

By guest columnist Chloe Ford, CCS '16

June is here and for many of us that means it's time to compile a summer reading list. This year I've added a new category to mine--alongside the contemporary fiction, the collections of poetry, and the personal essays, I've made room for some brilliant young adult novels. YA novels are *not only for teenagers*. Much contemporary YA fiction deals with activism, (in)justice, and critical but kind self-examination--important topics to which we *all* should be giving more attention. And YA writers often manage to explore these weighty topics while simultaneously capturing awkward romances, dynamic friendships, and the everyday hilarities and pains that come with growing up. That perfect combination makes the following novels next-level beach reads--I recommend picking them up whether you're fifteen or fifty.

*Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi is an incredible book about two teenagers living in the city of Lucille, which, supposedly, has been free of "monsters"--anyone who commits unjust acts--for years. In this novel, the teenagers must come to terms with darkness close to them and figure out how to fight it when no adults are able to see the truth. With a bit of a post-apocalyptic flavor and an emphasis on magical realism, it surprises and surprises and surprises. At its core, I believe *Pet* is a story about the vision of young folks--their ability to see and uncover what many adults overlook, to ask the hard and pressing questions many adults are too afraid to ask.

*The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo is a moving story told in verse about a teenager in Harlem finding her voice through spoken word. Acevedo deals with the oppressive male gaze, race, mother-daughter conflict, shifting relationships with religion, and how to speak (or write) one's truth even when it's terrifying to do so. I got chills every few pages, cried more than once, and remembered yet again the huge feelings to which only poetry can give rise.

*Dig.* by A.S. King is a strange, theatrical book with a whole cast of distinct characters. This surreal part-novel, part-play revolves around an in-depth exploration of white supremacy in America; more specifically, around teenagers making sense of their white parents' and grandparents' quiet and steady racism. King opens the door for white people to begin or continue a close critical examination of their individual whiteness and the ways in which it shapes their family systems. You might feel confused toward the beginning of the book as King jumps quickly from character to character, but my suggestion is to lean into it; it will all be worth it when you get to the end.

*You Should See Me in a Crown* by Leah Johnson is a story about feeling out of place in a small town--the main character is a black queer high school senior who is incredibly eager to escape her predominantly white and straight world for college. In order to win the scholarship she needs, though, she must run for prom queen. At the center of this book is a budding romance that teaches her about her desire, her power, her strength, and the beauty--rather than the terror--of being exactly who she is in front of other people.

I emerged from each of these books with new big questions, a deep attachment to the characters, and a sense of comfort amidst continuing chaos. I hope they can provide the same (or something even better!) to you. Happy summer reading!