# Arts

ESCAPE PLAN

## READ YOUR HEART OUT

The dreariest time of year is also the best time to curl up with a blanket and a good book. Follow the chart to find one that's just right for you.

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**HELP! I need a BOOK.**

### DAUGHTER OF THE DEEP
*By Rick Riordan*

If there's one writer who rivals J.K. Rowling for a hugely popular, world-building series, it's Rick Riordan (think: Percy Jackson). His newest book is set at a special high school for young marine scientists, navigators, explorers and naval warriors. Ana Dakkar is finishing her freshman year when everything explodes (literally) and she and her classmates are drawn into a deadly war with a rival school. Expect the adventure, wisecracks and cool family-origin-story stuff you love in Riordan. Plus: dolphins!

### ALLERGIC
*By Megan Wagner Lloyd and Michelle Mee Nutter*

You know that feeling of really wanting something? Like, craving something so bad you'd sell your little brother to get it? This graphic novel is about a 10-year-old named Maggie who's finally about to get her dream: a dog. That is, until she finds out she's . . . you guessed it. There's suspense — will Maggie be able to outsmart her itchy hives (and her parents)? — but it also all feels totally relatable.

### STUNTBOY, IN THE MEANTIME
*By Jason Reynolds; Illustrated by Raúl the Third*

This fun, fast graphic novel by the author of "Ghost" and "Long Way Down" is about a kid with a huge imagination who has taken on a secret superhero identity. His first challenge: keeping his parents from fighting. He also has to save himself from a mean kid in his apartment building ("the stinkiest, weeaged snot-bot ever"). All this, while trying to overcome "the frets," a.k.a. his anxiety. Fans of "Diary of a Wimpy Kid," this one's for you.

### MEASURING UP
*By Lily LaMotte; Illustrated by Ann Xu*

Calling fans of "Chopped" and "MasterChef Junior" — or anyone who loves to eat, for that matter. This graphic novel tells the story of 12-year-old Cici, who enters a kids' cooking contest without telling her dad. Just don't read it on an empty stomach: The mouthwatering drawings of noodles, rice dishes and dumplings will make you much too hungry. Plus, you might get a stomachache from the suspense as the competition starts to heat up.

### GONE TO THE WOODS: SURVIVING A LOST CHILDHOOD
*By Gary Paulsen*

Gary Paulsen, who died last fall, is known for his Y.A. novel "Hatchet," about a kid who has to survive in the wilderness. It turns out Paulsen's own childhood was even more dramatic. His new memoir describes a 400-mile train trip he took all alone at age 5, a shark attack, Paulsen's escape into the woods to get away from his terrible parents and much more. This isn't lighthearted reading, but it's an unforgettable story.

### ONLY IF YOU DARE: 13 STORIES OF DARKNESS AND DOOM
*By Josh Allen; Illustrated by Sarah J. Coleman*

Each story in this collection has a perfectly creepy, clever hook. There's one about a carnivorous pillow. Another features a sinister snowman. And don't miss the story of the possessed cellphone that reads your mind and won't stop texting you. These are perfect for sharing with a friend. They're short but definitely not too sweet.

### A PHO LOVE STORY
*By Loan Le*

A little like Romeo and Juliet, except here, the central couple is a pair of Vietnamese American teenagers on the West Coast, Linh and Bao, whose feuding families run rival pho restaurants. (And — spoiler! — nobody dies.) With chapters that swap back and forth between Linh and Bao, this light, sweet book is perfect if you're in the mood to escape into a romance.

### THE TROUBLED GIRLS OF DRAGOMIR ACADEMY
*By Anne Ursu*

Set at a mysterious boarding school in a world where sorcerers fight a vaporous evil called the Dread, this book promises "Harry Potter"-style adventure, with a twist. The institution where 12-year-old Marya is sent isn't a fancy academy — it's a reform school. As Marya adjusts to her new life, she and her classmates unravel secrets about how the magic in their society works. The spooky atmosphere of Dragomir alone is spellbinding.

### THE INSIDERS
*By Mark Oshiro*

This page-turner is about a gay kid named Héctor who transfers from his school in San Francisco where he had lots of friends to one in the suburbs where kids are much less open-minded. Then he finds a janitor's closet in his middle school that's actually a magic hideaway. It's the best combination of realism (like the scenes with his close-knit Mexican American family) and fantasy (the whole magic-portal part).

### PET
*By Akwaeke Emezi*

Imagine a future where everything that's wrong has been fixed. No more school shootings. No racist laws. No abusers. That's the utopia that Jam, a Black trans girl, believes she's living in, along with everyone else in her town. But when Jam accidentally releases a clawed, horned creature out of a painting — that's Pet, by the way — she discovers that the evil "monsters" of the past are not so past. This one's a real mind-bender. (And it was on the Texas politician Matt Krause's list of suspect library books.)

### THE SECRET DIARY OF ADRIAN MOLE, AGED 13¾
*By Sue Townsend*

This British novel from the 1980s is written in the form of diary entries by an angsty teenager who tells the brutal, embarrassing truth about everything: his "spots" (those would be zits); his parents; his crush on Pandora, a girl at school. (Here's a poem he writes on her Valentine's Day card: "Pandora!/I adore ya!/I implore ye/Don't ignore me.") Soooo cringe — but in the best and most hilarious way.

### KEEPING IT REAL
*By Paula Chase*

When you first start reading about Mari, you're going to have major life envy. She's rich (her parents are hip-hop and fashion bigwigs) but also grounded and really close to her family. Think Blue Ivy Carter in a few years. Then Mari takes a summer internship at the family fashion biz and learns a truth that rocks her world. The book is fun and juicy, but it also packs an emotional punch.

### THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE: A MEMOIR (ADAPTED FOR YOUNG ADULTS)
*By Ta-Nehisi Coates*

Steel yourself for a book that makes you feel all the feels. In this memoir (sort of like an autobiography), Ta-Nehisi Coates recalls growing up in Baltimore in the 1980s and trying to figure out who he is. Coates is one of the most respected writers around, so the book will definitely impress your parents. But it's also just a great read about growing up.

### LAST GATE OF THE EMPEROR
*By Kwame Mbalia and Prince Joel Makonnen*

You know how, after playing hours of video games, you feel as if you're *inside* a game? That's the vibe from this sci-fi adventure set in a space colony called Addis Prime, where swarms of drones keep citizens in check. When Yared, an orphan and gifted gamer, enters a tournament for an augmented-reality game, it leads to galaxywide chaos. Expect bionic beasts, secret identities and action galore.

### THE TWENTY-ONE BALLOONS
*By William Pène du Bois*

Yes, your grandma probably loved this book as a child. But guess what: Your grandma has good taste! And this book still rules, even if it's almost 75 years old. Here's the plot: A newbie explorer is traveling around the world on a hot-air balloon when he crash-lands on an island that turns out to be occupied by the wealthiest, weirdest people on earth. If you're into travel, gadgets and swanky living, this is your jam.

### WAYSIDE SCHOOL BENEATH THE CLOUD OF DOOM
*By Louis Sachar*

All the books in the Wayside series are made up of short stories set at the strangest school ever. Thirty levels high, Wayside School is packed with kids doing things like collecting toenail clippings (it's for math) and eating "spaghetti and feetballs" in the cafeteria. And, in this installment, they're also wondering about that dark cloud hovering above the roof of the school. . . .

**Flowchart prompts:** Baking cookies. · A Marvel movie. · The ability to talk to animals. · Puppies. · Like what British kids call zits. · Adopt Me! · MeepCity. · The gaming videos. · Which game? · Tell me something I don't know. · Piggy. · Roblox. · TikTok and YouTube. · The cooking videos. · How do you feel about kissing? · Ew. · Witchcraft (but the good kind). · OK, what power would you rather have? · My ideal Saturday afternoon involves: · I'm so, so bored. · Entertain me, please. · What's your screen addiction? · Sure. · More supernatural school sagas, please. · Too dark and intense. · Like how to gut a fish. · I've already read everything! · No, they just want me off screens. · Life can be so ridiculous sometimes. · But I want my school drama to feel more real. · Awesome. · "Harry Potter" books are __. · My parents are forcing me to read. · Did they use the word "worthwhile"? · The dance videos. · Real as in . . . · I want to escape into a different world. · Yes. · Will they check? · The funny videos. · Life can be so heavy sometimes. · I can handle something a little deeper. · Meh. · I only read it for Ron and Hermione. · Through a magic portal. · What kind of funny? · Embarrassing. · Yes · I'm over magic. Give me a real-life adventure. · In a distant galaxy. · On a top-secret island. · Yep. · Does it have to be a "classic"? · Weird funny. · Not really.