

Second Step Recommended Books for Students in Grades 6–8

Fiction

Bridge to Terabithia. Paterson, Katherine. In this powerful story of an unusual friendship cut short, Jess grapples with his feelings about Leslie's death. (empathy, emotion management, peer pressure, friendship/being an ally, stereotyping)

Children of the River. Crew, Linda. After immigrating from Cambodia to the United States, Sundara finds herself caught painfully between two cultures. (empathy, problem solving, perspective taking, assertiveness, friendship/being an ally, stereotyping, peer pressure)

Cry, the Beloved Country. Paton, Alan. Paton tells a poignant and passionate story about the tragic affects of apartheid on both black and white South Africans. (empathy, emotion management, problem solving, friendship/being an ally, stereotyping/prejudice)

Deliver Us from Evie. Kerr, M. E. When Evie reveals to her family that her relationship with Patsy is romantic, her family must deal with both their own and their community's anger and stereotypes. (empathy, emotion management, perspective taking, stereotyping)

Dough Boy. Marino, Peter. This is the story of 15-year-old Tristan's struggle to cope with own body issues while trying to make sense of his feelings for his new stepsister. The persistent torment she inflicts on him finally pushes Tristan to take action. (empathy, friendship/being an ally, stereotyping/labeling, bullying, accepting others, emotion management, coping with stress)

Dragon's Gate. Yep, Laurence. A political incident forces Otter to flee from China and join his father in the United States. Otter then must confront racism and unsafe working conditions as he and other Chinese workers help build the transcontinental railroad. (empathy, staying in control, emotion management, problem solving, stereotyping/prejudice, friendship/being an ally, assertiveness)

Friction. Frank, E. R. When Stacy enters 13-year-old Alex's eighth-grade class at Forest Alternative School, the careful balance between athletic, intellectual, and emotional growth that their teacher Simon has carefully created is tipped. Stacy, looking to cause a little excitement in the harmonious atmosphere, starts spreading rumors that could have devastating consequences. (empathy, perspective taking, accepting others, friendship/being an ally, sexual harassment)

Holes. Sachar, Louis. Stanley Yelnats, an unjustly convicted boy, has been sent to do time at Camp Green Lake. But this camp is not for swimming and hiking. This camp is designed to "build character" in wayward boys by having them dig holes. This fun read offers mystery and humor while it explores issues of racism, bullying, cliques, and friendship. (empathy, perspective taking, stereotyping/prejudice, friendship/being an ally, accepting others)

I Heard the Owl Call My Name. Craven, Margaret. A dying priest comes to understand the Kwakiuti Indians with whom he is sent to spend his last years. (empathy, stereotyping, perspective taking, friendship/being an ally)

Invisible. Hautman, Pete. The 17-year-old narrator of this book, Dougie Hanson, takes you inside his disturbed mind as he relays his troubles with school, girls, home, and his obsession with bridges and pyrotechnics. The mystery of the source of Dougie's troubles will keep young readers turning pages. (empathy, perspective taking, bullying, friendship/being an ally)

Ironman. Crutcher, Chris. The rage Bo feels at his father may fuel his triathlete endeavors, but too often it translates to angry outbursts in class. After being assigned to an anger management class, Bo finally realizes his need to deal with the source of his anger before it destroys him. (empathy, emotion management, coping with stress, problem solving)

Jacob Have I Loved. Paterson, Katherine. Brought up in the shadow of her twin sister, Louise struggles to define herself as an individual. (empathy, emotion management, stereotyping, perspective taking)

Letters from Rifka. Hesse, Karen. When Rifka and her family flee Russia during the Revolution in 1917, Rifka is denied passage on the boat to America for medical reasons and must spend the year alone. (empathy, problem solving, friendship/being an ally, assertiveness)

Make Lemonade. Wolff, Virginia Euwer. LeVonne takes a babysitting job working for a teenage mother in order to save money for college. (empathy, problem solving, friendship/being an ally, perspective taking, assertiveness)

Men of Stone. Friesen, Gayle. Fifteen-year-old Ben is bullied by his peers because he likes to dance. Just as his anger and frustration over his situation feels unbearable, his Russian great aunt Frieda arrives for a visit. Frieda shares a parallel story of how she and her Mennonite family were terrorized by Stalin's agents, "Men of Stone." The way Frieda dealt with her situation inspires Ben to confront the difficulties in his own life. (empathy, perspective taking, bullying, stereotyping/prejudice, emotion management, friendship/being an ally)

Misfits. Howe, James. This humorous novel provides an insightful look into preadolescent stereotyping and degrading labeling through the eyes of Bobby Goodspeed and his "gang" of middle school "misfits." (empathy, perspective taking, friendship/being an ally, bullying, accepting others, stereotyping/labeling)

Monster. Myers, Walter Dean. Steve is an African-American teenager who feels as if his life has gotten out of control. He is now on trial for murder, and is coping with it the best way he can—by turning it into a film script. Interspersed in his screenplay are his journal entries describing his life before the murder and while being held in prison during the trial.

Skills: Empathy, perspective taking, emotion management, coping with stress

Names Will Never Hurt Me. Adoff, Jaime. This novel takes you inside the minds of four teenagers one year after a shooting at their high school. These students are all different, but none is without the problems teenagers face, including rejection, labeling, bullying, violence, and trying to belong. (empathy, emotion management, bullying, stereotypes/labeling, perspective taking, accepting others)

Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind. Staples, Suzanne Fisher. When her family arranges for her to marry an older man, 11-year-old Shabanu finds herself torn between her feelings and Pakistani traditions. (empathy, staying in control, emotion management, assertiveness, stereotyping)

So Hard to Say. Sanchez, Alex. Fredrick is a new student at a Southern California middle school. Xio is the Hispanic girl who befriends him. But soon Fredrick finds out the Xio wants to be more than friends, leaving Fredrick to struggle with his own sexual identity. (empathy, perspective taking, accepting others, stereotyping/labeling, friendship/being an ally)

Speak. Anderson, Laurie Halse. Melinda, a high school freshman, is losing the ability to speak out loud. The author vividly illustrates the isolation Melinda and other teenagers sometimes feel. (empathy, emotion management, bullying, stereotypes/labeling, perspective taking)

Stargirl. Spinelli, Jerry. Stargirl Caraway, the new girl at quiet Mica High School, is as strange as her name. She dances when there's no music, wears weird clothes, and says all the wrong things, which is precisely why Leo Borlok is in love with her. The school is immediately in awe of Stargirl, but soon they turn on her. Leo tries to help her win back acceptance, but at what price? (empathy, friendship/being an ally, perspective taking, bullying, accepting others)

The End of the World as We Know It. Choyce, Lesley. Carson hates the world and everything in it, including himself. While attending a private school for kids who have flunked out everywhere else, Carson meets Christine, a teenage girl living in a trailer by herself, struggling to get by. As Carson starts to care for Christine, optimism begins to creep into his life. (empathy, perspective taking, emotion management, coping with stress, friendship/being an ally)

The Girls. Koss, Amy Goldman. This realistic story about middle school life is told from the different perspectives of six middle school girls. Through their eyes, readers get a deeper understanding of the cliques, social status, and peer pressure that middle school girls navigate on their way to discovering their own sense of self and what is right. (empathy, bullying, perspective taking, friendships/being an ally)

The Giver. Lowry, Lois. Set in a futuristic society that has eliminated feelings, the book tells of the difficult decisions Jonas must make that will affect his whole community. (empathy, problem solving, assertiveness, peer pressure)

The Lilith Summer. Irwin, Hadley. Ellen reluctantly agrees to spend the summer "lady-sitting" her elderly neighbor in exchange for a bicycle. Through the course of the summer, she overcomes her preconceptions of the elderly and forms a deep bond with her neighbor. (empathy, problem solving, perspective taking, stereotyping, friendship/being an ally)

The Revealers. Wilhelm, Doug. This fictional story is based on the author's own experiences and on his firsthand research in several middle schools. Three very different bullied seventh graders find allies in one another and others as they create an email forum for students to discuss their experiences with each other. (empathy, perspective taking, stereotyping/labeling, friendship/being an ally, bullying, accepting others)

Thirteen Reasons Why. Asher, Jay. When Clay Jensen finds a package on his front porch, he never dreams it could contain audio tapes from his dead friend, Hannah. This compelling story of how Clay deals with his friend's suicide highlights how even small actions and inactions may have consequences. (empathy, perspective taking, sexual harassment, bullying, friendship/being an ally, emotion management)

Touching Spirit Bear. Mikaelson, Ben. Cole Matthews is an angry teen facing a prison sentence for beating up his ninth-grade classmate to the point of brain damage. When Garvey, his Tlingit Indian parole officer, offers "circle justice" as an alternative to prison based on Native American traditions in which victim, offender, and community all work together to find a healing solution, Cole takes it. What follows is a riveting tale of Cole's transformation during this process. (empathy, emotion management, bullying, perspective taking)

Under the Sun. Dorros, Arthur. This story chronicles the trials and tribulations of thirteen-year-old Ehmet as he and his mother flee his war-torn home of Sarajevo, Bosnia. Throughout his journey, Ehmet encounters ethnic, racial, and religious prejudice, but he also finds deep friendship. (empathy, perspective taking, stereotyping/prejudice, accepting others, friendship/being an ally, emotion management)

When Heroes Die. Durrant, Penny Raife. Gary has always wished his Uncle Rob was his father. When he finds out Rob has AIDS and is dying, he must confront his anger, confusion, and prejudices. (empathy, emotion management, stereotyping, friendship/being an ally)

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town. Holt, Kimberly Willis. When Zachary, the "World's Fattest Boy," comes to town as part of a traveling sideshow, Toby realizes that someone just might have it worse than him. Toby's eventual friendship with Zach makes him view his situation from a whole new perspective. (empathy, friendship/being an ally, perspective taking, stereotyping/labeling, emotion management, coping with stress)

Nonfiction

Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships, 3rd edition. Bell, Ruth. This encyclopedic book for teens includes extensive information on health and sexuality, including body changes, emotional and physical health care, eating disorders, substance abuse, violence, sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex and birth control, pregnancy, and how to make changes locally and globally.

Diary of a Young Girl. Frank, Anne. This diary documents Anne's experiences as a young Jewish girl in hiding during World War II. (empathy, emotion management, staying in control, assertiveness, friendship/being an ally)

Farewell to Manzanar. Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki, and Houston, James D. A memoir of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's experiences as a child growing up in a Japanese internment camp and her efforts after the war to comprehend her experience. (empathy, emotional management, problem solving, stereotyping/prejudice)