

## Read 'Em and Weep

Books aren't key forces shaping the youth world-view, because of how few youth actually read them, but what is being read does reflect youth culture in important areas – in relationships, gender identity, passions and morality.

Among those who do read, what are they reading? On June 21<sup>st</sup> the top four bestsellers according to the [New York Times](#) were stories of:

- A romance between a vampire and a girl
- A 16 year-old girl in a reality TV game where the object is to kill the other 23 contestants
- A teen suicide and the 13 school-mates who drove her to do it
- A boy living in a graveyard because his father murdered his family with a knife.

Fortunately, there are some great books for youth to read. Most of them have been around a while and reinforce virtue, control of the passions and good relationships. You'll find a list on page two.

## How Romantic!

Stephanie Meyer's popular novel, *Twilight* was also recently released as a teen movie. It tells the story of 17 year-old Bella Swan, who falls in love with a teen vampire named Edward. He and his family drink animal – not human – blood.

Although it has sold far fewer books than the *Harry Potter* series, it has been at or near the top of the teen bestseller list since 2005.

*The Times* praised it for "capturing the teenage sense of sexual tension and alienation."

According to the author, the cover photo is meant to remind readers of the forbidden fruit from the Book of Genesis.

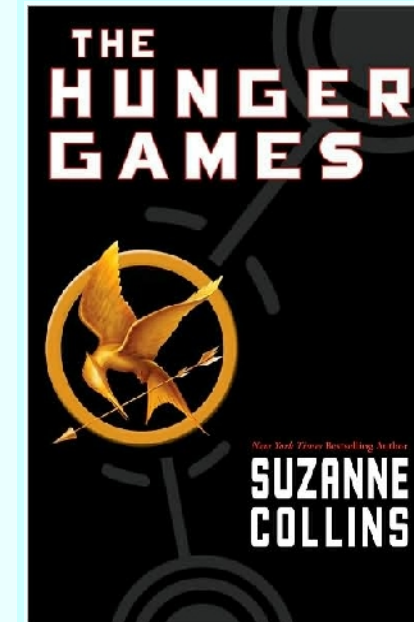
Bella knows she's eating forbidden fruit, but she is a teen and foolish romance is exciting, even if it puts the lives of everyone you love in danger!

Passions, not reason, rule teens in the *Twilight* zone.



## How Unromantic!

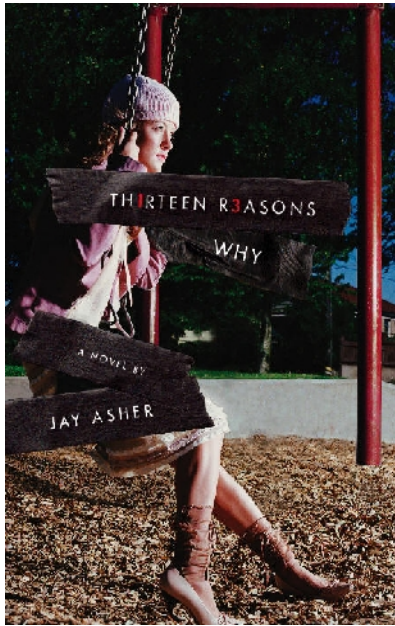
*The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins, is set in the future after the human population has been decimated by climate change and war. Now North America is a country with 12 fenced-in districts that all work to feed the enormously wealthy and technologically advanced capitol.



To keep the 12 districts under its control the capitol organizes an annual, mandatory-to-watch, reality TV game in which 24 teens are chosen at random to fight to the death. Only one survivor will go home: triumphant, rich and popular.

Katniss Everdeen, 16, lives in the poorest district. Her family only survives thanks to her illegal hunting and gathering outside the district's fence. With the help of her promotional team, her skill at killing, and a bit of luck...

No... she still won't be a model for young women.



## Morbid

*Thirteen Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher, is a story of a teen suicide. Clay Jensen gets home from school to find a strange box lying on his porch. It is addressed to him. Inside he finds a set of cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker, his classmate and girlfriend who had committed suicide

two weeks earlier. On tape, Hannah explains 13 reasons why she decided to end her life. Clay is one of them. If he listens, he'll find out how he made it onto the list.

Asher weaves an intricate and emotional story of the confusion and desperation teens can experience in high school. The danger in a book like this is that it actually might shape the behavior of its teen readers.

*"This book had me crying! It was wonderful. I finished the book in one sitting. My mom read the book the day after I finished it and wanted to have an in-depth conversation with me. I didn't because I just couldn't pick one thing out of this book that was wrong. This book has changed my life and the way I view it."*

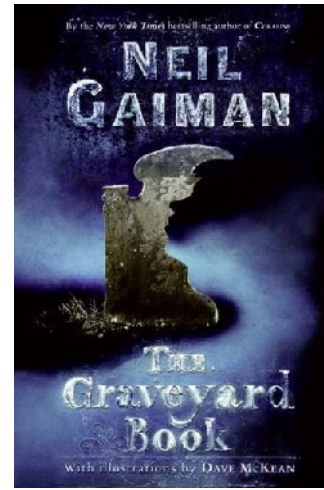
– **Katelyn** (from the book's website)

## More Morbid

*The Graveyard Book* won the 2009 American Library Association's Newbery Medal for the most distinguished contribution to children's literature. It is [described by the Association](#) as "a delicious mix of murder, fantasy, humor and human longing... in magical, haunting prose."

The story opens with a man slaughtering his family with a knife in the middle of the night. Only a toddler son escapes unnoticed to a graveyard full of ghosts who take him in. "Within its reassuringly locked gates, the boy finds a safe and cozy place to grow up among the dead. The boy – who is given the name Nobody Owens – lives with hideous ghouls, a witch, middle school bullies and a fraternal order of assassins that holds the secret to his family's murder."

HarperCollins, the book's publisher, describes it as "exciting and witty, sinister and tender."



### SOME GOOD BOOKS FOR TEENS TO READ

- *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis
- *The Man Who Was Thursday*, G.K. Chesterton
- *The Space Trilogy*, C.S. Lewis
- *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien
- *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom
- *The Father Brown Omnibus*, G.K. Chesterton
- *St. Francis of Assisi*, Omer Englebort
- *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee

## Lies & more lies & statistics

Fewer than half of American adults now read books, according to a [National Endowment for the Arts survey](#). The survey reports dramatic drops in book reading in every age group. The steepest rate of decline is among teens and young adults (aged early to mid twenties).

- 58% of the US adult population never reads another book after leaving high school
- 42% of university students never read another book after graduation
- 80% of US families did not buy or read a book last year
- 70% of US adults have not been in a bookstore in five years
- 57% of new books are not read to completion
- NOTE: 107% of those reading articles with statistics don't understand percentages.

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