

L.G.'s Awesome Book List

I'm a writer, and I homeschool, thus I collect children's books. After sending a bunch of book recommendations to a friend, I realized I ought to turn the list into a blog post. I've read all these books unless I've noted otherwise. I preferred fantasy, adventure, and historical fiction as a kid, so those flavors are pretty prominent. I admit I may not be the best judge of reading level, so know your child's ability! The list is alphabetical by title, and series are listed under the first book in the series.

My philosophy of children's literature I expect literature to widen a child's world, help them work through difficult topics in the safety of their imagination, and expand their vocabulary and language skills such as rhyme, alliteration, similes, and metaphors. But ultimately, I expect books to teach truth and beauty along with sin and its consequences. I don't believe depressing or nihilistic endings make sense from a Christian worldview, but saccharin-sweetness is equally problematic. I'm not afraid of scary books as long as the hero or heroine triumphs.

I've organized this list into several sections.

Picture books for preschool and early elementary

Chapter Books/Independently Reading Elementary (also good for read-alouds for nonreaders)

Middle Grade/Tweens

Young Adult

I have placed a blue heart next to books I think are more boy-oriented or pink next to girl-oriented. I could easily label them all purple since I grew up loving Jack London, Rudyard Kipling, and other books often recommended for boys. Still, I do think some books are more boyish or girly than others and deserve those labels. You know your kids best, so use or ignore the colors at your discretion.



I highly recommend searching out your local used bookstore for these titles, especially if you're looking for some of the vintage ones. I don't get any money for this list, so I'm not going to give you links or suggestions other than you should buy books as cheap as you can! I also believe in having extra copies of particularly good books so they can be loved into retirement and replaced.

Happy reading!

Pictures Books for Preschool and Early Elementary

Alexander and the Terrible Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day and *Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday* by Judith Viorst

Whenever I have a particularly difficult day, I announce loudly to no one in particular that I am moving to Australia with Alexander.

Are You My Mother? By P.D. Eastman

My sisters and I regularly quote a line from this hilarious book: "You are not my mother. You are a Snort!"

Baby Wren and the Great Gift by Sally Lloyd-Jones

Every creature praises God in their own way, and Baby Wren discovers hers in this gorgeously illustrated picture book.

Bedtime for Frances, Bread and Jam for Frances, Best Friends for Frances, A Baby Sister for Frances, A Bargain for Frances, and A Birthday for Frances by Russell Hoban

"What I am is tired of jam." Our family quotes these books regularly. Frances the badger is smart, funny, and a little naughty. And she's very fond of bread and jam.

Corduroy and *Corduroy's Pocket* by Don Freeman

My kids all love Corduroy. I think I have both books half-memorized by now.

Finding Winnie: the True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear by Lindsay Mattick

If you love Winnie the Pooh, this is the story of where that story got its start.

George Washington's Teeth by Deborah Chandra

Our first president had terrible teeth. This fun picture book tells the tale of his dental woes over the years.

Harry the Dirty Dog, Harry by the Sea, Harry and the Lady Next Door, and No Roses for Harry by Gene Zion

Harry is a white dog with black spots who is continually getting into and out of trouble. I particularly love his unique way of dealing with an annoying next-door neighbor.

A House is a House for Me by Mary Ann Hoberman

Every living thing has a house of some sort, and this book takes you on a tour of the domiciles of various creatures.

How a Book Is Made by Alike

An old book, but I have a feeling it's still pretty accurate. Writing a book is a long process!

How to Train a Train by Jason Carter Eaton

If you have a child who likes trains, you need this book.

"I Can't," Said the Ant by Polly Cameron

A rhyming tale about a broken teapot and the efforts of various kitchen items to help her.

Imogene's Antlers by David Small

Imogene wakes up feeling a bit different, and her family doesn't quite know what to do about it.

The Ink Garden of Brother Theophane

A beautifully illustrated rhyming story about a monk who makes ink for illuminated manuscripts. I seek out historical fiction illustrated in the style of the story's time period, and this book is a great example.

Journey, Quest, and Return by Aaron Becker

These beautiful picture books have no words, but each takes you on a beautiful and exciting adventure. Have your kids narrate as you turn the pages. I guarantee it will be entertaining.

Kites Sail High, Merry-Go-Round, Many Luscious Lollipops, and A Cache of Jewels by Ruth Heller

I use these bright fun picture books to help my kids practice parts of speech. They don't even notice they're learning!

Nanette's Baguette by Mo Willems

An awful lot of words rhyme with "baguette."

Madeline, Madeline's Rescue, Madeline and the Bad Hat, by Ludwig Bemelmans

Adorable classic French series with beautiful illustrations.

Make Way for Ducklings and Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey

McCloskey does gentle, funny stories so well. These are on every reading list known to man for good reason.

Many Moons by James Thurber

Princess Lenore is sick, and she claims that the only way she will get well is if someone will get her the moon. Her father sets about to grant her wish, and the most unlikely person finds a solution.

Marguerite Makes a Book by Bruce Robertson

Gorgeous pictures for a story about illuminated manuscripts in the middle ages. The art reflects the era of the story, which is a great way to familiarize kids with art history!

Meanwhile Back at the Ranch by Trinka Hakes Noble

If you've lived in Texas or near Texas, this book is even funnier because you can hear the accents. Rancher Hicks spends the day in the town of Sleepy Gulch while his wife Elna has a not-so-boring day back at their ranch. This will make your kids laugh out loud!

Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel, and The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton

Most kids will not recognize the technology in these stories. I say that's all the more reason to introduce them.

Moomin and the Moonlight Adventure by Tove Jansson

My sister brought this back from a trip to Sweden, and my kids love it. Moomin is a popular series there, and I can see why!

My Friend Maggie, Bernice Gets Carried Away, Extraordinary Jane, and Friends Stick

Together by Hannah E. Harrison

These books are so bright and colorful! Harrison is an incredible illustrator, and her stories are adorable. We love Bernice best, but all her characters are memorable.

No Jumping on the Bed! by Tedd Arnold

Jumping on the bed has consequences in an apartment building!

Pandamonia by Chris Owen

This book is a long hilarious rhyming warning of why you absolutely positively *should not wake the panda* on your visit to the zoo!

Paul Bunyan, Mike Fink, and Pecos Bill by Steven Kellogg

America's mythology! These stories are wonderful hyperbolic fun.

Poor Doreen: A Fishy Tale by Sally Lloyd-Jones

Miss Doreen Randolph-Potts isn't the brightest fish in the stream. Lots of alliteration make this book a fun read-aloud.

The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant

My husband and I both have large extended families, so the antics in this book are familiar and funny.

Sarah Morton's Day, Tapenum's Day, Samuel Eaton's Day, and Giving Thanks: The 1621 Harvest Feast by Kate Waters

I keep these books in a special box for Thanksgiving. The pictures are of real children reenacting people who lived in or near Plymouth Plantation. We pull them out every year and read them aloud. I have such good memories of the pictures bringing history to life for me as a child, and I'm so glad my mom let me have them for my kids to enjoy.

Thomas Jefferson Builds a Library by Barb Rosenstock

Thomas Jefferson collected books. I think he and I would have been fast friends. This was a fun story to read as part of our American history lessons.

The Three Little Javelinas by Susan Lowell

In this Southwest version of the Three Little Pigs, the javelinas pursued by a coyote. A must-have if you live anywhere near the southwest or western United States.

The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by A. Wolf

You only think you know the story of that horrible wolf eating innocent pigs! This version of the story is my favorite, and the quirky illustrations make it that much funnier.

The Wishes of the Fish King by Douglas McKelvey

A meditative fantastical poem.

Where's Our Mama? by Diane Goode

Mama loses her hat, and when she takes too long getting it back, her kids get anxious and ask a policeman for help. What follows is a sweet view of a mother through her children's eyes that might make you cry.

Chapter Books

A Bear Called Paddington by Michael Bond

If you haven't already read this, what even are you doing with your life? The Browns find a bear at Paddington Station in London, and around his neck is a card that reads, "Please take care of this bear. Thank you." And they do.

The Borrowers series by Mary Norton

Ever wonder where all your bobby pins, buttons, and other tiny objects disappear to? Borrowers.

Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry ♥

Newberry award winner! This book may be the reason I asked my mom if I could cook bananas and honey ham lunchmeat together on the stove because I was so curious how a spit-roasted pig stuffed with plantains would taste. (Also, don't do that. Bad idea.)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* by Roald Dahl

I don't love the other books most people mention when Roald Dahl's name comes up, but these two are fun. Be warned that Dahl likes gross-out humor, although these two books have significantly less than his other works.

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White

'Tis a classic for a reason.

A Cricket in Times Square by George Selden

Chester Cricket accidentally falls asleep in a picnic basket in Connecticut and wakes up to find himself in the subway below Times Square. One of my favorite books of all time.

The Family Under the Bridge by Natalie Savage Carlson

An old homeless man discovers some little children hiding under a bridge, waiting for their mother to return from work and ends up taking care of them on the streets of Paris. Homelessness is a heavy topic, but Carlson handles it beautifully.

The Green Ember Series by S.D. Smith ♥

My husband and our oldest child listened to the entire series on audiobook on our last big road trip and loved it.

Heidi by Johanna Spyri ♥

This story made me want to learn to milk a goat and sleep on a bed of hay covered in wool. Spyri made it sound so fun!

Hank the Cowdog series by John R. Erickson

Get the audio versions of these books. The author makes already funny stories so hilarious that my dad had to pull the car over on a road trip because he was laughing too hard to drive. Our family's favorites include *The Case of the Double Bumblebee Sting*, *It's a Dog's Life*, *Let Sleeping Dogs Lie*, and *The Case of the Vampire Vacuum Sweeper*.

The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes ♥

This book hit me hard as a kid. It's a really good book about poverty, bullying, and compassion. It's short easy reading that will make an impression.

In Grandma's Attic by Arleta Richardson ♥

Gentle adventures told by a grandmother looking back on her childhood on a farm. Get the treasury! The face mask involving beeswax made quite the impression on me as a tween worried about acne.

The Green Book by Jill Patton Walsh

Probably the first true sci-fi novel I ever read. There are some darker themes toward the end, so exercise caution with sensitive kids. I wasn't phased by it as a kid, b

The Jungle Book I and II by Rudyard Kipling ♥

Kipling can be a bit dark, and this is a series that parents should use to spark discussion. I loved the stories about Rikki Tikki Tavi, the cobra-killing mongoose.

King of the Wind: The Story of the Godolphin Arabian by Marguerite Henry

This is from the same author as *Misty of Chincoteague*, but it is my personal favorite. A horse story girls and boys would both love.

The Little Lame Prince by Dinah Mulock Craik

Very sad but sweet fantasy story. A prince, lamed at birth by a careless servant, is locked in a tower by his evil uncle, and his fairy godmother helps him.

Mary Poppins, Mary Poppins Comes Back, Mary Poppins Opens the Door, and Mary Poppins in the Park by P.L. Travers

Put the movie out of your mind because the books are nothing like the movies. They are weird. They are a little creepy in places. There's a character who breaks her fingers off and gives them to Jane and Michael as candy. Mary is so vain that it is off-putting. But they are also hilarious and perfect for reading aloud. Just don't expect Julie Andrews and animated penguins!

The Moffats series: The Moffats, The Middle Moffat, Rufus M., and The Moffat Museum by Eleanor Estes

I love these four books. We're still reading through them. They're about four kids and their widowed seamstress mother. Charming and hilarious.

Mr. Popper's Penguins by Richard Atwater

Mr. Popper dreams of exploring the South Pole and meeting a penguin, but he never expects the famous explorer Admiral Bird to send him a live penguin for a pet! It starts with a penguin in the icebox and gets sillier from there.

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH by Robert C. O'Brien

I just read this book for the first time as an adult, but my childhood best friend was obsessed. It's brilliantly written with memorable characters and an instantly intriguing plot.

Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's Magic, Hello, Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle, and Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's Farm by Betty McDonald

Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle knows how to cure all the problems of childhood, be it the Slow-Eater-Tiny-Bite-Taker plate set or Whisper-Sticks for gossipy girls. Parents should read these just to laugh at the ridiculous names of the characters. **I do not endorse the revamped Missy Piggle-Wiggle series.** Stick with the old ones.

My Side of the Mountain by Jean Craighead George ♥

A boy runs away and lives in the woods in a hollow tree, hunting, fishing, and foraging for his food. He even trains a falcon!

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Historical fiction about WWII. A girl and her family hide her Jewish friend from the Nazis. It has heavy material, but it's beautifully written and not explicit or violent.

Olga da Polga, Olga Carries On, Olga Moves House, Olga Meets Her Match, by Michael Bond

We had a guinea pig growing up, so I have a soft spot for guinea pigs in general. Olga da Polga is the funniest storytelling guinea pig of all time.

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster

This book is the punniest book ever written. Audible has a version narrated by Rainn Wilson, aka Dwight from *The Office*. I sincerely look forward to introducing my children to Milo, King Azaz the Unabridged, the Mathemagician, the Humbug, and a host of other memorable characters.

Pippi Longstocking, Pippi Goes on Board, and Pippi in the South Seas by Astrid Lindgren

Honestly, anything by Astrid Lindgren is probably good. I've read a lot of her other work, and it is all whimsical and fun. Pippi is the strongest girl in the world (she can carry her horse!), and she lives all by herself in her mess of a house, Villa Villekulla. I envied her not having a bedtime.

Redwall series by Brian Jacques ♥

Medieval adventure stories, but with mice, rats, and other animals. There's even a cookbook!

The Sea Fairies by L. Frank Baum

Same writer as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, but it's about mermaids! Girls will love it, but I suspect boys would enjoy it, too.

Sensible Kate by Doris Gates

This is a gentle story about a young orphan girl named Kate. She longs to be cute or pretty, but she settles for being sensible. Even though she has freckles and red hair, Kate is definitely not a copy of Anne of Green Gables! This one might be hard to find, but it's worth it!

The Story of Doctor Dolittle by Hugh Lofting

Dr. Dolittle is a doctor for people, but after his pet parrot teaches him to talk to animals, he starts treating animals instead.

What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin? And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?, Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May?, Why Don't You Get A Horse, Sam Adams?, Shh! We're Writing the Constitution, Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?, Will You Sign Here, John Hancock? by Jean Fritz

If your child likes history, these stories are so much fun. I personally love *Will You Sign Here, John Hancock*, because I didn't realize what a quirky man was behind the most famous signature in the world. All these books will teach your kids something while making them giggle.

The Wingfeather Saga by Andrew Peterson

So many things I could say about this series because it's a rich, funny, and captivating story told by an incredible writer and singer/songwriter. But mostly, I love that my kids run around yelling, "Not my potatoes!" Keep an eye out for the animated movie of the first book!

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and The Land of Oz by L. Frank Baum

The Oz series is surprisingly long, and I've read many of them. These are the only two I recommend. Warning: A girl transformed into a boy and back into a girl is a significant plot point in *The Land of Oz*, and in our current culture, that may be very confusing for some children.

Middle Grade/Tweens

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and *Through the Looking-glass* by Lewis Carroll

As a child, I loved the weirdness of these books. Carroll captures the confusion of a child trying to make sense of adult language and turns it into silly adventures.

Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery ♥

I identified with Anne's secret imaginary world as well as her penchant for renaming things to sound more exciting and beautiful.

The Black Pearl by Scott O'Dell

Ramon goes pearl diving and finds a treasure that his father believes may be the legendary pearl of heaven, but he may have also angered a monster.

Caddie Woodlawn by Carol Brink

I recall some creepy moments involving Indians and scalps. You might read it before giving it to your child to be sure there isn't anything you're uncomfortable with. I believe it would be a good discussion starter.

Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry ♥

Mafatu is terrified of the ocean which makes his father ashamed, so he sets out to conquer his fear. After he loses his canoe in a storm, he washes up on a deserted island... or so he thinks.

Cheaper by the Dozen by Frank Gilbreth Jr.

Frank and Lillian Gilbreth decided to have twelve children, six boys and six girls. And that's what they did. I have a soft spot for this book because Frank Gilbreth is also the father of organizational psychology, and the story illustrates how he used his large brood as a home laboratory for his theories with hilarious results!

The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis

No list would be complete without Narnia. Every child needs to feel the rush of excitement the first time the Pevensies meet Aslan.

The Cooper Kids Adventures by Frank Peretti

Eight books in all, some better than others, all solidly Christian and exciting fun stories.

Coraline by Neil Gaiman

I named one of my children after the titular character. This is horror, so it is scary. It's also exquisitely written and wildly creative. Never has a black shoe button seemed so foreboding than in this book!

The Day Boy and the Night Girl by George McDonald

A witch raises a boy so he never knows darkness and a girl so she never knows daylight, and yet, somehow, they meet. George McDonald influenced C.S. Lewis and Tolkien, and this is a good introduction. Once I read *The Princess and the Goblin* (his best-known work), I'll probably add it here.

Fortunately, the Milk by Neil Gaiman

Dad goes out to get milk and is gone a bit longer than expected. When he gets home, his explanation for his absence involves time travel, aliens pirates, dinosaurs, a volcano, and vampires. As soon as I finished reading this one aloud, my kids asked if we could start over and read it again.

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsburg

Another classic. If you read this book as a kid and didn't want to run away and live in a museum, I am convinced there is something wrong with you.

The Golden Goblet by Eloise Jarvis McGraw ♥

Historical adventure set in ancient Egypt. Ranofer wants to be a goldsmith, but his evil half brother Gebu keeps him enslaved. He gets a chance to change his life when he finds a golden goblet that his brother has kept hidden.

The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien

I read *The Hobbit* quite young (third grade, with my dad), and my husband has read it aloud to our oldest two. Tolkien is the only high fantasy writer I've ever enjoyed. Yes, I took a class on Tolkien in college and moved a final to see all three films in the theater on Trilogy Tuesday. And no, I haven't read the *Silmarillion*.

Holes by Louis Sachar ♥

Stanley seems to have terrible luck. He ends up at Camp Greenlake doing "community service" digging holes in a desert, but maybe all these holes will change his luck. I also highly recommend the movie!

The Hound of the Baskervilles by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ♥

I love all things Sherlock Holmes. This is Doyle at his creepy best.

Iggy and Oz: The Plastic Dinos of Doom, *The Soda Pop Wars*, and *The Living Snot* (coming Christmas 2021)

My oldest adores this series. It's goofy clean fun with some of the gross humor boys love.

Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell ♥

A girl ends up living alone on an island in the Pacific. It's sort of like *My Side of the Mountain* but a girl on an island.

The Mandie Series by Lois Leppard ♥

I borrowed a ton of these from a friend and loved them — solid Christian fiction for girls.

Mara, Daughter of the Nile by Eloise Jarvis McGraw

Mara is a slave who becomes a spy in the court of Queen Hatshepsut. I think of this as a more girl-oriented version of *The Golden Goblet*. Very good historical fiction.

The Midnighters trilogy by Scott Westerfeld: *The Secret Hour*, *Touching Darkness*, and *Blue Noon*

I have a soft spot for this series since it is set in Bixby, Oklahoma, and I happen to be Okie born and bred. Teens discover there is a secret hour warped within midnight. For an hour, everyone else freezes while those born precisely at midnight discover unique powers as well as terrifying monsters to battle. I never finished *Blue Noon* because I had to give it back to the library. Someday I'll finish it because it's still bugging me almost ten years later!

Mistress Masham's Repose by T.H. White ♥

This book should be much better known than it is. A young girl discovers a group of refugee Lilliputians (as in the tiny people from *Gulliver's Travels*) living on an island on the grounds of the estate where she lives. I still want a spider silk handkerchief like Maria.

Outlaws of Time series by N.D. Wilson ♥

Books by N.D. Wilson are the only ones I recommend without actually reading them because I know they'll be good. This series is on our shelf, and I'm hoping to get to them this Christmas.

The Prince and the Pauper by Mark Twain ♥

You probably think you know this story because it has been copied so many times. It's worth it to read the original, complicated language and all.

The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by Avi

A young woman sails home to Rhode Island from boarding school in England and finds herself the lone passenger on a ship with a scoundrel captain and a crew looking to mutiny. Charlotte is a heroine you will remember!

The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin

This book still bugs me years later because the puzzles were so intriguing! Turtle Wexler is definitely a scrappy, smart, and memorable little girl. If your child likes puzzles, they will probably like this one.

White Fang and *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London

These are classic "dog" stories that can be pretty scary. London was one of my favorite writers growing up.

The Witch of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare ♥

This historical novel is set in colonial Connecticut. Kit Tyler has run away from her home in Barbados to escape marriage to a much older man, and she has to figure out how to live with her Puritan extended family. This one features quite a bit of innocent romance, so boys may turn up their noses.

The Winds of Light series by Sigmund Brouwer

Warring groups of magicians, Merlins and Druids, use science to convince people they know magic and fight for control of medieval England. It has a little bit of romance mixed in later in the series. I got four books from this series on Christmas morning as a kid and finished three by dinner.

Young Adult

The Adoration of Jenna Fox by Mary E. Pearson (but not the rest of the series)

Excellent science fiction that asks questions about human value and how far you should go to save a life.

All Our Yesterdays

Time travel done right! I have never read the sequel and never will because, as far as I'm concerned, this book had a perfect ending.

Arena by Karen Hancock

I read this book in college and came out wondering how on earth I'd never heard of the author. I usually describe it as "*Pilgrim's Progress* in space with a dash of Lewis's space trilogy."

The Charlatan's Boy by Jonathan Rogers ♥

This book oozes atmosphere. It's a quirky story in the vein of Mark Twain starring an equally quirky main character.

Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card

I sincerely wish I'd read this book as a teen. As a nerdy child, I would have identified with his sense of isolation and worries about living up to his potential. Also, there are laser battles in zero gravity!

The Endless Steppe by Esther Hautzig

A young girl grows up exiled with her family in Siberia. This is a true story, but it reads like a novel.

Erebos by Ursula Poznanski ♥

If your teen is a gamer, give them this book! A teen hears about a game being passed around his school. Once he gets his hands on a copy, he finds more than he bargained for. I was hooked until the last page.

Expiration Day by William Campbell Powell

Humans are producing fewer and fewer babies, but Tania is a real girl in a world of teknoids: robot replacements for the children other parents can never have. As Tania grows older, she realizes most of her friends are robots and has to grapple with what it means to be human. The writing style of this book hooked me from page one.

Fin's Revolution series: *Fiddler's Gun* and *Fiddler's Green* by A.S. Peterson

Excellent historical fiction from the Rabbit Room! The first book is set in Georgia at the beginning of the American Revolution. Fin Button is one of the most memorable heroines I've read in a long time, and the books are bursting with atmosphere and humor.

Finding Alice and *The Other Side of Darkness* by Melody Carlson ♥

It is rare to find a Christian author addressing mental illness. *Finding Alice* is about schizophrenia, and *The Other Side of Darkness* is about obsessive-compulsive disorder. I was pleasantly surprised at the accuracy of the symptoms as well as how Carlson slowly draws the reader toward a Christian perspective on mental illness, compassion, and healing. Since many young adults struggle with anxiety, depression, and other mental illnesses, these books address issues that many teens will, unfortunately, find familiar.

The Forest of Hands and Teeth series by Carrie Ryan: *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, *The Dead-Tossed Waves*, and *The Dark and Hollow Places* ♥

I thought zombies were stupid until I read this series. These books are less about zombies and more about surviving in a broken world. The third isn't as good as the first two and

there are clean romances in each book. Parents and teens will have plenty of fodder for discussion about life and death, following rules, and what it means to sacrifice.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

I read this book in high school and saw a stage adaptation. I will never forget it. Lee captures racism, prejudice, and injustice in a way that will leave you unsettled and determined to change things long after you finish the book.

Life as We Knew It, The Dead and the Gone, and This World We Live In by Susan Beth Pfeffer

I don't endorse the fourth (and last) book in the series, but these three were absorbing. When I read the first one, I looked up at a chapter break and thought, "Oh, thank God that we have electricity!" It was 103 degrees outside, but in my head, I was in the depths of frigid winter with only the heat of a wood stove and a quilt to keep me alive.

Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen ♥

Jane Austen's first novel is the famous author at her sarcastic best, skewering the gothic novel genre with hilarious narrative asides. This is my favorite Austen novel and a good introduction to her style. Follow it up with *Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice*.

An Old-Fashioned Girl by Louisa May Alcott ♥

This book is a precious gift from a mentor that I will always treasure. I loved all the characters and seriously considered naming a child Polly after the heroine.

The Partial Sequence- Partial, Fragments, and Ruins by Dan Wells

Read this series with your child and discuss the ending, which is darker than expected for YA. I think parents and teens would have a lot to talk about regarding hope, redemption, and our role on this planet God has gifted us.

The Red Rising Saga: Red Rising, Golden Son, and Morning Star by Pierce Brown

The third book in this series has the distinction of being one of six books in the world to ever make me cry. Darrow was born a Red, the lowest class in a massive interplanetary empire. When he discovers he has been lied to his whole life about his role and his future, he chooses revolution. I only recommend this dark series for older, mature teens, and parents should definitely read along. The triumphal but bittersweet ending makes the ugliness and sin worth the journey. I have not read the last two books, *Iron Gold* or *Dark Age*, but I will update this review once I do.

Till We Have Faces by C.S. Lewis

This is a retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche that will spark lots of discussion about sisterhood, love, and jealousy. It's my favorite story by C.S. Lewis even more than the Narnia series.

The Time Machine by H.G. Wells

The Morlocks! The flesh-eating Morlocks! This book freaked me out in the best ways. If you have a teen who likes science, get them started on H.G. Wells.

The *Uglies* series by Scott Westerfeld: *Uglies*, *Pretties*, *Specials*, and *Extras* ♥

This is a compelling science fiction series about the quest for superficial beauty that is great for sparking discussion. *Extras* is written as part of the same universe as the first three but takes place in a different part of the world with different characters. Westerfeld released new books in the *Uglies* universe, and I'll probably be adding them to this list once I've had time to read them.

Victoria Grace the Jerkface by S.E. Clancy

This contemporary YA novel is equal parts hilarious sarcasm and heart-tugging sweetness with a gentle clean romance. And Victoria Grace is decidedly *not* a jerkface.

Whispers from the Depths by CW Briar

Dark fantasy set in a fascinating world where certain people are gifted with the ability to communicate with water spirits. I love the main character Betka. Be ready for a bittersweet ride with this one.

Wickers Bog: A Tale of Southern Gothic Horror by Mike Duran

Yes, Christian horror exists. And yes, it's excellent! Duran succeeded in making me shiver more than once in this novella, which is saying something when you write supernatural/horror yourself!

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeline L'Engle

This book is appropriate for middle grade, teens, and adults. Read it in all these phases of life, and you will gain something different each time. Meg Murray is my personal heroine, especially since I'm a brunette with glasses and a challenging temperament. I can't say I enjoyed L'Engle's other works. I never went past book two because the level of weirdness was too much.