



Reading Guide

High School

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About this Reading Guide

The Grow Engage Read Imagine (GERI) initiative has created three separate guides based on grade level and age appropriateness of books. The guides range from the grade levels of Pre-k and lower up to high school level readers. This particular guide was made for youth in high school (9th-12th).

The Reading Guide includes book summaries, an overview of themes in the book, discussion questions for ongoing conversations with your youth, and activities you can use to promote healthy relationships, boundaries, and social norms.

The GERI has also created a Parent Toolkit that provides an overview of topics including:

- Tips on age appropriate conversations with your child(ren)
- Safe, unsafe, and unwanted touches
- Handling disclosures
- Community resources for victims/survivors

This toolkit can be downloaded at www.gerigr.org

Content Warning

Safe Haven understands that some of the books included in the GERI will contain stories that show different forms of harm. Our goal is not to show violence for entertainment or shock value. However, violence is a reality in our world, and many people experience it day-to-day. The GERI Parent Toolkit and Reading Guides will help readers or parents/caregivers process and handle difficult conversations about sexual assault, domestic violence and other forms of violence.

If what you read is too much, prioritize self care. Put the book down, take a break and talk to someone you trust about why you feel overwhelmed.

Resources

This guide was created with the intent to give people who care for children and youth the tools to talk with them about tough subjects. Having these kinds of conversations can be hard. Do your best and speak from a place of concern and care.

If you or someone you know has or is experiencing violence or abuse, the following are local resources that can provide free and confidential support:

Safe Haven Ministries

Website: www.shmgr.org

24/7 Hotline: 616- 452- 6664

YWCA West Central Michigan

Website: www.ywcawcmi.org

24/7 Hotline: 616-454 -9922

Children's Advocacy Center of Kent County

Website: www.cac-kent.org

Number: 616-336-5160

Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCEDSV)

Website: www.mcedsv.org

24/7 Hotline: 855-864- 2374 or text 866-238-1454

National Resources:

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)

Website: <https://www.rainn.org/>

24/7 Hotline: 800-656-4673

Love is respect

Website: <https://www.loveisrespect.org/>

24/7 Hotline: 866-331-9474 or text LOVEIS to 22522

***Saints and Misfits* by S.K. Ali**

Description: Janna sees three types of people in her life: saints, who move the world forward, misfits, who just don't fit in, and monsters, like the person at her mosque who everyone thinks is untouchable. Through this novel, Janna tries to navigate her place with her father's "brand new family," her mother and older brother, her crush Jeremy, and the secret that plagues her.

Themes: Sexual Assault, Islamophobia, Girl Empowerment

Questions for *Saints and Misfits*

1. Janna's father comments on her wearing the burkini and how he does not force her to wear it to the crowd of people at the beach. How does Janna feel about wearing her hijab?
2. The chapters in *Saints and Misfits* switch between Saint, Misfit, and Monster. What kinds of indications do you think the author was trying to make by titling the chapters this way? How are characters represented in these chapters?
3. Throughout the story, Janna labels herself a "Misfit." Why do you think she sees herself as a misfit?
4. Janna feels like she must separate her life between her faith, her family, and her friends. Name times when she has to separate parts of her life to fit in.
5. What kind of judgements does Janna make about Sausun's face veil? And, how does Sausun change her perception of women in niqabs?
6. Janna is finally able to confront her monster with the help of Sausun. What were the reactions of her friends and family when she disclosed what happened to her?
7. What does Janna realize about Sarah and Sausun? How does this help her "shift the shame"?
8. How did Mr. Ram impact Janna's view of her own self worth?

Activities for *Saints and Misfits*

Watch a Short Film

[Hijab & Me](#): This short documentary from the TrueTube channel on Youtube follows the lives of three young Muslim women. These women share their experiences and beliefs around the hijab and growing up Muslim. (9mins)

Need a Laugh?

[Embarrassing Hijab Stories](#): BuzzFeed shares some embarrassing yet funny stories from Muslim women. 5mins

Fashion & Fun

Check out Teen Vogue's article *Four Black Muslim Fashion Models on What Fashion means to them*. The article covers the experiences of Black Muslims in the fashion industry and how they use fashion to express themselves.

***The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas**

Description: Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: the poor neighborhood where she lives and the fancy suburban prep school she attends. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. Khalil was unarmed. Soon afterward, his death made a national headline. Some are calling him a thug, maybe even a drug dealer and a gangbanger. Protesters are taking to the streets in Khalil's name. Some cops and the local drug lord try to intimidate Starr and her family. What everyone wants to know is: what really went down that night? And the only person alive who can answer that is Starr.

Themes: Police Violence, Racism, Community

Questions for *The Hate U Give*

1. Khalil explains to Starr the message of Tupac Shakur's "THUG LIFE". What does the acronym stand for, and how does it repeat itself throughout the story?
2. Who are the members of her family? How does their family dynamic impact different relationships throughout the story?
3. Khalil is the second person Starr has witnessed to be murdered. Who was the first and how has witnessing the death of her friends impacted Starr?
4. Starr does not let people at her school know she is from Garden Heights. Why?
5. As news outlets begin to cover Khalil's death, what type of person does the media frame him to be?
6. How does the fact that Starr and Chris are an interracial couple effect their relationship?
7. Starr is afraid to speak up at first about what happened the night Khalil was killed by One-fifteen. How would you react if you were in Starr's place?
8. At the end of the book, Starr repeats the names of people who have been murdered by the police and racial violence. What was her reasoning for naming them? How many of these names do you know? Research them, learn them, and most importantly, remember them.

Activities for *The Hate U Give*

Learn More

Maverick educates his children about the Black Panther Party. Find out more on who the Black Panthers were and what they stood for. Watch *5 things to know about the Black Panthers*: AJ+ Youtube channel offers an informational video on who the Black Panthers were with voice overs from former members. (2mins)

Musical Connections

The Hate U Give makes many references to the late hip-hop star Tupac Shakur. One reference in particular is the symbolism of Maverick's rose garden. Look up the poem "A rose that grew in concrete" and answer the following

1. What do you think is the meaning of this poem?
2. How does it show up in our story?
3. Does it have anything to do with "Thug Life"?

Code Switching

Starr feels exhausted having to be one person at school and another person at home. This all comes to a head when she admits to Chris that she was in the car with Khalil. For more insight around Starr's feelings check out Teen Vogue's article *The Mental Health Cost of Code Switching on Campus*. Read the article and think about how various characters "code switch" throughout the story. How does this impact them emotionally and socially?

***Hearts Unbroken* by Cynthia Leitich Smith**

Description: Louise Wolfe has just broken up with her first real boyfriend after he disrespects Native people. She'd rather focus on family, friends, and working on her school's newspaper. Along with photojournalist Joey Kairouz, Louise finds herself with a huge story: the school musical director's inclusive casting of *The Wizard of Oz* sparks backlash in their mostly-white Kansas town. While tensions rise in town and at school, a romance between Lou and Joey emerges. But will Lou break Joey's heart trying to protect her own?

Themes: Sexual Harassment, Racism, and Indigenous/ Native Rights

Questions for *Hearts Unbroken*

1. Cam makes racist remarks about Louise's culture and Jake steps in to call Cam out. Has there been a time when you heard someone make harmful remarks and stepped in to say something?
2. Lou wants to do her first story on bullying. Daniel tells Louise about Wyatt Hanley, who "some of the guys give a hard time." Why do you think he doesn't stand up to his friends when they bully Wyatt?
3. In the chapter "All American Diner," Louise and her family sit for a meal and they notice on the television a White woman wearing a "Plains-Indian-inspired headdress." What is her family's reaction after seeing this?
4. Parents Against Revisionist Theater (PART) want a return to traditional casting practices. Why do you think they are upset by the changes to casting and having People of Color play major roles in the *Wizard of Oz*?
5. How did Lou's article bring a form of closure to our story?
6. Do you agree with how Lou dealt with her relationship with Cam or Joey?
7. Louise realizes that she is not the best at communicating with her friends. Name two times Lou failed to communicate openly and honestly.

Activities for *Hearts Unbroken*

What is Cultural Appropriation?

While Louise and her family eat they see a non-Native person wearing a Native headdress. Read this article by Teen Vogue on cultural appropriation of Native people's traditional clothing: [Native Halloween Costumes Are Offensive. Support Native Designers Instead](#)

TEDxTalks

The following are TEDxTalks done by Native people addressing different aspects of their culture and the impact of colonization on Indigenous lands and traditions.

[Native Americans : We Shall Remain | LoVina Louie | TEDxCoeurdalene](#): LoVina Louie walks listeners through the history of her people and the work she does to keep her culture alive. (18mins)

[Indigenous In Plain Sight | Gregg Deal | TEDxBoulder](#): Gregg Deal talks about American culture and how its media representation has negatively impacted Native people. (13mins)

Where do I stand?

Cynthia Leitich Smith, the author of *Heart Unbroken*, is intentional in naming the different nations that various Native people belong to and their historical connections to the land. To find what Indigenous people's land that you are currently settled on visit the website <https://native-land.ca/>

Speak: The Graphic Novel by Laurie Halse Anderson, Illustrated by Emily Carroll

Description: "Speak up for yourself—we want to know what you have to say." From the first moment of her freshman year at Merryweather High, Melinda knows this is a big fat lie, part of the nonsense of high school. She is friendless—an outcast—because she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops, so now nobody will talk to her, let alone listen to her. Through her work on an art project, she is finally able to face what really happened that night: She was raped by an upperclassman, a guy who still attends Merryweather and is still a threat to her.

Themes: Sexual Assault, Consent, Mental Health

Questions for *Speak*

1. Melinda tells us the first ten lies they tell in highschool. Do you agree with her list?
2. At one point, Melinda says, "Shut your trap, button your lip, zip it. All that crap you hear about communication and expressing feelings is a lie." Are there times where this statement feels relevant to you? Why?
3. What is written in response to when Melinda writes "Stay away from Andy Evans" on the restroom stall? How does Melinda feel seeing it?
4. Melinda finds a poster of Maya Angelou and gains a lot of strength from her image. What connections might Maya Angelou's experiences have to Melinda's story?
5. Melinda blames herself for what happened at the party. Why does Melinda blame herself for not coming forward? How does society treat people who report that they have been sexually assaulted?
6. The first person that Melinda tells about her rape is her ex-best friend Rachel. Instead of believing her, Rachel gets defensive and accuses Melinda of lying. In what ways could Rachel have been more supportive of Melinda?
7. The story ends with Melinda ready to speak with an adult about her assault. How is Melinda at the end of our story different from who she was in the beginning?

Activities for *Speak*

Art Heals

Melinda was able to use her art class as a way to help her process the trauma of her assault. Drawing and creating sculptures was a way for her to speak to a world that was not listening. Use any medium of art to make something that reflects this message from *Speak*: "I survived. I'm here." If you feel comfortable share it with us by tagging our Instagram @safehavengr

Who is Maya?

Melinda finds a poster of Maya Angelou while hiding away one day. Do some research into the life of Maya Angelou and answer the following

1. Why did Melinda connect to Maya?
2. What is Maya Angelou's significance in the story of *Speak*?
3. Do you think Maya is a good role model for Melinda?

Consent & Relationships

In safe and healthy relationships, partners respect each other's boundaries, especially in sexual situations. In our comic, Melinda has her consent taken from her when she is sexually assaulted. Go check out Amaze.orgs youtube channel for the video called *Sexual Assault, Consent, and Sexual Harassment: what's the difference?* The video breaks down what each of these mean and what steps you can take if you are experiencing harm.

***The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo**

Description: Xiomara Batista lives in Harlem, where she has just discovered slam poetry. She uses slam to understand her mother’s religion and her own relationship to the world, where she feels unheard and unable to hide. After growing new curves, Xiomara learns to let her fists do the talking — but she still feels like she has plenty to stay, and fills pages with poems. After Xiomara is invited to join the slam poetry club at her school, she’s afraid to join without her mami finding out, but she can’t stop thinking about performing her poems.

Themes: Coming of Age, Sexual Harassment, Religion

Questions for *The Poet X*

1. In “Unhide-able,” Xiomara describes growing into her maturing body. How does she feel about people noticing? What does she mean when she says, “I’ve forced my skin just as thick as I am”?
2. Xiomara belongs to a devout religious family. How does this impact Xiomara’s view of faith and spirituality?
3. Xiomara is tired of being catcalled by boys and men in her neighborhood. She says, “I’m disgusted at myself for the slight excitement that shivers up my back at the same time that I wish my body could fold into the tiniest corner for me to hide.” How do you interpret what she is saying?
4. In the chapter “In front of My Locker,” Xiomara is groped by a boy. She looks to others to step in, especially her boyfriend Aman. When no one does anything, she has to step up and defend herself. Why do you think no one did anything to stop the boy from assaulting Xiomara?
5. Aman and Xiomara begin to get intimate after she runs away from her home. She stops Aman before anything happens and becomes anxious that Aman will be upset. How did Aman really respond? Why was she surprised by it?
6. Using Father Sean as a mediator, how does the relationship between Xiomara and her parents change?

Activities for *The Poet X*

Watch a performance

Interested in hearing some spoken word poems live? The following are spoken word performances done by various poets on Youtube. Check them out and become inspired.

[Team St. Louis - "Mother" | Brave New Voices 2019](#) "Mother" by Zack Lesmeister, Sarah Abbas, and Kaylyn McKoy discuss the influences their mothers had in their lives. (3mins)

[Denice Frohman - "Borders" \(WoWPS 2014\)](#) "Borders" by Denice Frohman is a poem that talks about crossing borders and coming from a family of Immigrants. (4mins)

[Sarah Kay & Phil Kaye - "When Love Arrives"](#) "When Love Arrives" by Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye teaches the audience about love and the moments it comes and goes. (5mins)

[IWPS Finals 2014 - Porsha O. "Angry Black Woman"](#) "Angry Black Woman" by Porsha Olayiwola is devoted to her experiences as a Black woman dealing with misogyny. (3mins)

[Alysia Harris - Death Poem](#) "Death Poem" by Alysia Harris is a story that Alysia chronicles about how even death can not stop the bond that love creates.

A word from the Author

In a TEDxTalk, the author of *Poet X*, Elizabeth Acevedo, shares with listeners her love of poetry and the inspiration for much of her work. Follow along as Acevedo uses poetry to heal and educate on violence against women and generation trauma.

[I use my poetry to confront the violence against women | Elizabeth Acevedo | TEDxMidAtlanticSalon](#)

***The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky**

Description: Charlie is just starting high school, and writing singular, unique, hilarious, and devastating letters to an unknown recipient. Caught between trying to live his life and run from it, Charlie is set on a strange course. He must learn to navigate the world of first dates, mixtapes, family drama, new friends, sex, drugs, and the Rocky Horror Picture Show. This is a time when all he needs is the right song on a perfect drive to feel infinite.

Themes: Toxic Masculinity, Dysfunctional Family, Friendship

Questions for *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

1. Describe the dynamics of Charlie's family. Does he get along with them?
2. Charlie watches as his sister's boyfriend slaps her. Why do you think Charlie's sister tells him not to say anything to their parents?
3. Charlie reveals to Bill, his English teacher, that his sister is in an abusive relationship, to which Bill replies "We accept the love we think we deserve." How do you feel about this?
4. Through the course of *Perks of Being a Wallflower* it is revealed that several people in Charlie's life have dealt with some form of domestic and sexual violence. How do you think this realization has impacted Charlie's view of the world?
5. Sam confronts Charlie about being a wallflower to his own life. She, along with an earlier message from his English teacher Bill, conveys that he can't just wait for life to happen. What do you think they both mean by that?
6. Name times Charlie was a bystander. Do you think that Sam was right to confront Charlie for allowing things to happen instead of speaking up?
7. What is revealed about Charlie's past? How does he heal from his experience?
8. Who do you think Charlie is writing to?

Activities for *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Is the book better than the movie?

The Perks of Being a Wallflower was also made into a film. Go check out the movie and compare/contrast it to the book.

1. What parts of the story are the same and what parts are different?
2. Was the movie able to convey a similar message as the book?
3. Which did you like better? The movie or the book?

Become the DJ to your own life

Music plays an important role in Charlie's life. Create a playlist of songs using the following prompts:

1. Add a song that would be the theme to your life
2. Add a song that makes you happy
3. Add a song you listen to when sad
4. Add a song from a movie
5. Add a song that makes you think about your family
6. Add a song about your friends
7. Add your most listened to song
8. Add a random song
9. Add a song that describes Charlie
10. Add a song that represents the ending of this story

***The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton**

Description: No one ever said life was easy. But Ponyboy is pretty sure that he's got things figured out. He knows that he can count on his brothers, Darry and Sodapop. And he knows that he can count on his friends—true friends who would do anything for him, like Johnny and Two-Bit. But not much else besides trouble with the Socs, a vicious gang of rich kids whose idea of a good time is beating up on “greasers” like Ponyboy. At least he knows what to expect—until the night someone takes things too far.

Themes: Toxic Masculinity, Family, Gang Violence

Questions for *The Outsiders*

1. What is Ponyboy's home life like? How does this impact him?
2. Who are the members of Ponyboy's gang? Who is he the closest to?
3. Why do you think that Darry is so hard on Ponyboy compared to SodaPop?
4. How are the greasers like a family? What are some of the characters' home lives like?
5. If you were Ponyboy's friend, would you have supported him running away from home? Who can you turn to when life at home gets rough?
6. Cherry explains what she thinks the differences are between the Socs and Greasers. How is her explanation different from Ponyboys?
7. Do you think there was a way to help Dally? Do you view Dally as the same person he was introduced as?
8. What does Jhonny mean when he tells Ponyboy “stay gold”?

Activities for *The Outsiders*

Watch the Movie

The Outsiders was eventually made into a film. Watch the movie to answer these questions.

1. What are some of the major similarities and differences between the film and book?
2. Did you see S.E. Hinton making a cameo in the film?
3. Are the characters in the film the same as you pictured them from within the book?

Get to Know the Author

Learn more about the author of The Outsiders. At the end of our book includes an interview from S.E. Hinton herself. Read the interview and think about the following questions.

1. How old was S.E. Hinton when she wrote The Outsiders?
2. What was the reason for shortening her name on the books?
3. What was her inspiration for The Outsiders?

A Time To Dance by Padma Venkatraman

Description: Veda, a classical dance prodigy in India, lives and breathes dance—so when an accident leaves her a below-knee amputee, her dreams are shattered. For a girl who's grown used to receiving applause for her dance prowess and flexibility, adjusting to a prosthetic leg is painful and humbling. But Veda refuses to let her disability rob her of her dreams, and she starts all over again, taking beginner classes with the youngest dancers. Then Veda meets Govinda, a young man who approaches dance as a spiritual pursuit. As their relationship deepens, Veda reconnects with the world around her, and begins to discover who she is and what dance truly means to her.

Themes: Disability, Dance, Girl Empowerment

Questions for *A Time To Dance*

1. What do you think of Veda's argument with her mother about her dancing? Who do you think is right?
2. What does Veda mean when she says that she can "dance beauty into her body"?
3. At the hospital nurses and doctors tell Veda she is lucky to receive treatment because her parents don't have much insurance. What are they trying to imply about her family's class/caste status?
4. As Veda tries to return back to her life before the accident, how do people treat her differently?
5. How is Veda's faith a major part of her road to recovery? Describe three times she felt challenged by her faith?
6. In what ways does Govinda, Jim, and Paati help Veda realize her potential?
7. How does the responsibility of becoming a dance instructor change Veda?
8. Describe the ways that Veda's relationship with her dancing, her body, and her faith evolve throughout the story.

Activities for *A Time to Dance*

Get some Perspective

In our story we learn briefly about India's caste system. We see how Veda's caste identity impacts the way she receives treatment at the hospital where she is recovering. The following video is from BBC News interviewing several women who belong to the Dalit community. The Dalit are considered to be the lowest caste within the system. Listen to these women as they share their stories on discrimination and reflect on how Veda's own caste identity may have impacted her.

[India's caste system: What it means to be a Dalit woman? – BBC News](#) (5mins)

Learn more

To learn more about India's caste system check out this article written by professor Sanjoy Chakravorty for the BBC News. The article talks about misconceptions of the caste system and the impact of British colonialism upon it.

[How the British Reshaped India's caste system](#)

Watch a Performance

Veda practices a cultural dance known as bharatanatyam. It is an Indian classical dance with a long history of dancers accomplishing spiritual enlightenment and acclaim from their communities. The following video is a video that can be found on the Youtube channel IndiaRaga. The channel is devoted to showing the beauty of classical Indian dance and making it accessible to new learners.

[Shiva Shambho: Most Watched Bharatanatyam Dance | Best of Indian Classical Dance](#)