

RECOMMENDED SCIENCE FICTION FOR USE AS A CLASSROOM TOOL  
compiled by science fiction writers

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We encourage you to read books on this list prior to assigning them or reading them aloud in class, as many science fiction novels deal frankly with difficult and controversial social issues.

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PICTURE BOOKS AND EARLY READERS

Anderson, Joan

*Richie's Rocket*

(All about weightlessness, communicating in space, and landing on the moon. Currently out of print, but available in libraries.)

Cecil, Laura

*Noah and the Space Ark*

(What if the Earth became too polluted to sustain life? This book talks about one way to save the plants and animals. An excellent introduction to environmental issues. Readily available.)

Fleischman, Paul

*Time Train*

(An historically accurate trip back in time, from the Civil War to dinosaurs. Readily available.)

Gaffney, Timothy and Root, Barry

*Grandpa Takes me to the Moon*

(A wonderful intro to and history of the Apollo moon missions. Currently out of print, but available in libraries.)

Getz, David and Rex, Michael

*Floating Home*

(A wonderful beginner's look at the nuts and bolts of space travel. Completely accurate and detailed information about traveling on the space shuttle, in terms 6-8 year olds can understand. Readily available.)

Weisner, David

*June 29, 1999*

(A hilarious discussion of what might happen if seeds from a high-altitude experiment fell to Earth. Readily available.)

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FOR MIDDLE-GRADERS and YOUNG TEENS:

Anderson, Kevin J. and Moesta, Rebecca

*Star Wars: Young Jedi Knights*

(While we tend to react negatively to media tie-ins, this series is written by an award-winning science fiction writer and his wife. They know their stuff and tell compulsively readable stories. Reluctant readers who love the *Star Wars* movies will find these books hard to resist. For similar reasons, we also recommend *The Rising Force*, first book of the *Star Wars: Jedi Apprentice* series, written by another award-winning SF writer, Dave Wolverton. Readily available.)

Applegate, K.A.

*The Message*

(What does it feel like to be an animal? In this first book of the *Animorphs* series, a group of kids gain the ability to change into animals and see the world from an entirely new point of view. The *Animorphs* series is very engaging, suspenseful, full of original ideas, and written in simple language. Highly recommended for reluctant readers. Readily available.)

Asimov, Isaac (writing as Paul French)

*David Starr, Space Ranger*

*Lucky Starr and the Pirates of the Asteroids*

*Lucky Starr and the Big Sun of Mercury*

*Lucky Starr and the Oceans of Venus*

*Lucky Starr and the Moons of Jupiter*

*Lucky Starr and the Rings of Saturn*

(In this series, originally written in the late '50's, Asimov uses then current knowledge of the solar system. In later editions, he has a preface explaining that the conditions are no longer accurate according to current knowledge, and discussing what has changed. These books are currently out of print, but most are still available in libraries.)

Bechard, Margaret

*Star Hatchling*

(Two human children cast away on an alien planet find out a lot about cultural differences, including how views of gender, facial expressions, food, and family can legitimately differ from what we're used to. Readily available.)

Bova, Ben

*The Dueling Machine*

(Suppose there were a machine that could be used to settle all human disputes, including wars? What would the ramifications be? Currently out of print, but still available in libraries.)

Christopher, John

*When the Tripods Came*

*The White Mountains*

*The City of Gold and Lead*

*The Pool of Fire*

(This series of novels set in a near-future in which aliens roam the Earth in gigantic machines and seize control of humans' minds at puberty can be used as a springboard for discussions of social behaviors and responsibilities as well as biology and ecology. Widely available.)

*Sword of the Spirits Trilogy*

(In this series, Christopher explores what-ifs concerning the physical and social after-effects of major ecological disaster. Currently out of print, but available in libraries.)

Coville, Bruce

*My Teacher is an Alien*

(This is the first book in a series about sixth graders struggling to derail an alien invasion of Earth. Coville has a wonderful talent for producing laughter while getting kids to think about ethical and other deep issues. Simple enough for reluctant readers, but engaging for readers at any level. It's hard to go wrong with any of Coville's books. Readily available.)

Engdahl, Sylvia Louise

*Children of the Star*

*Enchantress from the Stars*

*The Far Side of Evil*

(Excellent for sparking discussion about the definition of justice and related social issues. Availability varies from volume to volume.)

Etchemendy, Nancy

*The Power of Un*

(A book-length exploration of the paradoxes of time-travel, moral questions involved with changing the past, and cause and effect. VOYA says, "This book deserves a place on every middle school and public library shelf." Readily available.)

Farmer, Nancy

*The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*

(Grades 7-10. A somewhat lighthearted look at one possible future of Africa. Good springboard for discussions of third world societies, corporate ethics, and environmental issues. A Newbery Honor book. Readily available.)

Henderson, Zenna

*The People: No Different Flesh*

*Pilgrimage: the Book of the People*

(This brilliant series of short stories presupposes a large and scattered group of benign, kindly aliens shipwrecked in the western United States, who look like humans but aren't really. Useful for sparking discussions surrounding our definitions of "normal," and the penalties we impose on those who don't fit the mold. Early teens uncomfortable with their own bodies and new physical capabilities will find these tales especially resonant. Readily available.)

Hughes, Monica

*Beckoning Lights*

*Beyond the Dark River*

*The Crystal Drop*

*Invitation to the Game*

*The Other Place*

*Ring-rise, Ring-set*

*Space Trap*

*The Tomorrow City*

(The novels above are unrelated to each other; below are several that go together)

*Devil on My Back*

*The Dream Catcher*

*Crisis on Conshelf 10*

*Earthdark*

*The Keeper of the Isis Light*

*The Guardian of Isis*

*The Isis Pedlar*

(The Isis Trilogy is considered a classic; environmental issues play a big part in Hughes' work.)

L'Engle, Madeline

*A Wrinkle in Time*

(The Newbery Award winning first in an adored classic science fiction/ fantasy series that touches on everything from possible methods of faster-than-light travel to the nature of good and evil. Readily available.)

Lowry, Lois

*The Giver*

(How much freedom would you be willing to give up to live in a society where there is no poverty, no crime, no sickness and no unemployment, and where every family is happy, at least on the surface? These are the deep questions that face Lowry's 12-year-old protagonist in this modern science fiction classic. A Newbery Award winner. Readily available.)

Martel, Suzanne

*City Underground*

(A story about the effects of nuclear war that a fifth-grader can understand, and many teachers highly recommend. Currently out of print, but available in libraries.)

Mason, Anne

*The Dancing Meteorite*

*The Stolen Law*

(A two-part novel about alien languages and the difficulties of communicating in a foreign culture. Currently out of print, but available in libraries.)

McCaffrey, Anne

*Dragonsong; Dragonsinger; Dragondrums*

(McCaffrey's Pern books are set on an alien planet where huge "dragon" lizards are native and abundant. Strong female heroines face challenges, some of which are based on aspects of science, and some of which are based on cultural biases. Highly engaging. Readily available.)

Murphy, Pat

*There and Back Again*

(Grades 7 and up. A wild journey across the galaxy. This is a scientifically accurate, rollicking space adventure, great for persuading Star Wars' fans that there are other books worth reading. Readily available in hardcover and paperback.)

*Wild Angel*

(Grades 7 and up. An action-adventure book for girls. Young Sarah McKensie is adopted by wolves in Gold Rush California. Accurate descriptions of wolf biology and California history. Available in hardcover.)

Nix, Garth

*Shade's Children*

(Grades 7-10. In the world of *Shade's Children*, your 14th birthday is your last. 14-year-olds are harvested by the "Overlords," and their body tissues used in the creation of beasts designed to fight wars. This book deals with questions of authoritarian government and the ethics of organ harvesting. If you know kids who loved the movie, *The Matrix*, and are looking for a book reminiscent of it -- and more edifying -- this is a good one to recommend. Readily available.)

O'Brien, Robert

*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*

(What if experimental rats and mice could talk? What might they have to say about the importance of science, animal rights, and other moral questions laboratory scientists face? Much food for thought. Readily available.)

Rubinstein, Gillian

*Galex-Arena*

(Grades 7-10. A chillingly real coming of age story about human children kidnapped by aliens to be trained as dare-devil entertainers for a species that thrives on vicarious danger. This powerful book is hard to put down. Deals with crucial issues surrounding the tyrannizing effects of power. Currently out of print, but available in libraries.)

Schusterman, Neal

*The Dark Side of Nowhere*

(Grades 6-9. Suppose you found out that you and your parents were aliens, part of an advance force whose job is to lead the overthrow of Earth and all things human? A good companion for discussions of totalitarian government and the youth-based organizations they sometimes employ to help reach their objectives, ie. the Nazi Youth and The Wave, as well as the larger matter of what it means to be human. Readily available.)

Stevermer, Caroline

*River Rats*

(Echoes of Huckleberry Finn abound in this post-nuclear holocaust novel set on a dilapidated riverboat on the toxic Mississippi River. A good companion for discussions of the probable after-effects of nuclear war. Readily available.)

Yolen, Jane

*The Devil's Arithmetic*

(A young Jewish girl from America travels back in time and through space to Auschwitz. A harrowing and clear-eyed social commentary. Readily available.)

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#### FOR HIGH SCHOOL and YOUNG ADULTS

Barnes, John

*Orbital Resonance*

(A brilliant coming-of-age story set inside a cargo spaceship made from a hollowed-out asteroid. A starting point for discussions about everything from environmental disaster to the ethics of psychological manipulation. Readily available.)

Bradbury, Ray

*Fahrenheit 451*

(In this science fiction classic, it is a crime to read or own books, or to think and act independently. Excellent for discussions of censorship, totalitarian societies, and the means they employ to control citizens. Readily available.)

Card, Orson Scott

*Ender's Game*

(An intelligent and beautifully written book that addresses not only the technical aspects of space travel, but also the ethics of war and the extinction of species. This book holds a lot of appeal for youngsters fascinated with computers and computer gaming and the roles these inventions might play in future wars. The first in a series of four books, all equally deep, intelligent, and ethically informed. Readily available.)

Frank, Pat

*Alas Babylon*

(Though this book was written in the 1960's, it is still relevant in light of current concerns about ecology and the use of tactical nuclear weapons. The highly personal account of a small town's battle to survive after a nuclear war, this book is a recognized classic of the nuclear disaster subgenre. Useful for any study of the psychology of the Cold War or the ecological effects of nuclear holocaust. Readily available.)

Gould, Steven

*Wildside*

(If you were suddenly in control of a vast tract of unspoiled, resource-rich land, how would you choose to use it? That's the question facing this book's 18-year-old protagonist when he discovers a secret gate to a parallel world in which the state of Texas is pristine. Good for discussions of ecological issues. Readily available.)

Huxley, Aldous

*Brave New World*

(Huxley wrote this book in the late 1930's, and some of its moral tenets will seem quaint to today's teens. But many of the questions addressed here are still of vital concern. Why is population growth an important issue? What are the ethics of trying to control it? And is it possible--or desirable--to completely divorce ourselves from nature? Readily available.)

Le Guin, Ursula

*The Dispossessed*

(Anarchy is a hot topic among today's high school students. But could anarchy actually work as a form of government? In this classic piece of political science fiction, Le Guin creates just such a society, brilliantly exploring the practical implications of anarchy. Readily available.)

*The Left Hand of Darkness*

(Set on a bizarre planet whose inhabitants must switch genders several times during their lives. A great springboard for lively discussions of gender and sexual-orientation issues. Readily available.)

Miller, Walter

*A Canticle for Leibowitz*

(The classic, definitive post-nuclear holocaust story. Written in the 1950's, this book has been around for a long time, but it's still as fresh and convincing now as it was then. Mesmerizing and thought-provoking. Readily available.)

Robinson, Kim Stanley

*Red Mars*

*Green Mars*

*Blue Mars*

(Meticulously researched books outlining a highly possible colonization scenario for Mars. Chock full of facts about the planet, and what living there might require; but also an astute analysis of the likely politics. Readily available.)

Shelley, Mary

*Frankenstein*

(This book is traditionally thought of as horror, but in fact, its core concerns involve humanity's indiscriminate use of science and technology. Is it right to do something simply because we are able to? What happens when technology gets out of control? Teenaged readers may also be interested in the fact that Shelley was only 17 years old when she wrote it. Readily available.)

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## RECOMMENDED WEB SITES

*Science Fiction and Fantasy for Children: an annotated bibliography for educators*  
<http://libnt1.lib.uoguelph.ca/SFBib/index.htm>

*The Golden Duck Awards for Excellence in Science Fiction for Young Readers*  
<http://www.goldenduck.org/>