



**Bye Forever, I Guess** by Jodi Meadows

**How this book stands out:** When thirteen-year-old gamer Ingrid's real-life friendship dramatically implodes, a mysterious wrong-number text offers her a chance at a new connection and the opportunity to finally blend her identities.

**You might also like:** *Mallory in Full Color; Roll for Initiative; Dungeons and Drama*

**Junius Leake and the Spiraling Vortex of Doom** by Allan Wolf



**How this book stands out:** When Junius Leake's parents want some time to work on their marriage, they send him to live with a family he never knew he had - Uncle Spot and the cat, Aunt Bordeaux - in a boathouse located on Lake Pegineur.

Though Junius is obsessed with learning about 'water bodies', his fear and anxiety keep him from getting in the lake. He must face that fear during his time with Uncle Spot. Can he face that fear when the lake turns into a whirlpool of destruction? And can he handle the family secrets and presumed cursed treasure he discovers while at the lake?

**You might also like:** *Holes; The Secret Library; The Vanishing of Lake Pegineur: A Graphic Novel Based on a True Story*

The following book from the 2026 Lone Star List is classified in the ROBS library as Young Adult.

We realize not every student is ready for YA books and respect the right of the parent to judge the maturity of his/her child. Therefore, if a middle school student would like to check out YA books from the library, s/he must have parent or guardian permission on file.

**Blood in the Water** by Tiffany D. Jackson

**How this book stands out:** Kaylani, a true-crime enthusiast, spends the summer on Martha's Vineyard hoping to clear her father's name, but when a teen dies under suspicious circumstances, she starts uncovering secrets that put her in danger.

**You might also like:** *Body in the Woods; The Silent Sister; The Last Resort*



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The Lone Star Reading List encourages reading for pleasure and is aimed at students in grades 6-8. Each year, up to 30 books—exploring a variety of topics, reading tastes, and maturity levels—are chosen by a committee of school and public librarians from across Texas.



## 2026 Lone Star List

**\*This list varies in maturity and content. Not every book may be a good fit for every reader.**



**Spark** by Chris Baron

**How this book stands out:** Finn's life in his quiet town is turned upside down when his community has to evacuate due to a wildfire close to home. As the community works to rebuild, Finn and his best friend, Rabbit, grapple with lingering fear and trauma while holding onto hope that they can help prevent future fires.

**You might also like:** *Ode to a Nobody; When Giants Burn; The Burning Season*



**The Beat I Drum** by Dusti Bowling

**How this book stands out:** Connor Bradley is dreading his first day at a new high school, certain his Tourette-related tics will make him stand out for all the wrong reasons. Everything changes when he meets a girl who shares his condition and a music teacher who helps him channel his stress through drumming. Just as Connor starts to feel hopeful, his estranged father returns and a school bully pushes him to his limit. With pressures mounting, Connor must confront his fears and uncover a surprising truth that may help him reclaim his confidence—and find his own steady beat.

**You might also like:** *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus; Please Pay Attention; Forget Me Not*



**Westfallen** by Ann and Ben Bracheres

**How this book stands out:** Six kids, three in present day and three in 1944, find that they can communicate across time through a pair of radios. Too much information is shared, and the outcome of World War II is changed. Germany has won, and the United States is now a country called Westfallen. Can the kids find a way to fix their mistakes and correct the course of history?

**You might also like:** *Glitch; Silvia Doe and the 100-Year Flood; Wolf by Wolf; Live in Infamy*



**We are Not Alone** by Katryn Bury

**How this book stands out:** Sam has dealt with more than any middle schooler should: losing his best friend, Oscar, to brain cancer and recently overcoming cancer himself. As he returns to school, he is paired with the popular girl for a science project and discovers she is more of a nerd than she lets on. Together they team up not only on their science project, but on a personal mission to find answers to Oscar's UFO-based mystery he left behind.

**You might also like:** *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pies; Rabbit, Rabbit; Aftermath*



**A Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation** by Pablo Cartaya

**How this book stands out:** Gonzalo is stuck spending the summer on a cross-country book tour with his famous but distant grandfather, author of the *Chronicles of Gonzalo Sanz*. Still grieving his dad, Gonzalo slowly uncovers his grandfather's past and the family stories no one talks about. With his mom joining near the end, the trip helps all three begin to reconnect and heal, leaving Gonzalo with a clearer sense of who he is and the story he wants to tell.

**You might also like:** *Busted; Not Nothing; El Niño; Racing the Clouds*



**Kyra, Just for Today** by Sara Zarr

**How this book stands out:** 7th grade Kyra struggles with friendships and body image, while also worrying if her mom will relapse and return to drinking. Sensitive Kyra finds help through her weekly group meetings and her favorite hobby, cooking. Kyra is relatable as she deals with pressure and anxiety both at school and at home.

**You might also like:** *Berry Parker Doesn't Catch Crushes; Maid for It; Coyote Queen; The Benefits of Being an Octopus*



**The Trouble with Heroes** by Kate Messner

**How this book stands out:** After Finn vandalizes a grave stone in a local cemetery, he avoids traditional punishments and instead is given the task of climbing the 46 peaks of the Adirondacks. Finn begins hiking grudgingly, but as he tackles each peak he confronts his grief over his father's death and encounters the healing beauty of the natural world.

**You might also like:** *Joey the Good; Poetry of Car Mechanics; Just Keep Walking*



**Keeping Pace** by Laurie Morrison

**How the book stands out:** After losing the top scholar title to her ex-friend Jonah, Grace throws herself into training for a half-marathon to regain her confidence—and maybe beat him where it really counts. But as they grow closer, she realizes that winning might matter less than understanding who she is without constantly racing to the next goal.

**You might also like:** *Mallory in Full Color; Listen to This; Hidden Truths*



**The Extraordinary Orbit of Alex Ramirez** by Jasminne Paulino

**How it stands out:** Alex Ramirez, a seventh grader in self-contained classes, dreams of space. Not only does he love watching rocket launches and reading about planets, but he plans on working for NASA someday. Alex knows the first step to reaching his goal is to be placed in the mainstream science class. He will have to have the courage to believe in himself in order to succeed.

**You might also like:** *Freak the Mighty; Weird, Sad, and Silent; Not an Easy Win*



**Chronically Dolores** by Maya Van Wagenen

**How this book stands out:** Dolores, a fourteen-year-old living with interstitial cystitis, faces humiliation at school, a fading friendship, and tension at home. At a summer workshop, she meets Terpsichore, an autistic teen longing for more independence from her overprotective mother. Their unlikely friendship helps each girl push for the life she wants. Based on the author's personal experience, the novel offers an authentic look at chronic illness, identity, and resilience.

**You might also like:** *Popcorn; Louder than Hunger; Gut Reaction*



***The Legend of the Last Library*** by Frank L. Cole

**How it stands out:** A Blight of insects destroyed all the trees and the government burned as many books and paper as they could to stop the Blight from growing. Now, Juniper (Juni) searches for paper to sell to buy medicine for her ailing grandfather. In her desperate journey, she catches the attention of Novexus, the leading company, and their robot dogs, and clues that might lead her to the secret Last Library. Can Juni avoid those chasing her and find the Last Library in time to save her grandfather and learn the truth of what happened, not only to the nation but her parents?

**You might also like:** *The City of Ember; The Last Cuentista; The Book of Stolen Dreams; The Seed Keeper*



***Where Storms Only Grow*** by Alyssa Colman

**How this book stands out:** Amidst the crushing dust storms and financial ruin of the Great Depression, twins Joanna and Howe must set aside their sibling rivalry and demonstrate incredible resilience to save their struggling family farm after their father heads west for work.

**You might also like:** *Scattergood; Bea and the New Deal Horse; Will's Race for Home*



***It's Watching*** by Lindsay Currie

**How this book stands out:** Josie and her friends, budding journalists, go to Chicago's historic Bachelor's Grove (the most haunted graveyard in Illinois) with the hope of finding proof of the Lady in White and the phantom farmhouse. On this Halloween Night, things turn truly creepy for the trio when they are texted a bloody message "I'm Watching. You have 2 days." Can the trio discover the truth of the message before their time runs out and keep their friendship intact?

**You might also like:** *Dead Voices; 1-2-3-4 I Declare a Thumb War; The Clackity*



***Shadowed*** by Carl Deuker

**How this book stands out:** Nate lives in his sister's shadow by playing soccer to impress his parents even though he doesn't like it. Once Lucas moves in next door, he finds a new love for basketball. He and Lucas practice hard to become the best players and to take down the current star players, but everything changes fast when a prank goes too far.

**You might also like:** *Gym Candy; Rez Ball; Wrong Side of the Court*



***The Factory*** by Catherine Egan

**How this book stands out:** When his family becomes mired in inescapable debt, Asher is sent to an experimental research facility in order to wipe it out. When teenagers start disappearing from the facility, Asher and his friends set out to find answers. Are the painful procedures they undergo really leading to clean energy breakthroughs? What is truly being taken from them each time they are forced to undergo the experimental procedures?

**You might also like:** *The Loop; Bite Risk; Moongarden: Plotting the Stars*



***The Strongest Heart*** by Saadi Faruqi

**How this book stands out:** With his mother out of the country for work, thirteen-year-old Mo moves to Houston with his schizophrenic father. Mo's tough exterior hides a young teenager who misses his mother and who feels destabilized by his father's mental illness. With the help of his cousin Rayyan, his aunt, and the community of the local mosque, Mo learns to let go of his anger and chart a path forward for himself and his family.

**You might also like:** *Quagmire Tiarello Couldn't be Better; Ghost; The Tenth Mistake of Hank Hooperman*



***A Study in Secrets (Last Chance Academy)*** by Debbi Michiko Florence

**How this book stands out:** When 12 year old Meg Mizumi is sent to Leland Chase Academy, she's still reeling from the grief of losing her mother and feeling distanced from her workaholic father. She's not expecting to be pulled into a mysterious scavenger hunt with a big prize. But who is sending the clues and why?

**You might also like:** *The Liar's Society; Benny on the Case; The Misfits: A Royal Conundrum*



***The Girl Who Kept the Castle*** by Ryan Graudin

**How this book stands out:** Fay Gardener, a maid at Celurdur, is cursed to look partly like a cat by Wizard West after she accidentally reveals he died in his sleep. Now she must help the wizard's ghost secretly run a tournament to choose his replacement while an evil shadow grows in the castle, threatening everyone inside.

**You might also like:** *Howl's Moving Castle; Dealing with Dragons; Where there be Monsters; The House with the Dragon in it*



***The Freedom Seeker*** by Ruchira Gupta

**How this book stands out:** Simi's normal life in Northern India is flipped upside down when her community turns violent towards her parents' interfaith marriage. Her parents make the difficult decision to separate for their journey to seek asylum in the United States. Their plans go awry, leaving them all questioning the fate of each other. Simi uses everything within her to persevere through the harsh loneliness traveling with a coyote from Mexico to the US so that she can reunite her family.

**You might also like:** *Finally Seen; Zarina Divided; Borders*



***On Again, Awkward Again*** by Erin Entrada Kelly and Kwami Mbalia

**How this book stands out:** Two freshmen in high school, Pacy and Cecil have to get past the awkwardness of their first clumsy meeting in the clinic in order to give love at first sight a chance. They will have to work through insecurities, bad advice, and their journey of self discovery as they make room for romance.

**You might also like:** *Flipped; Not if You Break Up with Me First; When Dimple Met Rishi*



***The Experiment*** by Rebecca Stead

**How this book stands out:** Sixth-grader Nathan knows he's an alien, but when other Kast kids vanish and he starts changing, the experiment he's part of unravels fast. Called back to the mothership, he must rethink everything he believes about who he is and where he belongs.

**You might also like:** *Bloom; What Fell from the Sky; Defanged*



***Gloom*** by Jack MacKay

**How this book stands out:** Since her mother's death, Gwen has pushed aside her grief to care for her younger siblings—especially after their move to their late grandmother's eerie old house on a misty island. When Esme Laverne, a too-perfect babysitter with sharp smiles and darker intentions, enters their lives, Gwen is the only one who senses the danger. As nightmares take shape and the house begins to decay around them, Gwen must confront both supernatural threats and the fears she's been avoiding. To save her family, she'll have to face the monster living under their roof—and the one growing inside herself.

**You might also like:** *Identikill; Another; The Secret Dead Club*



***Vanya and the Wild Hunt*** by Sangu Mandanna

**How this book stands out:** Eleven-year-old Vanya Vallen can talk to books, but her ADHD and unique gift have always made her feel out of place. When a monster attack reveals hidden truths about her family, she's sent to Auramere, a magical library-school filled with danger and secrets. There, Vanya must embrace her abilities and work with others to stop the mysterious Wild Hunt before it's too late.

**You might also like:** *Skandar and the Unicorn Thief; Once There Was; Greenwild: The World Behind the Door*



***No Purchase Necessary*** by Maria Marianayagam

**How this book stands out:** Ajay is starting a new school as a 7th grader. In an effort to get in with Jacob and the popular crowd, he takes Jacob's dare of stealing a candy bar only to be rejected by the boy he wanted to impress. Ajay is then stuck with a new dilemma: does he take the winning \$1 million prize from the candy bar he stole, which would help his family, or does he confess to the store owner and face the consequences?

**You might also like:** *The Jake Show; Kareem Between; A Field Guide to Broken Promises*