



Readers Advisory for Teens...



...doesn't just mean Teen books



**From the BAYA workshop on Reader's
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I worked for 20 years as a Teen Librarian, and I have to say that reader's advisory was one of my favorite jobs. To be able to recommend books you've enjoyed to a young person (or a parent or teacher), to share firsthand the excitement that a book can generate, to be unabashedly enthusiastic about a title, an author, a genre- I think this is why many of us get into librarianship as a profession. However, the common wisdom- or myth- is that for those who don't know the teen literature, doing reader's advisory for teens is the toughest thing ever. We've all heard the old adage, "don't recommend or booktalk a book you haven't read", and often, the children's librarian, adult reference librarian or library specialist sitting at the desk hasn't read a single teen book. What can a person who is not a teen specialist possibly recommend?

Actually, even if you've never read Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, or a *Gossip Girl* title, or horror, or manga, or any of the many things teens might ask you for, I want to assure you that you are absolutely capable of providing intriguing, worthwhile suggestions to teens- or their parents.

Think back to what you read as a teen- depending on your age, some of it might have been "teen books" (books marketed for a teen audience) but I'm betting much of it wasn't. I'm betting much of it was adult literature and nonfiction that was of interest to you, because of your particular predilection for your personal passions: dance, mountaineering, science fiction, great white sharks, fantasy, romance, whatever.

At Berkeley Public Library, we make certain to keep our teen area stocked not only with what is being marketed as teen, but with titles marketed adult that appeal to teens. We frequently get adult patrons asking "Why do you have that in the Teen Area? It's not a teen book", and it's a wonderful moment to be able to educate the adult patron that teens read all over the

map- just as they did. Teens go back and read fairy tales for the comfort of it, and because some of the fairy tales, such as Andersen and Wilde, aren't really intended for young children, but for older teens and adults. They read romances written for adults, because sometimes these titles better capture the rapturous heady feelings of falling in love better than a "teen romance". They're reading to find that feeling, rather than to find a protagonist their age. They read *Clan of the Cave Bear* because it has explicit sex (of a prehistoric nature). They read *Black Hawk Down* because they want to experience a feeling of brotherhood and adventure. They read Michael Crichton because people of all ages love a rip-roaring adventure. They read memoirs such as *The Glass Castle* or *Always Running* because these gritty, real stories often mirror their own life experiences- or serve as a way to learn empathy.

I encourage you to use not your favorite adult readers advisory tools, be they online, print, or your personal scribbled journal to keep track of titles you've enjoyed, or others in your circle of family and friends have enjoyed. I'm fortunate to have a mother who is an omnivorous and voracious reader, and she prereads a lot of titles for me, alerting me to ones I really shouldn't miss.

Here's a tip for keeping that personal journal- Goodreads online is a great way to keep track, as is the little black book of titles read. Before returning your library books (because I'm assuming you get most of reading material at the library), take a minute to note the titles you're returning. I find that if I do this, I don't need to make any further notes- just the author and title works as a memory jog, when a patron asks me "What's a good title you'd recommend?"

But I'd like to emphasize a source that might not have existed when you were a teen- the Alex Awards. ALA calls them an annual list of ten books written for adults that have special appeal to young adults. I call them titles worth knowing for pretty much anyone. You can get the link to these titles off the ALA webpage.

Remember, too, that many coming-of-age stories are published for adults- but because of the subject matter, are very interesting to teens. Think of *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Scout may be young, but her experiences are not. She's discovering what it means to be a person of principles, and to have the courage to defend others. She's learning to walk inside another person's skin, and developing compassion and empathy. It's about the universal maturing experience, beautifully articulated and it speaks to and helps develop a sense of social justice, something many teens are passionate about. No wonder this title seems to survive its curriculum experience!

Let's take a look at various genres/subjects that teens frequently request, and some of the "adult" titles in these areas. By the way, all these titles have been recommended to me by

teens! These lists are representative only- I'm sure you'll think of many titles and authors to add.

Adventure:

Brown, Dan. Many titles.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice.

Casey, Susan. *The devil's teeth: a true story of obsession and survival among America's white sharks.*

Crichton, Michael. Many titles

Dumas, Alexandre. *The count of Monte Cristo.*

Eco, Umberto. *The name of the rose.*

Fleming, Ian. James Bond series

Ludlum, Robert. Bourne series

Kipling, Rudyard. *Kim.*

McCarthy, Cormac. Many titles.

Read, Piers Paul. *Alive.*

Schulman, Audrey. *The cage.*

Ullman, James Ramsay. Many titles.

Verne, Jules. Many titles.

Drugs (see also Gangs):

Frey, James. *A million little pieces.*

Brown, Cupcake. *A piece of cake.*

Family Stuff:

Diamant, Anita. *The red tent.*

Hedges, Peter. *What's eating Gilbert Grape.*

Lauck, Jennifer. *Blackbird.*

Sidransky, Ruth. *In silence: growing up hearing in a deaf world.*

Stegner, Wallace. *All the little live things.*

Walls, Jeannette. *The glass castle.*

Gangs:

Bing, Leon. *Do or die.*

Brown, Claude. *Manchild in the promised land.*

Rodriguez, Art. *East side dreams.*

Rodriguez, Luis. *Always running: la vida loca, gang days in LA*

Shakur, Sanyur. *Monster: the autobiography of an LA gang member.*

Thomas, Piri. *Down these mean streets.*

Horror (not vampires):

King, Stephen. Many titles

Levin, Ira. Rosemary's baby.
Lovecraft, H. P. Many titles
Martin, Valerie. Mary Reilly.
Strieber, Whitley. Communion

Humor/Satire:

Sedaris, David, Many titles.
Thurber, James. Many titles.
Townsend, Sue. Adrian Mole series
Vonnegut, Kurt. Many titles.
Wodehouse, P.G. Many titles.

Mental Illness:

Greenberg, Joanne. I never promised you a rose garden.
Hornbacher, Marya. Wasted. Bipolar.
Kaysen, Susanna. Girl, interrupted.
Simon, Lizzie. Detour: my bipolar road trip in 4-D.
Racial identity:
Ellisen, Ralph. Invisible man.
Fulbeck, Kip. Part Asian, 100% Hapa.
Jen, Gish. Mona in the promised land.
Lee, Gus. China boy. Honor and duty.
Momaday, N. Scott. House made of dawn.
Nguyen, Kien. The unwanted: a memoir.
Gibson, Aliona. Nappy: growing up Black and female in America.
Rodriguez, Richard. Hunger of memory.
Sinclair, April. Coffee will make you black.
Tan, Amy. Many titles.
Villasenor, Victor. Rain of gold.
Walker, Rebecca. Black, white and Jewish.

Romance:

Atherton, Nancy. Aunt Dimity mysteries.
DuMaurier, Daphne. Rebecca (and many other titles- and Rebecca spinoffs)
Golden, Arthur. Memoirs of a geisha.
Lord, Bette Bao. Spring Moon.
Smith, Bette. A tree grows in Brooklyn.
Sparks, Nicholas. Many titles.
Tsukiyama, Gail. The samurai's garden. Street of a thousand blossoms.

SciFi/Fantasy:

Beagle, Peter S. The last unicorn. Tamsin
Bradbury, Ray. Something wicked this way comes. Martian chronicles. Short stories.
Dick, Philip K. Do androids dream of electric sheep?
Gaiman, Neil. Many titles.
Gibson, William. Neuromancer.
Herbert, Frank. Dune.
Heinlein, Robert. Stranger in a strange land.
Lem, Stanislaw. Many titles.
McCaffrey, Anne. Pern series.
Stephenson, Neal. Snow crash.
Tepper, Sheri. Beauty
Yolen, Jane. Briar Rose.

Sexuality:

Brown, Rita Mae. Rubyfruit jungle.
Burroughs, Augusten. Running with scissors.
Eugenides, Jeffrey. Middlesex.

Teen pregnancy:

D'onofrio, Beverly. Riding in cars with boys.
Reynolds, Sheri. The rapture of Canaan.
Sapphire. Push
Haruf, Kent. Plainsong.
Vampires:
Butler, Octavia. Fledgling.
Dracula in London
Hambly, Barbara. Those who hunt the night.
Hamilton, Laurell. Anita Blake series
Rice, Anne. Interview with the vampire.
Stoker, Bram. Dracula
Yarbro, Chelsea Quinn. Saint Germain series

Other sources you might not think of:

New York Times Bestsellers
Oprah's list

If you are someone who reads, you can do reader's advisory for teens even if you've never read a "teen" book in your life! Titles published and marketed for adults are frequently of interest to teens, and are read by teens anyway, without being pushed on them. When you, an

adult library person, recommend an "adult" title to a teen, you send several important messages:

the library acknowledges that teens in general read and enjoy books written for adults

the library encourages teens to read books from and browse in the adult area of the library

the library sees teens as an "equal" in reading taste, and won't only recommend books from the teen area

But don't just recommend any adult book you've enjoyed. Think about the particular interests of teens in general and the one you're trying to help in particular, and go with those themes/ subjects/genres. If your contact with teens is limited, and you aren't sure of what those interests might be, remember that you have your own reading experience as a teen to work from. Think about the adult titles you read as a teen- many of them are still very relevant and appealing to teens now.

If you have purchasing power, buy adult titles teens enjoy and put them in your teen section. Sprinkle adult titles liberally throughout your reading lists. Make sure your teen patrons know that you consider them capable of reading and appreciating adult literature- and watch them feel flattered. Even if the teen you're helping at the moment isn't someone who reads adult titles, they will be complemented by the implication that you consider them capable of doing so.