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# Contents

Series Introduction vii  
Acknowledgments ix

## Part One

1. Readers’ Advisory and Young Adult Literature 3  
2. Teen Reading Habits and Marketing to Teens 9  
3. Readers’ Advisory with Teens 13  
4. Getting Up to Speed and Resources for Staying Current 19  
5. How This Book Works 27

## Part Two

6. Realistic Fiction 33  
7. Science Fiction 55  
8. Fantasy 79  
   BY KARYN SILVERMAN  
9. Horror 103  
10. Historical Fiction 121  
   BY CARRIE SHAURETTE
Contents

11 Adrenaline 139
   Mystery, Suspense, Crime, Thriller, Adventure, Supernatural Thriller

12 Nonfiction 159

Index 177
In a library world in which finding answers to readers’ advisory questions is often considered among our most daunting service challenges, library staff need guides that are supportive, accessible, and immediately useful. The titles in this series are designed to be just that. They help advisors become familiar with fiction genres and nonfiction subjects, especially those they don’t personally read. They provide ready-made lists of “need to know” elements, such as key authors and read-alikes, as well as tips on how to keep up with trends and important new authors and titles.

Written by librarians with years of RA experience who are also enthusiasts of the genre or subject, the titles in this series of practical guides emphasize an appreciation of the topic, focusing on the elements and features fans enjoy, so advisors unfamiliar with the topics can readily appreciate why they are so popular.

Because this series values the fundamental concepts of readers’ advisory work and its potential to serve readers, viewers, and listeners in whatever future space libraries inhabit, the focus of each book is on appeal and how appeal crosses genre, subject, and format, especially to include audio and video as well as graphic novels. Thus, each guide emphasizes the importance of whole collection readers’ advisory and explores ways to make suggestions that include novels, nonfiction, and multimedia, as well as how to incorporate whole collection elements into displays and booklists.

Each guide includes sections designed to help librarians in their RA duties, be that daily work or occasional interactions. Topics covered in each volume include:

■ The appeal of the genre or subject and information on subgenres and types so that librarians might understand the breadth and scope of the topic and how it relates to other genres and subjects. A brief history is also included to give advisors context and highlight beloved classic titles.
- Descriptions of key authors and titles with explanations of why they’re important: why advisors should be familiar with them and why they should be kept in our collections. Lists of read-alikes accompany these core author and title lists, allowing advisors to move from identifying a key author to helping patrons find new authors to enjoy.

- Information on how to conduct the RA conversation so that advisors can learn the tools and skills needed to develop deeper connections between their collections and their communities of readers, listeners, and viewers.

- A crash course in the genre or subject designed to get staff up to speed. Turn to this section to get a quick overview of the genre or subject as well as a list of key authors and read-alikes.

- Resources and techniques for keeping up-to-date and understanding new developments in the genre or subject are also provided. This section will not only aid staff already familiar with the genre or subject, but will also help those not familiar learn how to become so.

- Tips for marketing collections and lists of resources and awards round out the tools staff need to be successful working with their community.

As readers who just happen to be readers’ advisors, we hope that the guides in this series lead to longer to-be-read, -watched, and -listened-to piles. Our goal is that the series helps those new to RA feel supported and less at sea, and introduces new ideas or new ways of looking at foundational concepts, to advisors who have been at this a while. Most of all, we hope that this series helps advisors feel excited and eager to help patrons find their next great title. So dig in, explore, learn, and enjoy the almost alchemical process of connecting title and reader!
Part One
Readers’ Advisory and Young Adult Literature

Is there anything more rewarding than a smiling teen returning with a book clutched in his or her arms, asking for another one just like it? It is not an exaggeration to say that for young adults, who are in the middle of figuring out the world and their place in it, reading can be transformational. It is exciting to be part of that journey. Readers’ advisory for teens is a wonderful transaction. And it can be a challenge. The heartwarming interactions may be few at the beginning, interspersed as they are with teens who want little to do with an adult’s suggestions. This book combines an introduction to readers’ advisory language, vocabulary, and techniques with information about what teens like to read and why, followed by an examination of the appeal lurking within each genre of young adult literature. All this is in service to the goal of using readers’ advisory to help teens find the right books at the right time.

Readers’ Advisory

At its simplest, readers’ advisory is the art and science of helping patrons find a book to read. Joyce Saricks defines advisory services for adult readers as being focused on leisure reading. For teens, we need to be more flexible and include assigned reading as well. Our definition also goes
beyond “a book to read” and includes audiobooks in the mix. You will see that the genre chapters encompass whole collection readers’ advisory to include television and movies as well.

Readers’ advisory for adult readers is in full swing. Books and articles, tweets, conference presentations, and workshops abound. But what about those for serving teens? Not as much. Don’t get me wrong—public and school librarians have been performing readers’ advisory with teens for years. But where is the literature about that interaction? The tweets are more about our own love of particular books, and the conference presentations are more likely to be author panels attended by the readers and fans among us. The books are mostly lists of titles by subject area or genre.

There are exceptions. First and foremost, there is Heather Booth’s Serving Teens through Readers’ Advisory. The book you hold in your hands is indebted to this predecessor. Booth leads her readers through the how and why of performing readers’ advisory. This book builds on that foundation and offers an in-depth look at the appeal of each genre, through a close examination of the appeal of core titles.

This book is part of the American Library Association’s Readers’ Advisory Series. As such, it shares terminology with the other books in that series. In Readers’ Advisory Service in the Public Library, Joyce Saricks defined and established readers’ advisory and the elements of appeal. I establish and use related terms in this book’s genre chapters, particularly tone, pacing, characterization, story/theme, and setting. And I echo the basics of genre appeal as established in The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction by Saricks, and The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Nonfiction by Neal Wyatt. These basics work very well for young adult books as well, although there are cases in which the appeal of a genre or subgenre is somewhat different for teens, and we point out those distinctions.

**Young Adult Literature**

Now that we’ve begun to define readers’ advisory, we need to turn our gaze to young adult (YA) literature. The American Library Association defines young adult literature as books published for readers ages 12 through 18. (For a full overview of the changes in this definition over the decades, one cannot do better than the latest edition of Michael Cart’s Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism.) Young adult literature encompasses every genre and format, and it feels like there has been an explosion of publishing for this age group. Meanwhile, adults have
become major purchasers of young adult literature. In 2015, Nielsen statistics showed that “80% of all the YA books that are selling are being bought by adults.” Obviously, some of these are being purchased by adults for young adults (i.e., parents buying for their children). But this adult audience is also alarming. Are publishers now printing books in the YA category with the goal of appealing to adults? If so, we need to be even more conscious of what appeals to our teen readers, and why.

This brings us to a brief look at crossover books; that is, titles that appeal to both young adults and to adult readers. We need to understand the appeal of YA books to the adults in our libraries who enjoy them. Perhaps this appeal stems from the fact that many of these books are quick reads, are immediately engaging, and feature good writing. For some of us adults, the appeal of teen literature may be the nostalgia factor, or the fact that many YA books waste no time to launch into the meat of the story. This isn’t hard to understand. These stories harken back to a time when everything meant so much to us, when emotion ran high, when the stakes were high, when our choices were in front of us. It’s thrilling, scary, and meaningful. There are also adult book groups that read YA literature. Join one and test your own theories!

When working with teen readers, we quickly learn that they do not differentiate between books published for adults and those published for young adults. A great read is a great read. Books like Where’d You Go, Bernadette by Maria Semple or The Night Circus by Erin Morgenstern are read as voraciously as the new Sarah Dessen or Cassandra Clare novel. As they grow older, teens gravitate to adult books more and more often. They become more interested in adult characters, are more aware of what their parents are reading, and are ready to push the boundaries, especially in a favorite genre. Their teachers may also be recommending what they consider modern classics, like Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead.

**Intended Audience**

The audience for this book is librarians and library staff who serve young adults in public libraries, middle and high school libraries, and college and university libraries. This book will help readers’ advisors understand what young readers appreciate about their favorite genres and will expand their knowledge of the core titles in each genre. Collection development librarians will find titles to enhance and expand their buying, and

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administrators will learn more about serving young adult patrons. It is my hope that adult librarians whose duties and interests have expanded from adult readers’ advisory to include young adult fiction and nonfiction will find this book particularly helpful, since the genre chapters feature both popular young adult titles and adult titles with crossover appeal.

**What to Expect**

Readers’ advisory begins with knowing our audience and knowing their literature. We look at both teen reading habits and at young adult literature, genre by genre. Teen literature can appear particularly intimidating and overwhelming to readers’ advisors who are not already reading among its titles. By the end of this book, we will have established touchstone titles in every genre on which to scaffold future reading, as well as providing resources for keeping up with newer titles, and solid advice for talking to young adults about books.

The genre chapters are the heart of the book. Each chapter begins by defining the genre and pinpointing its appeal elements. Then we dig down to the subgenre level and recommend “core titles” and “next reads” to get a handle on the books to know. Each genre chapter includes whole collection advisory that highlights movie and television titles, which can help us to understand what a teen is looking for. This is followed by resources of all types to help us keep up with new and established titles in that genre.

Of course, genres blend together. There were instances where we struggled to place certain subgenres. Historical thrillers and mysteries? Historical fantasy? Paranormal suspense? To some extent, assigning a genre to a book is artificial. We thought very hard about just what draws readers to each book as we made these choices.

Again, readers’ advisory is as much an art as it is a science, and every great artist needs solid technique and background knowledge. It can be a challenge to think about books for their specific appeal elements, and just why we might suggest a particular book to a patron. Hopefully, this challenge is also enjoyable! There is a certain mindset that needs to be established and practiced. When reading for advisory purposes, we keep our mind on the book, but also on the teens we know who might enjoy it. Consider why certain teens might enjoy a particular book. Is it because they have expressed love for another book that feels similar to this one? Tease out the source of that similarity. Is it a certain tone? Does it call up the same emotions? Suggest the book to one of those teen patrons the next
time they come in, and ask for feedback. This is how we build a repetoire of titles to suggest. As we become more experienced, a well-written review can be enough to trigger a list of read-alikes in our minds.

In other words, it is important to read, especially in genres we do not usually enjoy. The Reference & User Services Association’s annual Reading List⁵ is a great way to keep up with adult titles and authors to know each year. The core titles in each of the genre chapters in this book are a similar resource. Many will be familiar. If we consider what appeals to teen readers about each of these core titles, we are on our way to thinking like readers’ advisors.

NOTES
Index

A
abbreviations used in this book, list of, 28–29
Adams, Douglas, 68
Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, 5
The Adoration of Jenna Fox (Pearson), 58
adrenaline
adventure, 150–153
appeal of, 140
awards and lists for, 157–158
characterization in, 141
crime, 146–148
journals on, 157
movies, 155
mystery, 141–143
new and upcoming titles for, 157–158
overview, 139–140
pacing of, 140–141
print resources on, 158
readers’ advisory, recommendations for, 156–157
setting in, 141
story/theme in, 141
supernatural mysteries and thrillers, 153–155
suspense, 144–146
television shows, 156
thrillers, 148–150
tone of, 140
websites on, 157
Adrift (Griffin), 151–152
adult readers, young adult books
with particular appeal for. See crossover books
adventure, 150–153
Airborn (Oppel), 64–65
ALA Readers’ Advisory series, ii, vii–viii, 4
Alanna (Pierce), 82
Albertalli, Becky, 40, 50
Alexander Hamilton (Chernow), 160
Ali, S. K., 35
Alice Bliss (Harrington), 48
Alif the Unseen (Wilson), 89–90
“All about Science Fiction for Teens” (Hatch), 56
All Our Yesterdays (Terrill), 66
All the Bright Places (Niven), 45
All the Light We Cannot See (Doerr), 133
Almost Astronauts (Stone), 161
The Amazing Book Is Not on Fire (Howell and Lester), 175
Amazon, 10
American Gods (Gaiman), 90
American Gods (television show), 99
Americanah (Adichie), 5
And the Trees Crept In (Kurtagich), 113
And We Stay (Hubbard), 36, 47–48
Anderson, Laurie Halse, 44, 46, 122, 129
Anderson, M. T., 57, 133
Anderson, Natalie C., 149
Anna and the French Kiss (Perkins), 40
Anna and the Swallow Man (Savit), 122
Anna Dressed in Blood (Blake), 114
Another Castle (Wheeler), 82
apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, 71–73
appeal characteristics
of adrenaline, 140
of fantasy, 80–81
of historical fiction, 122
of horror, 104–105
of nonfiction, 160–161

appeal characteristics (cont.)
  of realistic fiction, 34–35
  of science fiction, 56
Aronson, Marc, 160
art and science, readers’ advisory as, 6–7
Ash (Lo), 90, 91
Asher, Jay, 50
Ashes (Bick), 109
Ashfall (Mullin), 72
Ashton, Brodi, 121
Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing,
  Traitor to the Nation series
  (Anderson), 133
Atlas Obscura: An Explorer’s Guide to the
World’s Hidden Wonders (Foer,
Thuras, and Morton), 172
Atonement (film), 135
Atwood, Margaret, 71, 75
audience for this book, intended, 5–6
Austen, Jane, 49
autobiography and memoir, 165–167
Avatar (film), 73
awards and lists
  for adrenaline, 157–158
  for all genres, 20–21
  for fantasy, 101–102
  for historical fiction, 137–138
  for horror, 119
  for nonfiction, 175–176
  for realistic fiction, 52
  for science fiction, 76
Aydin, Andrew, 166

B
The Bachelor/The Bachelorette (television
  show), 174
Bacigalupi, Paolo, 71
Backderf, Derf, 160
Bardugo, Leigh, 87
Barracough, Lindsey, 113
Barry, Max, 154
Bascomb, Neal, 167
Berry, Julie, 134
Between a Rock and a Hard Place (Ralston),
  151
Between Shades of Gray (Sepetys), 123, 125
Beverly, Bill, 146
Bick, Isla J., 109
Billingsley, Franny, 96
biography, 163–165
Bird Box (Malerman), 107–108
Bishop, Rudine Sims, 51
Black, Holly, 95, 110
Black Hole Sun (Gill), 59, 67
Blair Witch Project (film), 116
Blake, Kendare, 114
The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game
  (Lewis), 168–169
Blink: The Power of Thinking without
  Thinking (Gladwell), 170
Bliss (Myracle), 115
blogs. See websites, blogs, and
discussion lists
Bloody Jack series (Meyer), 151
Bone Gap (Ruby), 88
Bones (television show), 156
book clubs, 11, 14
book displays, 11–12
book lists. See awards and lists
Booklist, 19, 20
The Book of Aron (Shepard), 137
The Book of Unknown Americans
  (Henriquez), 44–45
The Book Thief (film), 135
The Book Thief (Zusak), 122, 134
Booth, Heather, 4
The Borden Murders (Miller), 162
Born a Crime (Noah), 161
Bossypants (Fey), 166
The Bourne Identity (film), 155
The Boys in the Boat (Brown), 167
The Boys Who Challenged Hitler (Hoose),
  174
The Boy in the Black Suit (Reynolds), 35
Bradley, Alan, 157
Brain on Fire (Cahalan), 169
Brashares, Ann, 66
Bray, Libba, 115, 122
Brooklyn (film), 135
Brooks, Kevin, 144
Brown, Daniel, 167
browsing (entertainment/how-to)
  nonfiction, 171–173
Bruchac, Joseph, 122, 128
Bubble World (Snow), 61, 67
Budhos, Marina, 160
Index

Buffering (Hart), 175
Buffy the Vampire Slayer (television show), 117
Burn Baby Burn (Medina), 132
Butler, Octavia, 67

C
The Cabin in the Woods (film), 116
Cahalan, Susannah, 169
Capote, Truman, 146
Card, Orson Scott, 62
Carey, M. R., 109
Carriger, Gail, 131
Carson, Rae, 83
Cart, Michael, 4
Carter, Ally, 147
Cashore, Kristin, 83
Cavallaro, Brittany, 142
The Central Park Five (film), 173
Chains (Anderson), 129
Challenger Deep (Shusterman), 46
Chaos Walking novel series (Ness), 103
characterization
  in adrenaline, 141
  in fantasy, 82
  in historical fiction, 123–124
  in horror, 105–106
  in nonfiction, 161
  in realistic fiction, 35
  in science fiction, 57
Chbosky, Stephen, 49
Chernow, Ron, 160
Chet and Bernie series (Quinn), 157
Chime (Billingsley), 96
Christie, Agatha, 142
City of Bones (Clare), 94
City Watch series (Pratchett), 94
The City of Saints & Thieves (Anderson), 149
Clare, Cassandra, 94, 103
Clarke, Arthur C., 55
classic and traditional historical fiction, 124–126
Cleopatra’s Daughter (Moran), 123
Cline, Ernest, 60
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (film), 56
Clueless (film), 49
Coben, Harlan, 157
Code Name Verity (Wein), 123, 127, 136
Code Talker: A Novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two (Bruchac), 128
The Coldest Girl in Coldtown (Black), 110–111
Collins, Suzanne, 69
crime, 146–148
crossover books
  in adrenaline, 145, 149, 153
  in fantasy, 84, 85, 87, 89, 97–98
  in historical fiction, 125, 127, 130, 134
  in horror, 106–107, 109, 111, 113–114, 115
  in nonfiction, 164, 166
  overview, 5
  in realistic fiction, 38, 39–40, 43, 47–48
  resources for, 21–22
  in science fiction, 63, 64–65, 66, 69–70, 71–72
Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (Haddon), 143
current, methods for staying, 19–26. See also new and upcoming titles
D
Dairy Queen (Murdock), 42
Dan & Phil (YouTube celebrities), 175
A Darker Shade of Magic (Schwab), 87
The Dark Days Club (Goodman), 97
database resources, 22
Daughter of Smoke and Bone (Taylor), 92
Davies, Russell T., 175
Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue (Lester), 129
de la Peña, Matt, 42
DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time
  in classrooms, 10
death and dying, 47–48
Death Cloud (Lane), 131
Dessen, Sarah, 36, 50
Die Young with Me (Rufus), 169
Dime (Frank), 35, 44
discussion lists. See websites, blogs, and discussion lists.

*Discworld* novel series (Pratchett), 68

*The Disenchantments* (LaCour), 42

*The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* (Lockhart), 36

*The Divergent* film series, 73

*Divergent* (novels and films), 56

*The Diviners* (Bray), 115

*The Diviners* series (Bray), 122

*Doctor Who: The Writer’s Tale* (Davies), 175

*Doctor Who* (television show), 56, 74

*Doctorow, Cory*, 70

*DODGERS* (Beverly), 146

*Doerr, Anthony*, 133

*Doescher, Ian*, 69

*Donnelly, Jennifer*, 126

*Downton Abbey* (television show), 136

*Dracula* (Stoker), 110

*Dreamhunter* (Knox), 97–98

*Dubner, Stephen J.*, 169

*DuMaurier, Daphne*, 146

*Duncan, Lois*, 103

*Dune* (Herbert), 58

*Dungeons and Dragons* (game), 99

*Dunham, Lena*, 165

 dystopian worlds, 69–71

**E**

*E. T.* (film), 56

*Ebrahim, Zak*, 166

*Edelweiss*, 26

*An Education* (film), 135

*Eleanor & Park* (Rowell), 34, 39–40

*An Ember in the Ashes* (Tahir), 85

*Emma* (Austen), 49

*Enchanted Air* (Engle), 162

*Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 80

*Ender’s Game* (Card), 62

*Engle, Margarita*, 162

entertainment/how-to (browsing) nonfiction, 171–173

*Entertainment Weekly*, 25, 175

*Etiquette and Espionage* (Gail Carriger), 131

*Every Falling Star: The True Story of How I Survived and Escaped North Korea* (Lee and McClelland), 168

*Everything, Everything* (Yoon), 47

*Evil Dead* film series, 116

*The Exorcist* (film), 117

*The Exorcist* (television show), 117

*The Expanse* (television show), 74

*Eyes of the World* (Budhos), 160

*Eyes Wide Open: Going Behind the Environmental Headlines* (Fleischman), 169–170

*The Eyre Affair* (Fforde), 68–69

**F**

*Fables* graphic novel series (Willingham), 90

*The Face on the Milk Carton* (Cooney), 144

fairy tale retellings, 90–92

*Fake ID* (Giles), 147–148

*Fallen Angels* (Myers), 123, 127–128

family and friends, coming-of-age books emphasizing, 37–39

*The Family Romanov* (Fleming), 161

*The Fangirl’s Guide to the Galaxy* (Maggs), 175

fantastic beasts, 92–94

*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (film), 98

fantasy

appeal of, 80–81

awards and lists for, 101–102

characters in, 82

fairy tale retellings, 90–92

fantastic beasts, 92–94

games and apps, 99

girl power, 82–84

grimdark, 86–88

historical fantasy, 96–98

journals, 100

movies, 98–99

mythopoetic fantasy, 88–90

new and upcoming titles for, 100–102

overview, 79–80

pacing of, 81

political fantasy, 84–86

print resources, 102

readers’ advisory, recommendations for, 100

settings for, 81

story/theme in, 82

television shows, 99
Index

G

Gabi, a Girl in Pieces (Quintero), 37
Gaiman, Neil, 80, 90
Game of Thrones (television show), 86, 99
A Game of Thrones (Martin), 88
games and apps, fantasy, 99
genres
  breaking down YA literature into, 6
  how this book works and, 27–28
George, Elizabeth, 157
Get Out (film), 155
ghost stories and the occult, 114–116
Giles, Jeff, 166
Giles, Lamar, 147
Gill, David Macinnis, 59
Gilmore Girls (television show), 49
Girl at War (Novic), 124, 128
girl power, 82–84
Girl Rising (film), 173
Girl Rising (Stone), 161
Girl Underwater (Koryta), 152–153
The Girl of Fire and Thorns (Carson), 83
The Girl on the Train (Hawkins), 156
The Girl with All the Gifts (Carey), 109–110
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (film), 155
The Giver (Lowry), 56
Gladwell, Malcolm, 170
The Great American Whatever (Federle), 35
The Great Gatsby (film), 135
Green, John, 34, 47, 49, 50
Gregory, Philippa, 123
Gregory, Paul, 151
grimdark, 86–88
Grisham, John, 157
Guardian of the Dead (Healey), 89
Guardians of the Galaxy (film), 56, 74
Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal (Roach), 170–171
H

Haddon, Mark, 143
Hamill, Pete, 126
Hamilton, Steve, 148
Hamilton: The Revolution (Miranda and McCarter), 172
Han, Jenny, 38
Hand, Cynthia, 121
The Handmaid’s Tale (Atwood), 71

---

tone of, 81–82
urban fantasy, 94–96
websites, 101

Fatal Fever: Tracking Down Typhoid Mary (Jarrow), 162, 170
The Fault in Our Stars (film), 49
The Fault in Our Stars (Green), 47
Fed Up (film), 173
Feed (Anderson), 57
Ferraris, Zoe, 143
Fey, Tina, 166
Fforde, Jasper, 68
The 5th Wave (Yancey), 72
The 57 Bus (Slater), 146, 160
Final Fantasy (video game), 99
Finding Nouf (Ferraris), 143
Finishing School series (Gail Carriger), 131
Firefly (television show), 57, 74
Fisher, Catherine, 65
Flavia de Luce series (Bradley), 157
Fleischman, Paul, 169
Fleming, Candace, 160, 161
Flygirl (Smith), 123
Foer, Joshua, 172
Food, Inc. (film), 173
Forman, Gayle, 36, 49
Forrest Gump (film), 135
The Fosters (television show), 49
Frank, E. R., 35, 44
Freakonomics (Levitt and Dubner), 169
Friday Night Lights (television show), 49
friends and family, coming-of-age books emphasizing, 37–39
Hannah, Kristin, 50
Hardinge, Frances, 133
Harrington, Laura, 48
*Harry Potter* series (Rowling), 9, 79, 81
Hart, Hannah, 175
Hartman, Rachel, 93
hashtags on Twitter to follow for book resources, 26
Hatch, Jennifer Stubben, 56
*The Hate U Give* (Thomas), 43
Healey, Karen, 89
Heiligman, Deborah, 160, 164
Heinlein, Robert, 62
*Heist Society* (Carter), 147
*The Help* (film), 135
Henriquez, Cristina, 44
Henry, April, 144, 156
*The Here and Now* (Brashares), 66
Herman, Eleanor, 86
*The Hero and the Crown* (McKinley), 82
High-Demand Hot List (*Booklist*), 19
Hill, Joe, 108, 115
Hillenbrand, Laura, 164
*The Hired Girl* (Schlitz), 125–126
*The Historian* (Kostova), 111–112
historical fantasy, 96–98
historical fiction
appeal of, 122
awards and lists for, 137–138
characterization in, 123–124
classic and traditional, 124–126
injustice throughout history, 129–130
journals for, 137
literary, 132–134
movies, 135–136
mysteries and thrillers, 131–132
new and upcoming titles for, 137–138
overview, 121–122
pacing of, 123
print resources for, 138
readers’ advisory, recommendations for, 136–137
setting for, 123
story/theme in, 124
television shows, 136
tone of, 123
war, 127–128
websites for, 137
Hitchcock, Bonnie Sue, 34
*The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (Adams), 57, 68
*Honor Girl* (Thrash), 160
*Hoop Dreams* (film), 173
Hoose, Philip, 174
Horowitz, Anthony, 157
horror
appeal of, 104–105
awards and lists for, 119
characterization in, 105–106
ghost stories and the occult, 114–116
gothic horror, 112–114
journals, 118
monsters, 106–108
movies, 116–117
new and upcoming titles for, 118–120
overview, 103–104
pacing of, 105
print resources, 119
readers’ advisory, recommendations for, 117–118
setting for, 105
Stephen King rereads websites, 119
story/theme in, 106
television shows, 117
tone of, 105
vampires, 110–112
websites, 118–119
zombies, 108–110
*The Hot Zone* (Preston), 169
*House at the End of the Street* (film), 117
how this book works, 27–29
how-to/entertainment (browsing)
nonfiction, 171–173
Howell, Daniel, 175
Hubbard, Jenny, 36, 47
Hubert, Jennifer, 121
Hulu series, 9
*Humans of New York: Stories* (Stanton), 171
humor in science fiction, 67–69
*The Hunger Games* (Collins), 57, 69–70
Hunger Games film series, 73
Hunger Games (novels and films), 56

I

I, Robot (Binder), 58
I Am Jazz (television show), 174
I Hunt Killers (Lyga), 150
I Know What You Did Last Summer (Duncan), 144
I Know What You Did Last Summer film series, 116
If I Stay (film), 49
If I Stay (Forman), 36
If I Was Your Girl (Russo), 35
I’ll Give You the Sun (Nelson), 41
Illuminae (Kaufman and Kristoff), 58–59
In Cold Blood (Capote), 146
In the Heart of the Sea (film), 155
Incerceron (Fisher), 65
IndieNext (monthly booklist), 26
injustice throughout history historical fiction, 129–130
Insignia (Kincaid), 62–63
interaction with teens in the library, 13–17
Interstellar (film), 74
interview with teens, 15–17
Into the Wild (Krakauer), 168
Into Thin Air (Krakauer), 167
Invasion (Myers), 122
It (film), 117
It’s Kind of a Funny Story (Vizzini), 46

J

James Bond series (film), 155
Jarrow, Gail, 162, 170
Johnston, E. K., 91
Jordan, Hillary, 130
journals
  for adrenaline, 157
  for all genres, 22–23
  for fantasy, 100
  for historical fiction, 137
  for horror, 118
  for nonfiction, 175
  for realistic fiction, 51
  for science fiction, 75
Jurassic Park film series, 73

K

Kaufman, Amie, 58
Keeping Up with the Kardashians (television show), 174
Kells, Claire, 152
Kincaid, S. J., 62
Kindred (Butler), 67
King, Laurie, 157
King, Stephen, 103, 111, 119
Kleon, Austin, 172
The Knife of Never Letting Go (Ness), 63
Knisley, Lucy, 160
Knox, Elizabeth, 97
Koryta, Michael, 152
Kostova, Elizabeth, 111
Krakauer, Jon, 167, 168
Kraus, Daniel, 107
Kristoff, Jay, 58
Kuehn, Stephanie, 144
Kurson, Robert, 167
Kurtagich, Dawn, 113

L

Labyrinth (film), 98
LaCour, Nina, 42, 48
LaFevers, Robin, 84
Lane, Andrew, 131
Larbalæstier, Justine, 145
Larsson, Stieg, 149
Latham, Jennifer, 153
Law & Order (television show), 156
Le Guin, Ursula, 75
Lee, Patrick, 154
Lee, Stacey, 122
Lee, Sungju, 168
Legacy of Kings (Herman), 86
The Legend of Zelda (video game), 99
Lester, Julian, 129
Lester, Phil, 175
Leviathan (Westerfeld), 65
Levitt, Steven D., 169
Lewis, John, 166
Lewis, Michael, 168
Lexicon (Barry), 154–155
Library Reads (monthly booklist), 26
The Lies of Locke Lamora (Lynch), 88
The Lie Tree (Hardinge), 133–134

alastore.ala.org
Life in a Fishbowl (Vlahos), 47
Lin, Grace, 51
Link, Kelly, 64
lists and awards. See awards and lists
literary historical fiction, 132–134
Little Brother (Doctorow), 70
Lo, Malinda, 91
Lock In (Scalzi), 61–62
Locke & Key (Hill), 115–116
Lockhart, E., 36, 145
Lockstep (Schroeder), 59–60
The Lock Artist (Hamilton), 148
Logan Family series (Taylor), 129
Long Lankin (Barraclough), 113
Lord, Emery, 35
The Lord of the Rings (film), 99
The Lord of the Rings (Tolkien), 81
Love and Hip Hop (television show), 174
Love & Gelato (Welch), 35
Lu, Marie, 61
Lyga, Barry, 150
Lynch, Scott, 88

M
Maas, Sarah, 83
Maberry, Jonathan, 108
Macallister, Greer, 132
The Magicians (television show), 99
The Magician’s Lie (Macallister), 132
Maisie Dobbs series (Winspear), 157
Malerman, Josh, 107
The Marbury Lens (Smith), 104
March Trilogy (Lewis, Aydin, and Powell), 166
Marie Antoinette (film), 135
marketing reading to teens, 10–12
The Martian (film), 74
The Martian (Weir), 57, 67–68
Martin, George R. R., 86, 88
Mary Russell series (King), 157
MasterChef Junior (television show), 174
The Matrix film series, 73
Maus (Spiegelman), 122
Maze Runner (novels and films), 56
McCarter, Jeremy, 172
McClelland, Susan, 168
McCormick, Patricia, 124
McCreight, Kimberly, 150
McKinley, Robin, 82, 96
Meadows, Jodi, 121
Medina, Meg, 132
memoir and autobiography, 165–167
mental illness in realistic fiction, 45–47
Mexican WhiteBoy (de la Peña), 42–43
Meyer, L. A., 151
Meyer, Stephenie, 140
military science fiction, 62–63
Millay, Katja, 40
Millennium series (Larsson), 149
Miller, Madeline, 123
Miller, Sarah, 162
Minority Report (film), 74
Miranda, Lin-Manuel, 172
“Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors” (Bishop), 51
Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children (Riggs), 105, 113–114
Mission Impossible series (film), 155
A Monster Calls (film), 49
monsters, 106–108
Monstrumologist (Yancey), 104, 105, 106–107
Moran, Michelle, 123
Morgenstern, Erin, 5, 98
Morpurgo, Michael, 122
Mortal Engines (Reeve), 57, 64
Morton, Ella, 172
Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War (Sheinkin), 163
Most Valuable Players (film), 173
movies
adrenaline, 155
fantasy, 98–99
historical fiction, 135–136
horror, 116–117
nonfiction, 173
realistic fiction, 49
science fiction, 73–74
Mr. Robot (television show), 74
Mudbound (Jordan), 130
Mullin, Mike, 72
Murdock, Catherine Gilbert, 42
My Friend Dahmer (Backderf), 160
My Lady Jane (Hand, Ashton, and Meadows), 121
My Sister Rosa (Larbalestier), 145–146
Myers, Walter Dean, 122, 127
Myracle, Lauren, 115
mysteries, 141–143
mysteries and thrillers
in historical fiction, 131–132
supernatural, 153–155
mythopoeic fantasy, 88–90

N
The Names They Gave Us (Lord), 35
The Name of the Wind (Rothfuss), 86
The Nazi Hunters: How a Team of Spies and Survivors Captured the World’s Most Notorious Nazi (Bascomb), 167–168
Nelson, Blake, 35
Nelson, Jandy, 41
Ness, Patrick, 49, 63, 103
Netflix series, 9
NetGalley, 26
Never Fall Down (McCormick), 124
Never Let Me Go (Ishiguro), 75
new and upcoming titles
in adrenaline, 157–158
in fantasy, 100–102
in historical fiction, 137–138
in horror, 118–120
in nonfiction, 175–176
in realistic fiction, 51–53
in science fiction, 75–77
Niffenegger, Audrey, 66
Night (Wiesel), 122
The Night Circus (Morgenstern), 5, 98
The Night She Disappeared (Henry), 144–145
Niven, Jennifer, 45
Nix, Garth, 59
Noah, Trevor, 161
nonfiction
appeal of, 160–161
awards and lists for, 175–176
biography, 163–165
browsing (entertainment/how-to) nonfiction, 171–173
characterization in, 161
journals on, 175
memoir and autobiography, 165–167
movies, 173
new and upcoming titles for, 175–176
overview, 159–160
pacing of, 162
podcasts, 174
print resources on, 176
readers’ advisory, recommendations for, 174–175
science and discovery, 169–171
setting of, 162
story/theme in, 161–162
television shows, 174
tone of, 161
A Northern Light (Donnelly), 126
NOS4A2 (Hill), 108
Novic, Sara, 128
Novik, Naomi, 94

O
occult and ghost stories, 114–116
Ocean’s Eleven (film), 155
Older, Daniel Jose, 95
Once Upon a Time (television show), 99
127 Hours: Between a Rock and a Hard Place (Ralston), 151
The 100 (television show), 74
One Tree Hill (television show), 50
Oppel, Kenneth, 64, 112
Orlando, Kristen, 149
The Other Boleyn Girl (film), 135
The Other Boleyn Girl (Gregory), 123
Out of Darkness (Perez), 130

P
pacing
of adrenaline, 140–141
of fantasy, 81
of historical fiction, 123
of horror, 105
of nonfiction, 162
of realistic fiction, 36–37
of science fiction, 57
Painchaud, Michelle, 147
Paranormal Activity film series, 116
passions pursued in realistic fiction, 41–43
The Passion of Dolssa (Berry), 134
Patterson, James, 157
Peak (Smith), 151
Peeps (Westerfeld), 111
People Magazine, 25
Perez, Ashley Hope, 130
The Perfect Storm (Junger), 151
Perkins, Stephanie, 40
The Perks of Being a Wallflower (film), 49
Picoult, Jodi, 36, 50
Piecing Me Together (Watson), 35
Pierce, Tamora, 82
Pike, Christopher, 103
A Place at the Table (film), 173
Plain, Nancy, 161
pleasure, reading for, 10
podcasts, nonfiction, 174
political fantasy, 84–86
Popular: Vintage Wisdom for a Modern Geek (Van Wagenen), 161
Porter, Sarah, 91
post-apocalyptic and apocalyptic fiction, 71–73
Powell, Nate, 166
Pratchett, Terry, 68, 92, 94
Preston, Richard, 169
Pretending to Be Erica (Painchaud), 147
Pretty Little Liars (television show), 156
The Princess Bride (film), 99
print resources
for adrenaline, 158
for all genres, 23
for fantasy, 102
for historical fiction, 138
for horror, 119
for nonfiction, 176
for realistic fiction, 52–53
for science fiction, 76–77
Private Peaceful (Morpurgo), 122
publisher marketing newsletters, 26
Pure (Baggott), 75

Q
The Queen’s Own Fool: A Novel of Mary Queen of Scots (Yolen), 123
Quinn, Spencer, 157
Quintero, Isabel, 37

R
The Raven Boys (Stiefvater), 89
Readers’ advisory
for adrenaline, 156–157
as art and science, 6–7
audience for this book, intended, 5–6
current, methods for staying, 19–26
defined, 3–4
for fantasy, 100
genres, breaking down YA literature into, 6
for historical fiction, 136–137
for horror, 117–118
interaction with teens in the library, 13–17
interview with teens, 15–17
marketing reading to teens, 10–12
for nonfiction, 174–175
overview, 3–4
reading for advisory purposes, 6–7
for realistic fiction, 50–51
resources for staying current, 20–26
for science fiction, 75
summaries of books, 16
Readers’ Advisory series (ALA), ii, vii–viii, 4
Readers’ Advisory Service in the Public Library (Saricks), 4
The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction (Saricks), 4
The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Nonfiction (Wyatt), 4
reading for advisory purposes, 6–7
Reading List (Reference & User Services Association), 7
Ready Player One (Cline), 60, 75
Ready Player One (film), 74
realistic fiction
appeal of, 34–35
awards and lists for, 52
characterization in, 35
coming-of-age books emphasizing friends and family, 37–39
death and dying, 47–48
journals for, 51
mental illness, 45–47
movies, 49
new and upcoming titles for, 51–53
overview, 33–34
pacing in, 36–37
passions, pursuit of, 41–43
print resources for, 52–53
readers’ advisory, recommendations for, 50–51
romance and, 39–41
setting in, 36
story/theme in, 36
teens on the edge, 43–45
television shows, 49–50
tone in, 36
websites for, 51
windows and mirrors concept, 35, 51

Rebecca (DuMaurier), 146
Reconstructing Amelia (McCreight), 150
Recovery Road (Nelson), 35
Redshirts (Scalzi), 57
Reeve, Philip, 57, 64
Reichs, Kathy, 157
Reign (television show), 99
Relish (Knisley), 160
The Replacement (Yovanoff), 93–94
resources for staying current, 20–26. See also new and upcoming titles
Reynolds, Jason, 50
Riggs, Ransom, 113
Riordan, Rick, 136
Riot (Myers), 122
Riverdale (television show), 156
Roach, Mary, 170
Robopocalypse (Wilson), 63
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor), 129
romance
in realistic fiction, 39–41
tolerance of teens for, 16
Rot & Ruin (Maberry), 108–109
Rothfuss, Patrick, 86
Rotters (Kraus), 107
Rowell, Rainbow, 39, 50
Rufus, Rob, 169

The Runner (Lee), 154
Rutkoski, Marie, 85

S
Saints and Misfits (Ali), 35
Salem’s Lot (King), 111
Salt to the Sea (Sepetys), 123
Samurai Rising: The Epic Life of Minamoto Yoshitsune (Turner), 164
Sandman graphic novel series (Gaiman), 80
Saricks, Joyce, vii, 3, 4, 55, 123
Savit, Gavriel, 122
Scalzi, John, 57, 61
Scarlett Undercover (Latham), 154
Schlitz, Laura Amy, 125
School Library Journal, 20, 175
Schroeder, Karl, 59
Schwab, Victoria, 87
science and discovery, 169–171
science fiction
apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, 71–73
appeal of, 56
awards and lists for, 76
characters in, 57
dystopian worlds, 69–71
humor, 67–69
journals for, 75
military science fiction, 62–63
movies, 73–74
new and upcoming titles for, 75–77
overview, 55–56
pacing of, 57
print resources for, 76–77
readers’ advisory, recommendations for, 75
settings for, 57
space operas, 58–60
steampunk, 64–65
story/theme in, 58
television shows, 74
time travel, 65–67
tone of, 57
virtual reality, 60–62
websites for, 75–76
The Scrapbook of Frankie Pratt (Preston), 125
Scream film series, 116
Scream (television show), 117
The Sea of Tranquility (Millay), 40–41
Sedaris, David, 165
Seeds of America series (Anderson), 122, 129
Semple, Maria, 5, 38, 50
Sepetys, Maria, 5, 38, 50
Seraphina (Hartman), 93
Serial (podcast), 9, 174
The Serpent King (Zentner), 38
Serving Teens through Readers’ Advisory (Booth), 4
settings
for adrenaline, 141
for fantasy, 81
for historical fiction, 123
for horror, 105
for nonfiction, 162
for realistic fiction, 36
for science fiction, 57
Shadow Divers (Kurson), 167
Shadowshaper (Older), 94, 95–96
Shaurette, Carrie, 121
Sheinkin, Steve, 160, 163
shelf talkers, 12
Sherlock (television show), 142, 156
Ship Breaker (Bacigalupi), 71
Shiver (Stiefvater), 103
Shusterman, Neal, 46, 70
Shutter Island (film), 155
The Silence of the Lambs (film), 155
Silvera, Adam, 50
Silverman, Karyn, 79
Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda (Albertalli), 40
Six of Crows (Bardugo), 87
Slater, Dashka, 146, 160
The Smell of Other People’s Houses (Hitchcock), 34
Smith, Andrew, 104
Smith, Roland, 151
Smith, Sherri, 123
Snow, Carol, 61
The Snow in August (Hamill), 126
social media, marketing to teens on, 11
Some Girls Are (Summers), 44
Some Writer! (Sweet), 162
A Song of Ice and Fire (Martin), 86
The Song of Achilles (Miller), 123
space operas, 58–60
Speak (Anderson), 44
Spellman series (Lutz), 157
Spiegelman, Art, 122
St. Mandel, Emily, 72
Stanton, Brandon, 171
Star Trek (television show), 56, 74
Star Wars (film), 69
Star Wars film series, 56, 69, 73
Stardust (film), 99
Starship Troopers (film), 74
Starship Troopers (Heinlein), 62
Station Eleven (St. Mandel), 72–73, 75
Stead, Rebecca, 56
Steal Like an Artist (Kleon), 172–173
steampunk, 64–65
Steampunk! An Anthology of Fantastically Rich and Strange Stories (Grant and Link), 64
The Steep and Thorny Way (Winters), 122, 129–130
Stephen King rereads websites, 119
Stiefvater, Maggie, 89, 103
Stine, R. L., 103
Stoker, Bram, 110
Stone, Tanya Lee, 161
story/theme
in adrenaline, 141
in fantasy, 82
in historical fiction, 124
in horror, 106
in nonfiction, 161–162
in realistic fiction, 36
in science fiction, 58
Stranger Things (television show), 74, 117
Straub, Emma, 50
A Study in Charlotte (Cavallaro), 142–143
subgenres, how this book works and, 27–28
The Suffragette (film), 135
Suma, Nova Ren, 153
summaries of books, 16
Summers, Courtney, 44, 109
The Summer I Turned Pretty (Han), 38
Sunshine (McKinley), 96
supernatural mysteries and thrillers, 153–155
Supernatural (television show), 117
suspense, 144–146
Sweet, Melissa, 162

T
TAG (teen advisory group), 14
Tahir, Sabaa, 85
Tash Hearts Tolstoy (Ormsbee), 35
Taylor, Laini, 92
Taylor, Mildred D., 129
technology encouraging reading for teens, 9–10
teens
book review sources by, 24
reading habits, 9–12
romance, tolerance of teens for, 16
teens on the edge in realistic fiction, 43–45
Teens’ Top Ten list (Young Adult Library Services Association), 19
television shows
adrenaline, 156
fantasy, 99
historical fiction, 136
horror, 117
nonfiction, 174
realistic fiction, 49–50
science fiction, 74
Terrill, Cristin, 66
The Terrorist’s Son: A Story of Choice (Ebrahim and Giles), 166–167
theme. See story/theme
Thirteen Reasons Why (television show), 50, 156
This Dark Endeavor: The Apprenticeship of Victor Frankenstein (Oppel), 112
This Is Not a Test (Summers), 109
This Strange Wilderness (Plain), 161
Thomas, Angie, 43
Those Who Wish Me Dead (Koryta), 152
A Thousand Nights (Johnston), 91–92
Thrash, Maggie, 160

U
Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption (Hillenbrand), 164
The Underground Railroad (Whitehead), 5
The Unfinished Life of Addison Stone (Griffin), 141
Unwind (Shusterman), 70
upcoming titles. See new and upcoming titles

alastore.ala.org
Index

Uprooted (Novik), 94
urban fantasy, 94–96
The Usual Suspects (film), 155

V
vampires, 110–112
Van Wagenen, Maya, 161
Vassa in the Night (Porter), 91
Veronica Mars (television show), 156
Vikings (television show), 136
Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers (Heiligman), 164
virtual reality, 60–62
Vizzini, Ned, 46
Vlahos, Len, 47
The Voice (television show), 174

W
The Waking Dark (Wasserman), 105
The Walking Dead (television show), 117
Walls, Jeannette, 165
The Walls Around Us (Suma), 153
War Horse (film), 136
war in historical fiction, 127–128
Warcross (Lu), 61
Wasserman, Robin, 105
The Watchmaker of Filigree Street (Pulley), 137
The Watch That Ends the Night: Voices from the Titanic (Wolf), 131–132
Water for Elephants (film), 136
Water for Elephants (Gruen), 137
Wattpad, 10
We Are Okay (LaCour), 48
We Were Liars (Lockhart), 145, 156
websites, blogs, and discussion lists
for adrenaline, 157
for all genres, 24–25
for historical fiction, 137
for horror, 118–119
for realistic fiction, 51
for science fiction, 75–76
Wein, Elizabeth, 122, 127
Weir, Andy, 57, 67
Westerfeld, Scott, 65, 71, 111
Whedon, Joss, 57
Wheeler, Andrew, 82
When You Reach Me (Stead), 56
Where’d You Go, Bernadette (Semple), 5, 38–39
Whitehead, Colson, 5
Wiesel, Elie, 122
William Shakespeare’s Star Wars: Verily, a New Hope (Doescher), 69
Wilson, Daniel H., 63
Wilson, G. Willow, 89
windows and mirrors concept in realistic fiction, 35, 51
The Winner’s Curse (Tahir), 85
Winspear, Jacqueline, 157
Wintergirls (Anderson), 46–47
Winters, Cat, 120
Witches Abroad (Pratchett), 92
The Wizard of Oz (Baum), 90
Wolf, Allan, 131
A Wrinkle in Time (L’Engle), 56
Wyatt, Neal, vii, 4, 159

Y
Yancey, Rick, 72, 104, 105, 106
Yolen, Jane, 123
Yoon, Nicola, 34, 47, 50
You Don’t Know My Name (Orlando), 149–150
Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism (Cart), 4
young adult (YA) literature overview, 4–5
Young Pilots series (Wein), 122
YouTube as marketing device, 11
Yovanoff, Brenna, 93

Z
Zentner, Jeff, 38
zombies, 108–110
Zusak, Marcus, 122, 134