



High Interest Books for High School Students Reading Below Grade Level

- Alexie, Sherman. [The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian](#). New York: Little, Brown, 2007. [y ALEXIE] RL 4.0*
Budding cartoonist Junior leaves his troubled school on the Spokane Indian Reservation to attend an all-white school in town where the only other Indian is the school mascot.
- Anderson, Laurie Halse. [Wintergirls](#). New York, N.Y.: Viking, 2009. [y ANDERSON 2009] RL 4.1*
Eighteen-year-old Lia comes to terms with her best friend's death from anorexia as she struggles with the same disorder.
- Anderson, M.T. [Burger Wuss](#). Cambridge, Mass: Candlewick Press, 1999. [y ANDERSON] RL 3.5*
Hoping to lose his loser image, Anthony plans revenge on a bully which results in a war between two competing fast food restaurants, Burger Queen and O'Dermott's.
- Armstrong, Lance. [It's not about the bike: My journey back to life](#). New York: Putnam, 2000. [796.62 A734i 2000] RL 6.7*
This is the story of bicyclist and Tour de France winner, Lance Armstrong, his battle with cancer, and his ride to a Tour victory.
- Beres, D. B. [Dusted and busted!: the science of fingerprinting](#). New York: Franklin Watts, c2007. [j363.25 B491d 2007]
Presents a collection of real-life cases that were solved through the science of fingerprinting.
- Beres, D. B. [Killer at large: criminal profilers and the cases they solve!](#). New York: Franklin Watts, c2007. [j363.25 B491k 2007]
Presents a collection of real-life cases that were solved by criminal profilers.
- Bishop, Nic. [Nic Bishop butterflies and moths](#). New York, NY: Scholastic Nonfiction, c2009. [j595.789 B622n 2009 Beginning Facts] RL 5.4*
Simple, engaging text presents both basic information and fun, quirky facts about the insects' appearance, habits, and life cycle.
- Bishop, Nic. [Nic Bishop marsupials](#). New York, NY: Scholastic, c2009. [j599.2 B622n] RL 5.4*
- Bodeen, S.A. [The compound](#). New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2008. [y BODEEN] RL 4.1*
Along with his parents and two sisters, Eli has spent six years in a vast underground compound built by his wealthy father to protect them from a nuclear holocaust.

- Bragg, Georgia. [How they croaked: the awful ends of the awfully famous](#). New York: Walker & Co., 2011. [j920.02 B8134h 2011] RL 6.8*
A look at the deaths of several famous people throughout history and the circumstances surrounding those deaths.
- Bruchac, Joseph. [Code talker: a novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two](#). New York: Dial Books, c2005. [yBRUCHAC] RL 6.4*
After being taught in a boarding school run by whites that Navajo is a useless language, Ned Begay and other Navajo men are recruited by the Marines to become Code Talkers, sending messages during World War II in their native tongue.
- Collins, Suzanne. [The hunger games](#). New York: Scholastic Press, 2008. [y COLLINS 2008.] RL 5.2*
In a future North America, where the rulers of Panem maintain control through an annual televised survival competition, 16-year-old Katniss's skills are put to the test when she voluntarily takes her younger sister's place. [Catching fire](#) is the sequel.
- Cummings, Priscilla. [Red kayak](#). New York: Dutton Children's Books, c2004. [yCUMMINGS] RL 4.9*
Living near the water on Maryland's Eastern Shore, thirteen-year-old Brady and his best friends J.T. and Digger become entangled in a tragedy which tests their friendship and their ideas about right and wrong.
- Denega, Danielle. [Have you seen this face?: the work of forensic artists](#). New York: Franklin Watts, c2007. [j363.25 D392h 2007]
Presents a collection of famous cases solved by illustrations created by forensic artists.
- Denega, Danielle. [Skulls and skeletons: true life stories of bone detectives](#). New York: Franklin Watts, c2007. [j614.17 D392s 2007] RL 5.7*
Presents a collection of famous cases solved by DNA analysis of the bone remains.
- Deuker, Carl. [Payback time](#). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. [yDEUKER 2010] RL 5.0*
Overweight, somewhat timid Mitch reluctantly agrees to be the sports reporter for the Lincoln High newspaper because he is determined to be a writer, but he senses a real story in Angel, a talented football player who refuses to stand out on the field--or to discuss his past.
- Ellis, Deborah. [I am a taxi](#). Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2006. [yELLIS] RL 4.8*
Cocalero novels regarding the cocoa industry in Bolivia.
- Fisher, Catherine. [Incarceron](#). New York: Dial Books, 2010. [y FISHER] RL4.6*
To free herself from an upcoming arranged marriage, Claudia, the daughter of the Warden of Incarceron, a futuristic prison with a mind of its own, decides to help a young prisoner escape.
- Fleischman, Paul. [Whirligig](#). New York: H. Holt, 1998. [y FLEISCHMA] RL 4.9*
While traveling to each corner of the country to build a whirligig in memory of the girl whose death he causes, sixteen-year-old Brian finds forgiveness and atonement.

- Forman, Gayle. [If I stay](#). New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2009. [y FORMAN 2009] RL 5.3*
While in a coma following an automobile accident that killed her parents and younger brother, 17-year-old Mia weighs whether to live with her grief or join her family in death.
- Grandits, John. [Blue lipstick: concrete poems](#). New York: Clarion Books, c2007. [y811.6 G753b 2007] RL 3.5*
A 15-year-old girl named Jessie voices typical--and not so typical--teenage concerns in this unique, hilarious collection of poems. Her musings about trying out new makeup and hairstyles, playing volleyball and cello, and dealing with her annoying younger brother are never boring or predictable. The poems are inventive, irreverent, irresistible, and full of surprises--just like Jessie--and the playful layout and ingenious graphics extend the wry humor.
- Green, John. [Will Grayson, Will Grayson](#). New York: Dutton, c2010. [yGREEN] RL 5.1*
When two teens, one gay and one straight, meet accidentally and discover that they share the same name, their lives become intertwined as one begins dating the other's best friend, who produces a play revealing his relationship with them both.
- Harmon, Michael B. [The last exit to normal](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. [y HARMON] RL 3.6*
Seventeen-year-old Ben is yanked out of his city life and plunked down into a small Montana town with his father and this father's boyfriend.
- Hijuelos, Oscar. [Dark dude](#). New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2008. [y HIJUELOS 2008] RL 5.6*
In the 1960s, Rico Fuentes – a pale-skinned Cuban American teenager – abandons drug-infested New York City for the picket fence and apple pie world of Wisconsin.
- Holt, David. [The exploding toilet: Modern urban legends](#). Little Rock, Ark.: August House Publishers, 2004. [y398.2 H758e 2004] RL 6.5*
Here you'll find stupid criminals, government SNAFUs, scary stories, and a section featuring the Internet. These stories are too good not to pass on ...
- Hopkins, Ellen. [Impulse](#). New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2007. [y HOPKINS] RL 4.5*
Three teens who meet at Aspen Springs mental hospital after each has attempted suicide connect with each other in this novel in verse.
- Hurley, Tonya. [Ghostgirl](#). Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2008. [y HURLEY 2008] RL 6.6*
Even dead, high school senior Charlotte Usher is as invisible to nearly everyone as she always felt. The sequel is [Ghostgirl: Homecoming](#).

- Johnson, Angela. [The first part last](#). New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003. [y JOHNSON] RL 4.7*
Bobby's carefree teenage life changes forever when he becomes a father and must care for his adored baby daughter.
- Joyce, Jaime. [Bullet proof!: the evidence that guns leave behind](#). New York: Franklin Watts, c2007. [j363.25 J89b 2007] RL 5.3*
Presents a collection of real-life cases that were solved by forensic firearms examiners and describes how a single bullet can lead authorities to the criminal.
- Joyce, Jaime. [Toe tagged: true stories from the morgue](#). New York: Franklin Watts, c2007. [j614.1 J89t 2007]
Presents a collection of real-life cases that were solved in the morgue.
- Kostyal, K. M. [Trial by ice: A photobiography of Sir Ernest Shackleton](#). Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 1999. [j919.89 K86t 1999] RL 6.2*
Traces the adventurous life of the South Pole explorer whose ship, the Endurance, was frozen in ice and crushed, leaving the captain and crew to fight for survival.
- Levithan, David. [Boy meets boy](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. [yLEVITHAN] RL 4.5*
This is the story of Paul, a sophomore at a high school like no other: The cheerleaders ride Harleys, the homecoming queen used to be a guy named Daryl, and the gay-straight alliance was formed to help the straight kids learn how to dance.
- Lisle, Janet. [Black duck](#). New York: Sleuth/Philomel, c2006. [yLISLE] RL 4.8*
Years afterwards, Ruben Hart tells the story of how, in 1929 Newport, Rhode Island, his family and his best friend's family were caught up in the violent competition among groups trying to control the local rum-smuggling trade.
- Madigan, L. K. [Flash burnout](#). Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 2009. [yMADIGAN] RL3.5*
Telephoto lens. Zoom. In a shutter release millisecond, Blake's world turns upside down. The nameless woman with the snake tattoo is not just another assignment. "That's my mom!" gasps Marissa. Saturated self-portrait: Blake, nice guy, class clown, always trying to get a laugh, not sure where to focus. Contrast. Shannon, Blake's GF. Total. Babe. Marissa, just a friend and fellow photographer. Shannon loves him; Marissa needs him. How is he supposed to frame them both in one shot?
- Marsden, John. [Tomorrow, when the war began](#). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995. [yMARSDEN] RL 6.3*
Seven Australian teenagers return from a camping trip in the bush to discover that their country has been invaded and they must hide to stay alive.
- Marcantonio, Patricia. [Red ridin' in the hood: and other cuentos](#). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. [jMARCANTON] RL 4.4*
A collection of well-known tales, retold from a Hispanic American perspective.

- Myers, Walter Dean. [Monster](#). New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999. [yMYERS] RL 5.1*
While on trial as an accomplice to a murder, 16-year-old Steve Harmon records his experiences in prison and in the courtroom in the form of a film script.
- Neri, Greg. [Yummy: the last days of a Southside Shorty](#). New York: Lee & Low Books, c2010. [ygn 305.896 NERI 2010] RL 3.4*
A graphic novel based on the true story of Robert "Yummy" Sandifer, an eleven-year old African American gang member from Chicago who shot a young girl and was then shot by his own gang members.
- O'Donnell, Liam. [Ramp rats: a graphic guide adventure](#). Victoria, B.C.: Orca Book Publishers, c2008. [jgnODONNELL 2008] RL 3.2*
- Olson, Arielle North. [More bones: scary stories from around the world](#). New York, N.Y.: Viking, 2008. [j398.2 M8352 2008] RL 5.3*
Can you escape from an evil wizard? Can you outrun a corpse? Can you learn secrets from a severed head? These terrifying questions--and many more--enliven twenty-two tales collected from around the world and retold.
- Preller, James. [Bystander](#). New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2009. [jPRELLER] RL 4.2*
Thirteen-year-old Eric discovers there are consequences to not standing by and watching as the bully at his new school hurts people, but although school officials are aware of the problem, Eric may be the one with a solution.
- Prokos, Anna. [Guilty by a hair!: real-life DNA matches](#). New York: Franklin Watts, 2007. [j572.86 P964g 2007] RL 5.2*
All it would take is one sneeze. Your DNA would be all over this book. That's right. Your spit has DNA in it. So does your skin. And your blood. That's important to police because everyone's DNA is different. With the right equipment, detectives can match a person with some blood left at a crime scene. They've put murderers in jail that way. They've also freed innocent people.
- Prokos, Anna. [Killer wallpaper: true cases of deadly poisonings](#). New York: Franklin Watts, 2007. [j615.9 P964k 2007] RL 5.2*
Presents a collection of famous cases that involved poison.
- Rhodes-Courter, Ashley. [Three little words: A memoir](#). New York: Atheneum, 2008. [y362.733 R476t 2008] RL 5.4*
Ashley spent nine years in foster care enduring many caseworkers, moving from school to school, and manipulative, humiliating and abusive treatment from one foster family.
- Runyon, Brent. [The burn journals](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004. [y362.28 R943b 2004] RL 3.8*
Brent Runyon was fourteen years old when he set himself on fire. In this memoir, he describes that suicide attempt and his recovery over the following year.

- Ryan, Carrie. [The Forest of Hands and Teeth](#). New York: Delacorte Press, 2009. [y RYAN 2009] RL 5.8*
Orphaned Mary seeks knowledge of life, love, and especially what lies beyond her walled village – the unconsecrated; the aggressive flesh-eating people who were once dead.
- Schumacher, Julie. [Black box](#). New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. [ySCHUMACHE 2008] RL 4.1*
When her 16-year-old sister is hospitalized for depression and her parents want to keep it a secret, 14-year-old Elena tries to cope with her own anxiety and feelings of guilt.
- Scieszka, Jon. [Knucklehead: tall tales & mostly true stories about growing up Scieszka](#). New York, N.Y.: Viking, 2008. [j813.54 S416k 2008] RL 4.6*
How did Jon Scieszka get so funny? He grew up as one of six brothers with Catholic school, lots of comic books, lazy summers at the lake with time to kill, babysitting misadventures, TV shows, and jokes told at family dinner.
- Shan, Darren. [Cirque du Freak](#). Boston: Little, Brown, 2001. [jSHAN] RL3.8*
Two boys who are best friends visit an illegal freak show, where an encounter with a vampire and a deadly spider forces them to make life-changing choices. Note: First of a series. Also check out the Wanga version of these books.
- Simon, Seymour. [Cats](#). New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004. [j636.8 S596c 2004] RL 4.5*
Discusses the history, physical characteristics, behavior, and various breeds of cats, and provides basic information on caring for one as a pet.
- Simon, Seymour. [Dogs](#). New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2004. [j636.7 S596d 2004] RL 4.6*
Provides a basic introduction to the physical characteristics and behavior of dogs.
- Sitomer, Alan. [The hoopster](#). New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2005. [y SITOMER] RL 4.9*
Andre Anderson loves to play basketball. When he is viciously attacked, it calls his whole world into question – even his deadly jumpshot. [Hip-hop high school](#) and [Homeboyz](#) complete the trilogy.
- Soto, Gary. [The afterlife](#). Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2003. [y SOTO] RL 5.2*
A senior at East Fresno High School lives on as a ghost after his brutal murder in the restroom of a club where he had gone to dance.
- Spinelli, Jerry. [Stargirl](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. [y SPINELLI] RL 4.2*
(Also available in [Spanish](#))
In this story about the perils of popularity, the courage of nonconformity, and the thrill of first love, an eccentric student named Stargirl changes Mica High School forever.
- Telgemeier, Raina. [Smile](#). New York: Graphix, 2010. [ygn617.645 TELGEMEIE] RL 2.4*
From sixth grade through tenth, Raina copes with a variety of dental problems that affect her appearance and how she feels about herself.

- Turner, Pamela. [Project seahorse](#). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2010. [j597.6798 T9511p 2010] RL 6.6*
- Valdes-Rodriguez, Alisa. [Haters](#). New York: Little, Brown, 2006. [y VALDESROD] RL 4.2*
Having tried for years to deny her psychic abilities, high school sophomore Paski has disturbing visions about the popular girl at her new school in Orange County, California.
- Volponi, Paul. [Hurricane song](#). New York: Viking, 2008. [y VOLPONI 2008] RL 5.4*
High school sophomore Miles Shaw goes to live with his father – a jazz musician – in New Orleans, and together they survive the horrors of Hurricane Katrina.
- Watson, Renee. [What Momma left me](#). New York: Bloomsbury, 2010. [yWATSON 2010] RL 3.9*
After the death of their mother, thirteen-year-old Serenity Evans and her younger brother go to live with their grandparents, who try to keep them safe from bad influences and help them come to terms with what has happened to their family.
- Webber, Diane. [Do you read me?: famous cases solved by handwriting analysis!](#). New York : Franklin Watts, c2007. [j363.25 W371d 2007]
Presents a collection of famous cases solved by handwriting analysis including the Lindbergh kidnapping and the Hitler diaries.
- Webber, Diane. [Shot and framed: photographers at the crime scene](#). New York: Franklin Watts, c2007. [j363.25 W371s 2007]
Presents a collection of famous cases where crime-scene photographers played an important role.
- Werlin, Nancy. [The rules of survival](#). New York: Dial Books, 2006. [y WERLIN] RL 4.3*
Seventeen-year-old Matthew recounts his attempts, starting at a young age, to free himself and his sisters from the grip of their emotionally and physically abusive mother.
- White, Robb. [Deathwatch](#). New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers, 1972. [y WHITE] RL 6.0*
Needing money for school, a college boy accepts a job as guide on a desert hunting trip and nearly loses his life.
- Williams-Garcia, Rita. [Jumped](#). New York: HarperTeen, 2009. [y WILLIAMSG 2009] RL 3.6*
The lives of Leticia, Dominique, and Trina are irrevocably intertwined after Leticia overhears Dominique's plans to beat up Trina.
- Winchester, Elizabeth. [The right bite: dentists as detectives](#). New York: Franklin Watts, 2007. [j614.1 W759r 2007]
Presents a collection of famous cases solved by dental analysis.
- Wolff, Virginia Euwer. [Make lemonade](#). New York: H. Holt, 1993. [y WOLFF] RL 5.0*
In order to earn money for college, fourteen-year-old LaVaughn babysits for a teenage mother. [True believer](#) and [This full house](#) complete the trilogy.

Wong, Janet S. [Behind the wheel: Poems about driving](#). New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1999. [y811.5 W872b 1999] RL 4.6*

Thirty-six poems look at various aspects of driving – including passing the driver's test, being pulled over by a cop, having an accident – treating them as metaphors for life.

Zarr, Sara. [Once was lost](#). New York: Little, Brown, 2009. [yZARR] RL 4.7*

As the tragedy of a missing girl unfolds in her small town, fifteen-year-old Samara, who feels emotionally abandoned by her parents, begins to question her faith.

Zarr, Sara. [Story of a girl](#). New York: Little, Brown, 2007. [y ZARR] RL 4.5*

In the three years since her father caught her in the back seat of a car with an older boy, sixteen-year-old Deanna's life at home and school has been a nightmare.

*Reading level figures come from the Renaissance Learning website

(http://www.renlearn.com/store/quiz_advanced.asp). The first digit indicates the *average* grade level, and the second is approximately how far through that grade year. (RL 4.5 means a title could be read by an average 4th grade reader halfway through the school year.)

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