

# English 2 Summer Reading



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# Selecting a book

## **Students, parents, and guardians:**

Please review this list of memoirs and work together to select **one** from the 20 following options to read before the start of tenth grade. There are a wide variety of options in terms of reading levels and subjects represented. There are works by both male and female authors, and authors representing many different races, ethnicities, experiences, and communities. There are classics as well as contemporary memoirs, and books written for younger audiences as well as books written about more adult subject matter.

Students may want to choose a book by an author they have something in common with that reflects and supports their identity and experience or one about someone different than themselves that expands their worldview and empathy.

Don't hesitate to contact me for further assistance in choosing a title at [akates@philasd.org](mailto:akates@philasd.org).

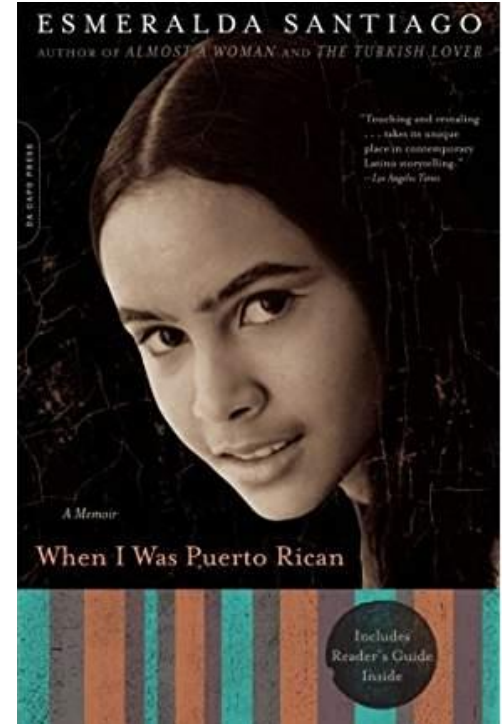
-Ms. Kates

# When I Was Puerto Rican by Esmeralda Santiago

Lexile Score: 1020L

**Themes: Home, Family, Identity, Education, Language, Immigration, Coming of Age**

Esmeralda Santiago's story begins in rural Puerto Rico, where her childhood was full of both tenderness and domestic strife, tropical sounds and sights as well as poverty. Growing up, she learned the proper way to eat a guava, the sound of tree frogs in the mango groves at night, the taste of the delectable sausage called *morcilla*, and the formula for ushering a dead baby's soul to heaven. As she enters school we see the clash, both hilarious and fierce, of Puerto Rican and Yankee culture. When her mother, Mami, a force of nature, takes off to New York with her seven, soon to be eleven children, Esmeralda, the oldest, must learn new rules, a new language, and eventually take on a new identity. In this first volume of her much-praised, bestselling trilogy, Santiago brilliantly recreates the idyllic landscape and tumultuous family life of her earliest years and her tremendous journey from the *barrio* to Brooklyn, from translating for her mother at the welfare office to high honors at Harvard.

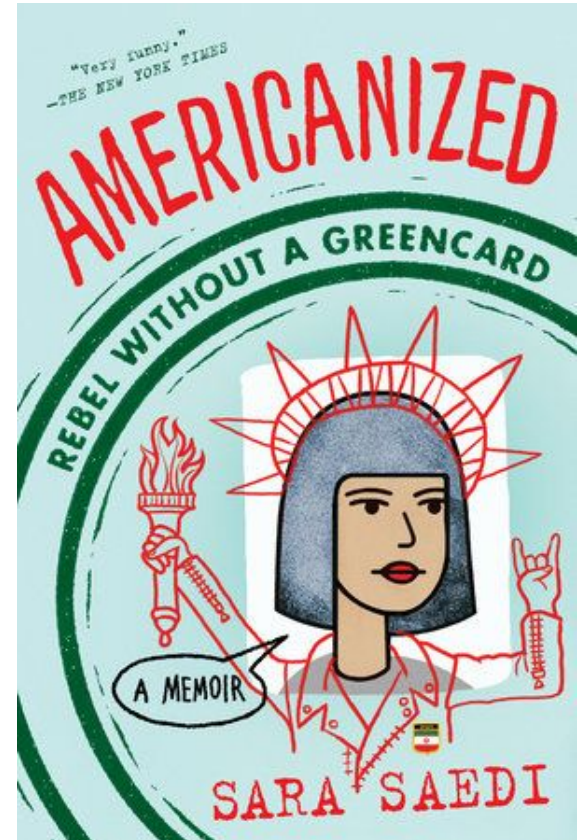


# Americanized by Sara Saedi (2019)

**Lexile Score: 1030L**

**Themes: Coming of Age, Citizenship, Community, Cultural Identity, Immigration, Friendship and Family**

At thirteen, bright-eyed, straight-A student Sara Saedi uncovered a terrible family secret: she was breaking the law simply by living in the United States. Fear of deportation kept Sara up at night, but it didn't keep her from being a teenager. She desperately wanted a green card, along with clear skin, her own car, and a boyfriend. *Americanized* follows Sara's progress toward getting her green card, but that's only a portion of her experiences as an Iranian-"American" teenager. From discovering that her parents secretly divorced to facilitate her mother's green card application to learning how to tame her unibrow, Sara pivots gracefully from the terrifying prospect that she might be kicked out of the country at any time to the almost-as-terrifying possibility that she might be the only one of her friends without a date to the prom. This moving, often hilarious story is for anyone who has ever shared either fear.



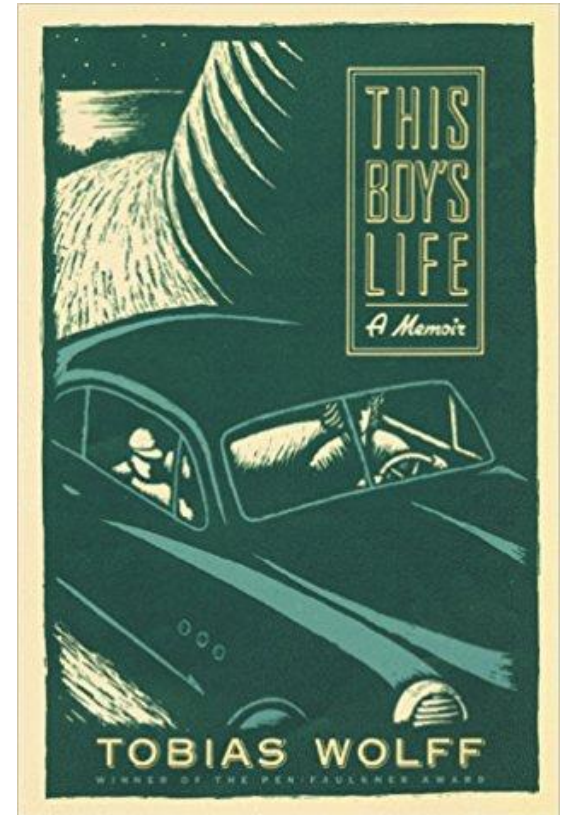
# This Boy's Life by Tobias Wolff (1989)

**Lexile Score: Unavailable**

**Themes: Transformation, Family, Lies and Deceit, Guilt and Blame, Power and Powerlessness, Men and Masculinity, Rules and Order, Parenting and Neglect**

This unforgettable memoir introduces us to the young Toby Wolff, by turns tough and vulnerable, crafty and bumbling, and ultimately winning. Separated by divorce from his father and brother, Toby and his mother are constantly on the move, yet they develop an extraordinarily close, almost telepathic relationship.

As Toby fights for identity and self-respect against the unrelenting hostility of a new stepfather, his experiences are at once poignant and comical, and Wolff does a masterful job of re-creating the frustrations and cruelties of adolescence. His various schemes - running away to Alaska, forging checks, and stealing cars - lead eventually to an act of outrageous self-invention that releases him into a new world of possibility.

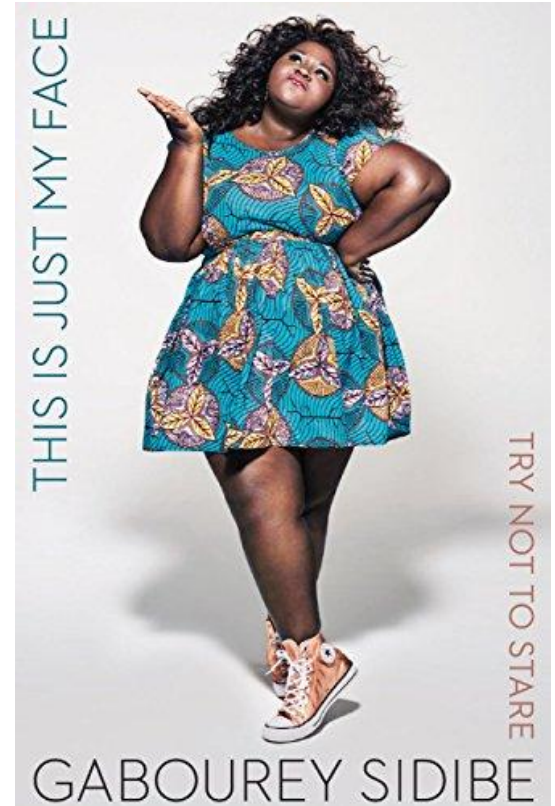


# This is Just My Face by Gabourey Sidibe (2017)

**Lexile Score: 810L**

**Themes: Family; Sex and Sexuality; Depression and Mental Health; Art; Race, Inequality, and Identity; Weight and Body Image**

The Oscar-nominated *Precious* star and *Empire* actress delivers a much-awaited memoir—wise, complex, smart, funny—a version of the American experience different from anything we’ve read. Sidibe’s memoir hits hard with self-knowing dispatches on friendship, depression, celebrity, haters, fashion, race, and weight (“If I could just get the world to see me the way I see myself,” she writes, “would my body still be a thing you walked away thinking about?”). Irreverent, hilarious, and untraditional, this will resonate with anyone who has ever felt different, and with anyone who has ever felt inspired to make a dream come true.



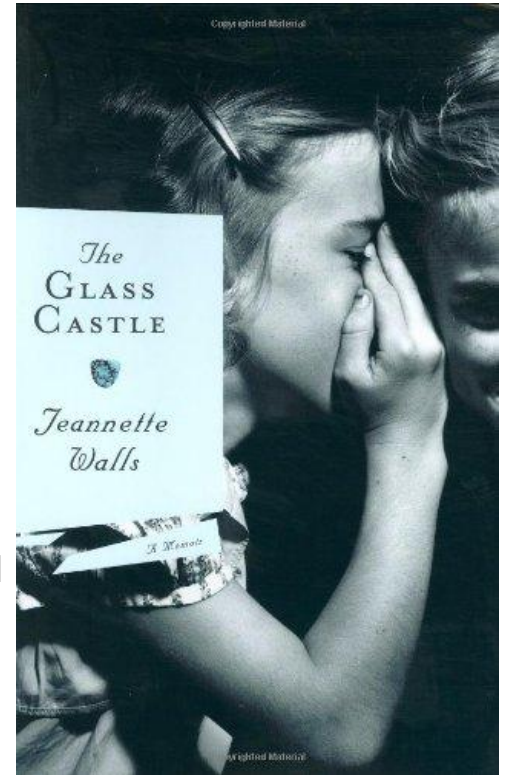
# The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls (2005)

**Lexile Score: 1010L**

**Themes: Family, Home, Perseverance, Coming of Age, Identity, Freedom and Confinement, Domestic Abuse, Addiction, Mental Health**

*The Glass Castle* is a remarkable, bestselling memoir of resilience and redemption, and a revelatory look into a family at once deeply dysfunctional and uniquely vibrant. When sober, Jeannette's brilliant and charismatic father captured his children's imagination, teaching them physics, geology, and how to embrace life fearlessly. But when he drank, he was dishonest and destructive. Her mother was a free spirit who abhorred the idea of domesticity and didn't want the responsibility of raising a family.

The Walls children learned to take care of themselves. They fed, clothed, and protected one another, and eventually found their way to New York. Their parents followed them, choosing to be homeless even as their children prospered. *The Glass Castle* is truly astonishing—a memoir permeated by the intense love of a peculiar but loyal family.

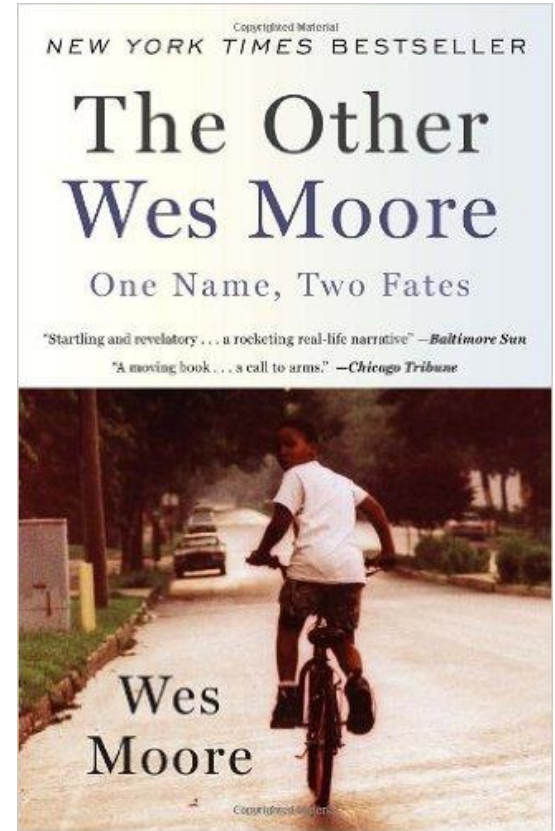


# The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore (2011)

**Lexile Score: 990L**

**Themes: Luck versus Choice; Friendship, Family, and Brotherhood; Inclusion and Exclusion; Race, Inequality, and Injustice; Discipline and Violence**

Two kids named Wes Moore were born blocks apart within a year of each other. Both grew up fatherless in similar Baltimore neighborhoods and had difficult childhoods; both hung out on street corners with their crews; both ran into trouble with the police. How, then, did one grow up to be a Rhodes Scholar, decorated veteran, White House Fellow, and business leader, while the other ended up a convicted murderer serving a life sentence? Wes Moore, the author of this fascinating book, sets out to answer this profound question. In alternating narratives that take readers from heart-wrenching losses to moments of surprising redemption, *The Other Wes Moore* tells the story of a generation of boys trying to find their way in a hostile world. "The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his."



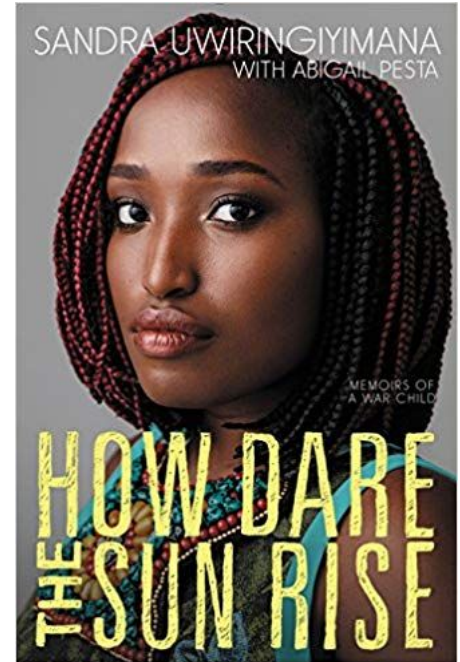


# How Dare the Sun Rise by Sandra Uwiringiyimana (2018)

**Lexile Score: HL790L**

**Themes: Belonging and Identity; War and Violence; Self-Esteem and Self Reliance; Movement and Dislocation; Race and Discrimination; Trauma and Survival**

This profoundly moving memoir is the remarkable and inspiring true story of Sandra Uwiringiyimana, a girl from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who tells the tale of how she survived a massacre, immigrated to America, and overcame her trauma through art and activism. Sandra was just ten years old when she found herself with a gun pointed at her head. She had watched as rebels gunned down her mother and six-year-old sister in a refugee camp. Remarkably, the rebel didn't pull the trigger, and Sandra escaped. Thus began a new life for her and her surviving family members. With no home and no money, they struggled to stay alive. Eventually, through a United Nations refugee program, they moved to America, only to face yet another ethnic disconnect. Sandra may have crossed an ocean, but there was now a much wider divide she had to overcome. And it started with middle school in New York. In this memoir, Sandra tells the story of her survival, of finding her place in a new country, of her hope for the future, and how she found a way to give voice to her people.

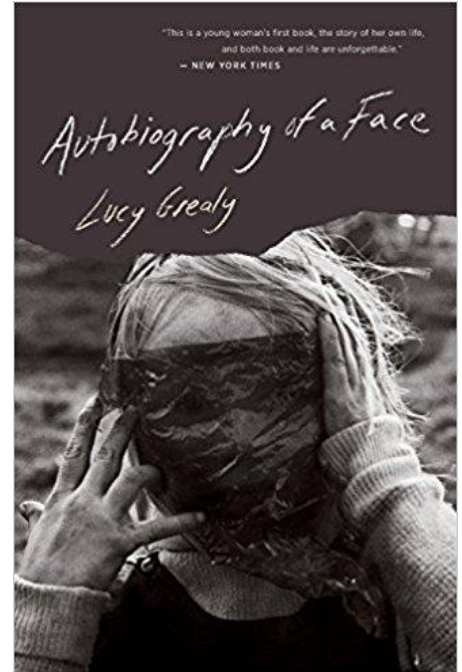


# Autobiography of a Face by Lucy Grealy (1994)

**Lexile Score: 1110L**

**Themes: Coming of Age, Health and Medicine, Body Image and Beauty, Bullying, Discrimination, Identity**

Diagnosed at age nine with Ewing's sarcoma, a cancer that severely disfigured her face, Grealy lost half her jaw, recovered after two and half years of chemotherapy and radiation, then underwent plastic surgery over the next 20 years to reconstruct her jaw. This harrowing, lyrical autobiographical memoir is a striking meditation on the distorting effects of our culture's preoccupation with physical beauty. Her discovery that true beauty lies within makes this a wise and healing book.

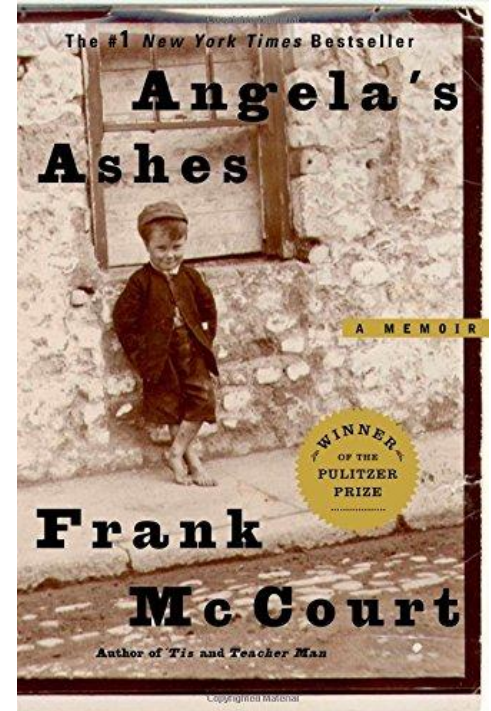


# Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt (1996)

**Lexile Score: 1110L**

**Themes: Childhood, Religion, Poverty, Family, Coming of Age**

"When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I managed to survive at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood." So begins the luminous memoir of Frank McCourt, born in Depression-era Brooklyn to recent Irish immigrants and raised in the slums of Limerick, Ireland. Wearing rags for diapers, begging a pig's head for Christmas dinner and gathering coal from the roadside to light a fire, Frank endures poverty, near-starvation and the casual cruelty of relatives and neighbors -- yet lives to tell his tale with eloquence, exuberance and remarkable forgiveness. *Angela's Ashes*, imbued on every page with Frank McCourt's astounding humor and compassion, is a glorious book that bears all the marks of a classic.

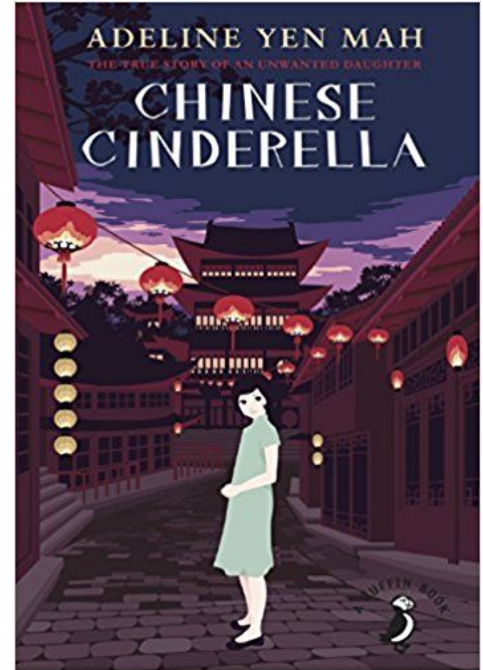


# Chinese Cinderella by Adeline Yen Mah (2015)

**Lexile Score: 960L**

**Themes: Family, Identity, Love, Wealth and Class, Loss**

A Chinese proverb says, “Falling leaves return to their roots.” In Chinese Cinderella, Adeline Yen Mah returns to her roots to tell the story of her painful childhood and her ultimate triumph and courage in the face of despair. Adeline’s affluent, powerful family considers her bad luck after her mother dies giving birth to her. Life does not get any easier when her father remarries. She and her siblings are subjected to the disdain of her stepmother, while her stepbrother and stepsister are spoiled. Although Adeline wins prizes at school, they are not enough to compensate for what she really yearns for — the love and understanding of her family.



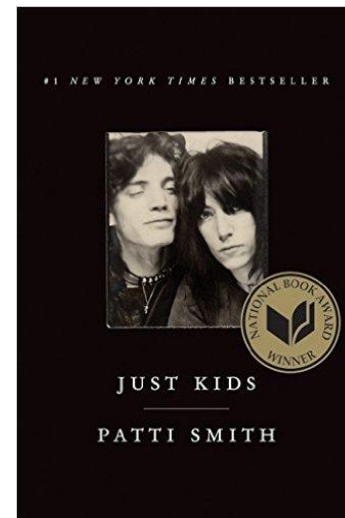
# Just Kids by Patti Smith (1996)

**Lexile Score: Unavailable**

**Themes: Childhood, Religion, Poverty, Family, Coming of Age**

In 1967, 21-year-old singer–songwriter Smith, determined to make art her life and dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities in Philadelphia to live this life, left her family behind for a new life in Brooklyn. She soon found herself homeless, jobless, and hungry. Through a series of events, she met a young man named Robert Mapplethorpe who changed her life—and in her typically lyrical and poignant manner Smith describes the start of a romance and lifelong friendship with this artist: It was the summer Coltrane died. Flower children raised their arms... and Jimi Hendrix set his guitar in flames in Monterey. It was the summer of *Elvira Madigan*, and the summer of love....

This beautifully crafted love letter to her friend (who died in 1989) functions as a memento mori of a relationship fueled by a passion for art and writing. Smith transports readers to what seemed like halcyon days for art and artists in New York as she shares tales of the denizens of Max's Kansas City, the Hotel Chelsea, Scribner's, Brentano's, and Strand bookstores. In the lobby of the Chelsea, where she and Mapplethorpe lived for many years, she got to know William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Johnny Winter. Most affecting in this tender and tough memoir, however, is her deep love for Mapplethorpe and her abiding belief in his genius. Smith's elegant eulogy helps to explain the chaos and the creativity so embedded in that earlier time and in Mapplethorpe's life and work.

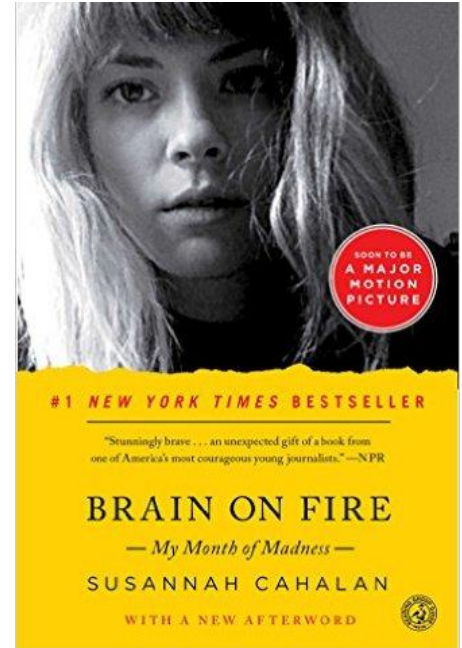


# Brain on Fire by Susannah Cahalan (2013)

**Lexile Score: Unavailable**

**Themes: Coming of Age, Identity, Health and Medicine, Survival**

An award-winning memoir and instant *New York Times* bestseller that goes far beyond its riveting medical mystery, *Brain on Fire* is the powerful account of one woman's struggle to recapture her identity. When twenty-four-year-old Susannah Cahalan woke up alone in a hospital room, strapped to her bed and unable to move or speak, she had no memory of how she'd gotten there. Days earlier, she had been on the threshold of a new, adult life: at the beginning of her first serious relationship and a promising career at a major New York newspaper. Now she was labeled violent, psychotic, a flight risk. What happened? In a swift and breathtaking narrative, Susannah tells the astonishing true story of her descent into madness, her family's inspiring faith in her, and the lifesaving diagnosis that nearly didn't happen. "A fascinating look at the disease that . . . could have cost this vibrant, vital young woman her life" (*People*), *Brain on Fire* is an unforgettable exploration of memory and identity, faith and love, and a profoundly compelling tale of survival and perseverance that is destined to become a classic.

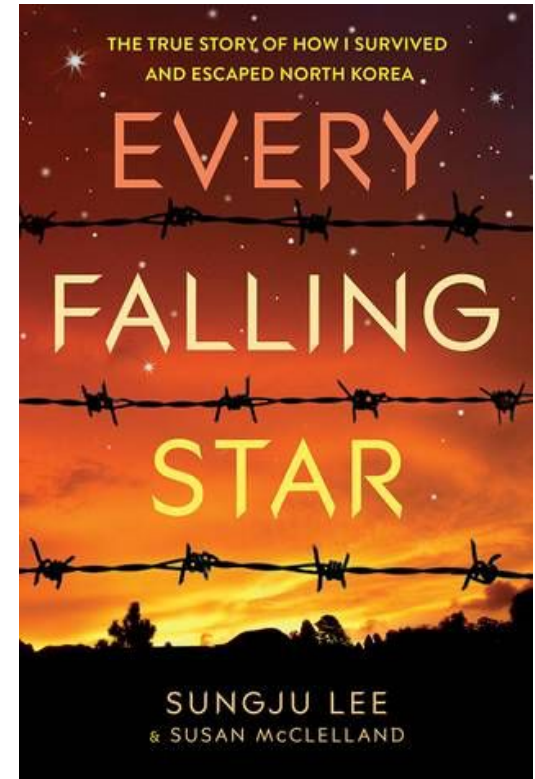


# Every Falling Star by Sungju Lee (2016)

**Lexile Score: 880L**

**Themes: Coming of Age, Freedom, Oppression, Poverty, Survival**

*Every Falling Star*, the first book to portray contemporary North Korea to a young audience, is the intense memoir of a North Korean boy named Sungju who is forced at age twelve to live on the streets and fend for himself. To survive, Sungju creates a gang and lives by thieving, fighting, begging, and stealing rides on cargo trains. Sungju richly re-creates his scabrous story, depicting what it was like for a boy alone to create a new family with his gang, his “brothers”; to be hungry and to fear arrest, imprisonment, and even execution. This riveting memoir allows young readers to learn about other cultures where freedoms they take for granted do not exist.

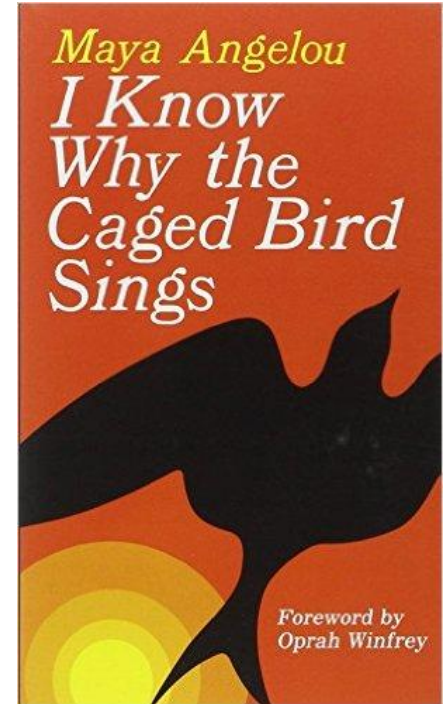


# I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou (1969)

**Lexile Score: 1070L**

**Themes: Race, Inequality, and Identity; Sex, Gender, and Sexuality; Abuse; Language; Religion; Family; Home and Displacement**

Angelou's debut memoir is a modern American classic beloved worldwide. Sent by their mother to live with their devout, self-sufficient grandmother in a small Southern town, Maya and her brother, Bailey, endure the ache of abandonment and prejudice. At eight years old and back at her mother's side in St. Louis, Maya is attacked by a man many times her age—and has to live with the consequences for a lifetime. Years later, in San Francisco, Maya learns that love for herself, the kindness of others, her own strong spirit, and the ideas of great authors will allow her to be free instead of imprisoned. Poetic and powerful.





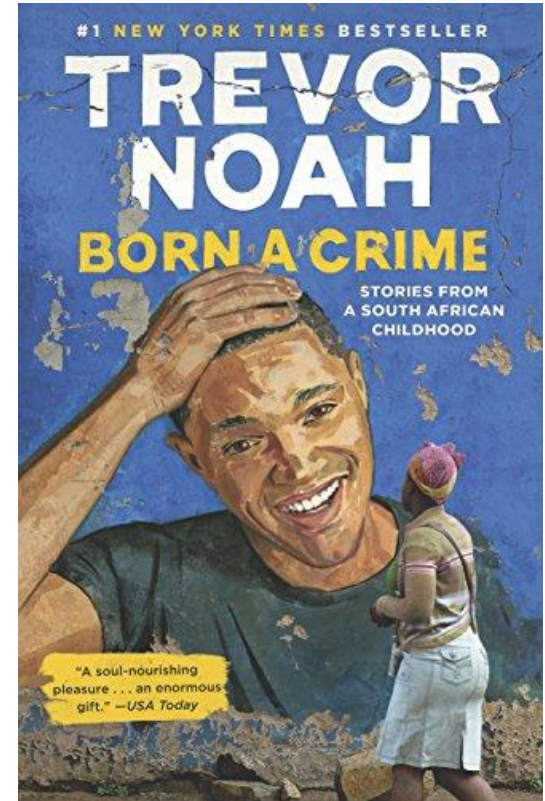
# Born a Crime by Trevor Noah (2016)

**Lexile Score: 770L**

**Themes: Racism, Apartheid, and the Cycle of Poverty; Identity, Belonging, and Community; Love and Personal Growth; Resilience through Religion, Education, and Humor**

Trevor Noah's unlikely path from apartheid South Africa to the desk of *The Daily Show* began with a criminal act: his birth. Trevor was born to a white Swiss father and a black Xhosa mother at a time when such a union was punishable by five years in prison. Living proof of his parents' indiscretion, Trevor was kept mostly indoors for the earliest years of his life, bound by the extreme and often absurd measures his mother took to hide him from a government that could, at any moment, steal him away.

Born a Crime is the story of a mischievous young boy who grows into a restless young man as he struggles to find himself in a world where he was never supposed to exist. It is also the story of that young man's relationship with his fearless, rebellious, and fervently religious mother—his teammate, a woman determined to save her son from the cycle of poverty, violence, and abuse that would ultimately threaten her own life.

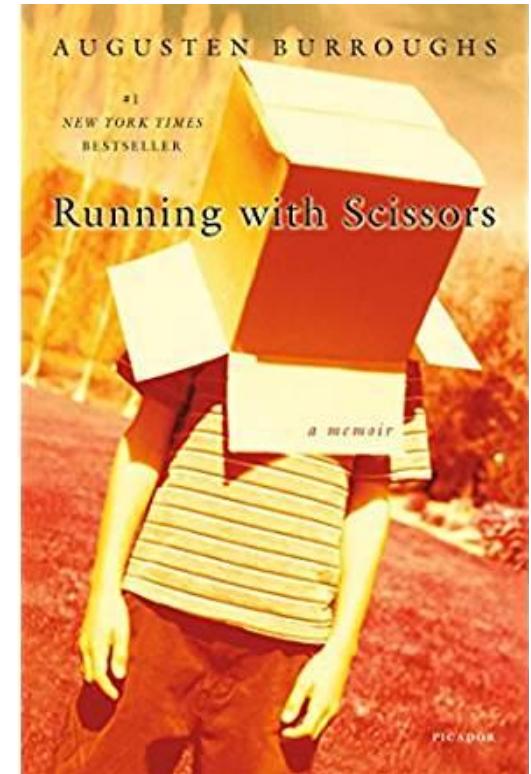


# Running with Scissors by Augusten Burroughs (2004)

**Lexile Score: Unavailable**

**Themes: Family, Home, Coming of Age, Gender, Humor, Identity, Domestic Abuse, Addiction, Psychology and Mental Health**

*Running with Scissors* is the true story of a boy whose mother (a poet with delusions of Anne Sexton) gave him away to be raised by her unorthodox psychiatrist who bore a striking resemblance to Santa Claus. So at the age of twelve, Burroughs found himself amidst Victorian squalor living with the doctor's bizarre family, and befriending a pedophile who resided in the backyard shed. The story of an outlaw childhood where rules were unheard of, and the Christmas tree stayed up all year round, where Valium was consumed like candy, and if things got dull an electroshock-therapy machine could provide entertainment. The funny, harrowing and bestselling account of an ordinary boy's survival under the most extraordinary circumstances.



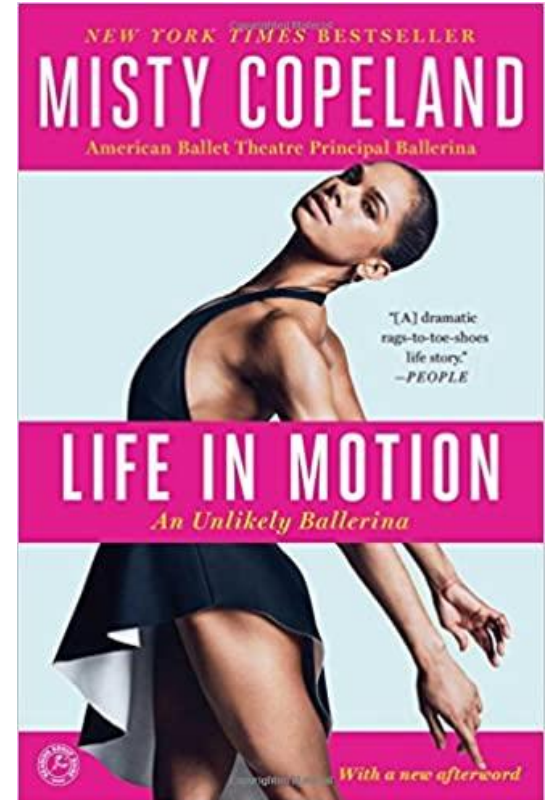
# Life in Motion by Misty Copeland (2014)

**Lexile Score: Unavailable**

**Themes: Dance, Identity, Resilience, Gender, Race, Ambition**

In this instant *New York Times* bestseller, Misty Copeland makes history, telling the story of her journey to become the first African-American principal ballerina at the prestigious American Ballet Theatre. But when she first placed her hands on the barre at an after-school community center, no one expected the undersized, underprivileged, and anxious thirteen-year-old to become one of America's most groundbreaking dancers .

A true prodigy, she was attempting in months roles that take most dancers years to master. But when Misty became caught between the control and comfort she found in the world of ballet and the harsh realities of her own life, she had to choose to embrace both her identity and her dreams, and find the courage to be one of a kind. *Life in Motion* is a story of passion, identity and grace for anyone who has dared to dream of a different life.

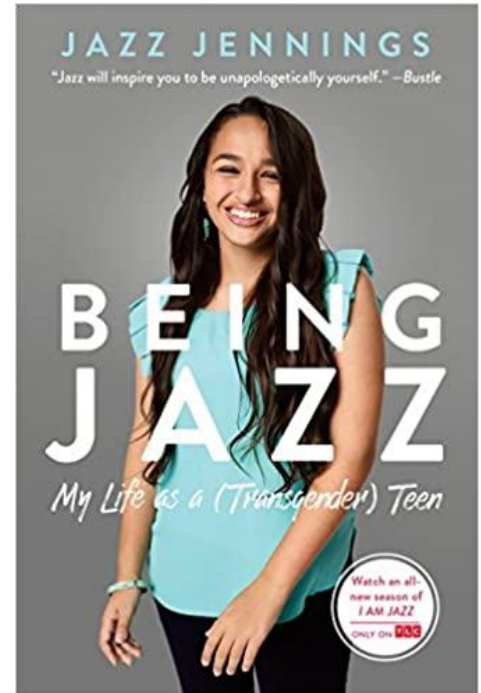


# Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen by Jazz Jennings (2017)

**Lexile Score: 1120L**

**Themes: Family, Friendship, Coming of Age, Bullying, Prejudice, Gender, Ambition**

Jazz Jennings is one of the youngest and most prominent voices in the national discussion about gender identity. At the age of five, Jazz transitioned to life as a girl, with the support of her parents. A year later, her parents allowed her to share her incredible journey in her first Barbara Walters interview, aired at a time when the public was much less knowledgeable or accepting of the transgender community. In her remarkable memoir, Jazz reflects on these very public experiences and how they have helped shape the mainstream attitude toward the transgender community. But it hasn't all been easy. Jazz has faced many challenges, bullying, discrimination, and rejection, yet she perseveres as she educates others about her life as a transgender teen. Making the journey from girl to woman is never easy--especially when you began your life in a boy's body.



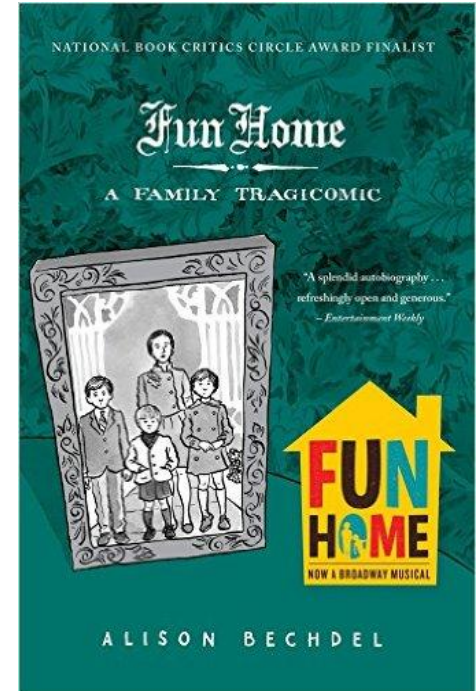
# Fun Home by Alison Bechdel (2007) GRAPHIC NOVEL

**Lexile Score: Unavailable**

**Themes: Family, Coming of Age, Gender, Sex and Sexuality, Art and Writing, Death, Suicide**

A fresh and brilliantly told memoir from a cult favorite comic artist, marked by gothic twists, a family funeral home, sexual angst, and great books. This breakout book by Alison Bechdel is a darkly funny family tale, pitch-perfectly illustrated with Bechdel's sweetly gothic drawings.

Meet Alison's father, a historic preservation expert and obsessive restorer of the family's Victorian home, a third-generation funeral home director, a high school English teacher, an icily distant parent, and a closeted homosexual who, as it turns out, is involved with his male students and a family babysitter. Through narrative that is alternately heartbreaking and fiercely funny, we are drawn into a daughter's complex yearning for her father. And yet, apart from assigned stints dusting caskets at the family-owned "fun home," as Alison and her brothers call it, the relationship achieves its most intimate expression through the shared code of books. When Alison comes out as homosexual herself in late adolescence, the denouement is swift, graphic -- and redemptive.



# The Complete Maus by Art Spiegelman (1996) GRAPHIC NOVEL

**Lexile Score: Unavailable**

**Themes: Holocaust, Art, Storytelling, Memory, Family, Survival, Loss, History**

*\*Volume 1 and 2 are sometimes sold separately--make sure to read and annotate BOTH.*

The Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* tells the story of Vladek Spiegelman, a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe, and his son, a cartoonist coming to terms with his father's story. *Maus* approaches the unspeakable through the diminutive. Its form, the cartoon (the Nazis are cats, the Jews mice), shocks us out of any lingering sense of familiarity and succeeds in "drawing us closer to the bleak heart of the Holocaust" (*The New York Times*). *Maus* is a haunting tale within a tale. Vladek's harrowing story of survival is woven into the author's account of his tortured relationship with his aging father. Against the backdrop of guilt brought by survival, they stage a normal life of small arguments and unhappy visits. This astonishing retelling of our century's grisliest news is a story of survival, not only of Vladek but of the children who survive even the survivors. *Maus* studies the bloody pawprints of history and tracks its meaning for all of us.

