



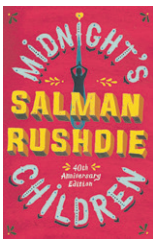
Finding a Good Read

A column to help you find intriguing books

Ruth

Coming-of-Age

Novelists reproduce the **coming-of-age** plot again and again. The awkward transition between childhood and adulthood is defined differently according to culture, community or individual. A character's adolescence becomes a playground for authors to pose essential questions to their readers: Does growing up mean shedding your childhood self? Do people who face personal or political trauma 'come-of-age' more quickly? What does it mean to be a fully realised adult?



Coming-of age-narratives around the world

Coming-of-age narratives are a global phenomenon, emerging in various fantastic forms.

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger captures a moment in Holden Caulfield's anxious, angry and alienated adolescence as he drifts cynically through New York City.

A Frozen Woman by Annie Ernaux questions whether coming-of-age means bending to the rigid gender stereotypes of 20th century France.

Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie follows Saleem from his birth at exactly midnight on the day of India's independence through to his adulthood. As Saleem navigates aging, so too does India grow as a nation newly freed from colonial control.

Although the protagonist of *Kitchen* by Banana Yoshimoto is slightly older than typical for a coming-of-age novel, Mikage's self-discovery in the wake of her grandmother's death fits the essential elements of the genre.

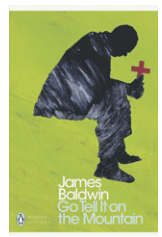
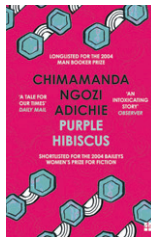


Growing up in a dystopian world

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro follows a friendship group's childhood and adolescence at boarding school, where an unnamed, insidious fate looms.

In *The Blue Book of Nebo* by Manon Steffan

Ros, Dylan's coming-of-age narrative unfolds in a post-apocalyptic existence where 'manhood' may look different to pre-disaster society.

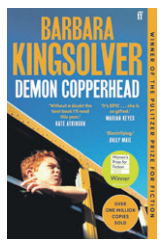
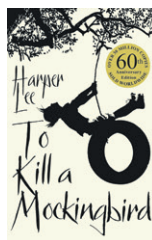


Controlling parents

Characters in coming-of-age novels often must defy the status quo of their childhood to freely and fully enter adulthood.

In *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 15-year-old Kambili struggles to cross the threshold into adulthood whilst under the iron grip of her father amidst the political tumult of 1990s Nigeria.

Oranges are not the Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson and *Go Tell it on the Mountain* by James Baldwin are both semi-autobiographical novels which treat their protagonists with a brutally honest tenderness as they journey from parental repression to personal freedom.



Coming-of-age in political adversity

Often the most compelling coming-of-age narratives unfold against the backdrop of political upheaval, portraying change on both a personal and social scale.

In the graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of Childhood*, Marjane Satrapi illustrates her early life in Tehran through a series of striking black-and-white comic book images. Satrapi's coming-of-age is inevitably shaped by the instability of 1970s -1980s Iran.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee dissects the brutality of the American South in the throes of 1930s racial segregation, told through the rapidly maturing perspective of young and precocious Scout.

Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver exposes the US opioid crisis through the book's young protagonist, Demon, who grapples with the economic inequality of 1990s Appalachia.

With thanks to PRG and Give a Book volunteer Ruth



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