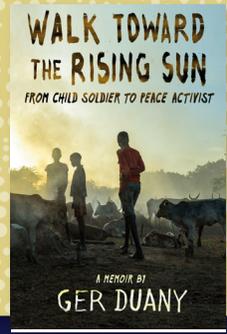
# EVEN MORE BOOKS COMING SOON!



Myths, Legends & Folklore;  
Historical Fiction



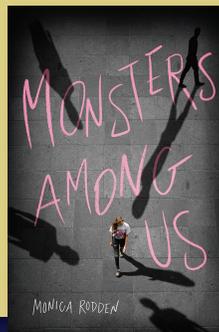
Mystery & Suspense;  
Family & Relationships



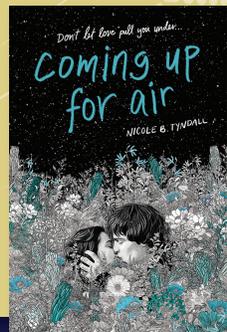
Biography; War



Science Fiction;  
Friendship & Romance

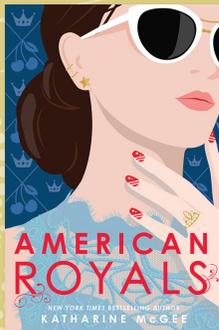


Mystery & Suspense;  
Dying & Grief

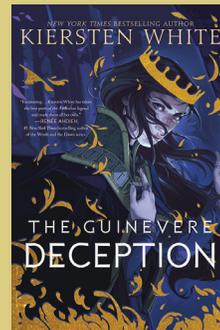
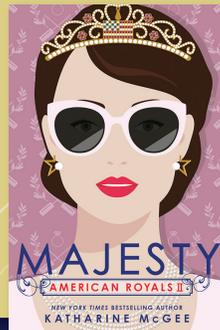


Love & Romance;  
Coming of Age

## SERIES TO BINGE!



Family & Relationships; Betrayal



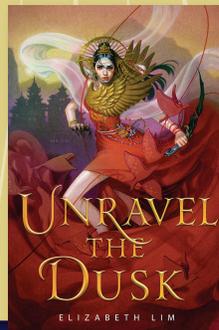
Historical Fiction; Fantasy



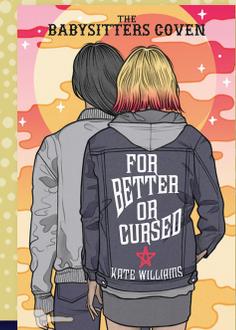
Good vs. Evil; Love & Romance



Art, Music & Theater; Coming of Age



Supernatural; Good vs. Evil



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