

Reader's Guide for New Adults

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LIBS 647: Reading and Literature for Adult Library Patrons

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July 16, 2023

Target Audience

Although the media casts college students as devotees to only social media, recreational reading is an incredibly central part of their lives. In 2014, the Pew Research Center found that “88 percent of Americans under 30 read a book in the past year, compared with 79% of those age 30 and older” (Zickuhr & Rainie, para 6). While Americans under 30 are just as likely to use libraries as those over 30 (50% versus 47%), they access the library website more often (36% versus 28%) (Zickuhr & Rainie, para 8). Despite this, 36% of Americans under 30 say that they know “little to nothing about the local library’s services” (Zickuhr & Rainie, para 9). However, they still believe that libraries are “warm, welcoming places” that are easy to interact with (Zickuhr & Rainie, para 9). Because of this information about younger readers, I chose to create a reader’s guide for traditional college students in the age range of 18-25, often referred to as “new adults.”

In the first discussion board for this class, a large number of students said that their recreational reading slowed down or stopped while they attended college (Duncan, 2023; Heidelberger, 2023; Neher, 2023). The goal of this reader’s guide and display is to bring college students back to the library to check out recreational books. In a study by Gilbert and Fister (2011), 93% of students in their sample said that they enjoy recreational reading (p. 478). However, they found that “lack of time” is the largest barrier to reading for students. 77.1% of students said they “already have enough reading for class,” and 31.2% said they’d rather spend their limited free time in other ways (Gilbert & Fister, 2011, p. 482). When it comes to cultivating a collection for new adults, it is important to focus on book length when thinking about when students will have time to read.

In a 2022 Wattpad study, Gen Z respondents, the current college-aged population, reported that 55% read once a week or more and 40% read every day (Wattpad, 2022, para 7). Although it is often assumed that Gen Z are primarily digital readers, a majority prefer physical books. Baron (2023) says, “A number of Gen Z readers are citing digital eye strain as

something print books give them relief from” (para 9). Only 14% of Gen Z’s book sales last year were eBooks (Baron, 2023, para 8). These new adults, in an attempt to avoid giving money to major online retailers, have a “strong support for independent bookstores and libraries” (Baron, 2023, para 10). 79% of Gen Z respondents say that diversity and representation are some of the most important aspects when it comes to their choice of books, topping millennials’ 66% desire for diversity (Baron, 2023, para 4). Recreational reading, especially recreational fiction, helps students by providing space for readers to build more understanding and empathy for diverse characters and communities far from their own life experiences (Dewan, 2013, p. 312). In addition to book length, physical book formats and diversity of characters and content are also important when creating a collection.

When building a collection to meet college students’ wants and needs, looking at the genre of new adult fiction is a perfect place to start. New adult fiction is defined as “narratives that explore the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood” that is “typically aimed towards readers aged 18-25,” which is my target age group (Peraza-Brown, n.d., para 5). This genre covers “moving away from home for the first time; starting higher education; deeper exploration of sexual experiences, identity and gender; establishing careers; [and] figuring out relationships - familial, platonic and romantic,” (Peraza-Brown, n.d., para 8). All of these experiences are incredibly relevant to college students’ lives.

This is very applicable to the Norfolk, Virginia area. Within the city, there are two universities, Old Dominion University (ODU) and Norfolk State University (NSU), and one community college, Tidewater Community College (TCC). ODU has a student population of about 25,000, NSU enrolls almost 6,000 students, and TCC has about 25,000 students (Norfolk State University, 2022; Old Dominion University, 2023; Tidewater Community College, 2023). While not all of these students are within the 18- to 25-year-old demographic, especially at TCC, this still shows the large number of college students that makes up the Norfolk community.

For this collection, I recommend physical new adult books that are a maximum of about 350 pages. Hopefully, having this as a maximum length will prevent books on the display from looking too intimidating. Diversity is also necessary for this collection. Out of the twelve selected books, five feature at least one BIPOC as a main character and seven feature at least one LGBTQIA+ main character. Along with the physical copies of the books, though, there will be eBook versions available through OverDrive. Even though Gen Z statistically prefers physical books, for many college students, being able to read an eBook on their tablet or phone makes reading more accessible.

Recommended Books

Carmack, C. (2013). *Losing it*. William Morrow Paperbacks.

Losing It (189 pages) is a new adult novel about a college student who, after backing out of a one-night-stand in an attempt to lose her virginity, finds out that her prospective partner is her new theater professor. This book, published in 2013, is one of the originals of the new adult genre. It focuses on themes of building relationships and exploring sexuality.

Danler, S. (2016). *Sweetbitter*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Sweetbitter (356 pages) tells the story of a 22-year-old who moves to New York City and begins to work in the restaurant industry. As she explores the city through food and drugs, the main character finds herself in a love triangle. Many college students are experiencing a move to a new city and different kinds of relationships. Working in the world of food service is one also of the most common jobs for college students. The book focuses on a relatable hunger for “knowledge, experience, and belonging” (Goodreads, n.d.b).

Hoover, C. (2012). *Slammed*. Atria Books.

In the wake of her father's death, *Slammed's* (354 pages) 18-year-old protagonist is attempting to be a rock for her family. When she meets her new neighbor, a 21-year-old slam poet, the two fall into an intense love affair. *Slammed* covers issues of grief, familial relationships, and first love. The author, Colleen Hoover, is also incredibly popular in the new adult and adult fiction genres.

Kann, C. (2018). *Let's talk about love*. Square Fish.

Let's Talk About Love (304 pages) focuses on a biromantic, asexual, Black protagonist during the summer between her freshman and sophomore years of college. The book is about growing comfortable in your sexuality, coming out, navigating the dating world while asexual, how friendships are affected by romantic relationships, and the difficulties of choosing your own path when your family has other expectations of you. The book serves as either a much-needed mirror or window that encapsulates the college experience from an identity that doesn't often get a voice.

Kwon, R. O. (2018). *The incendiaries*. Riverhead Books.

The Incendiaries (214 pages) is a story with a darker tone. The love affair between two Korean American college students comes to a halt when one is seduced into a religious extremist cult. As the female protagonist becomes more deeply involved in the cult, her boyfriend desperately tries to get her out. Although this storyline is very unlike the other books, it still features an exploration of relationships, even in the face of great odds. *The Incendiaries* also a great choice for students looking for something darker than a typical college romance.

Melendez, J. (author), Brine, D. (illustrator), Jones, H. (colorist), & Otsmane-Elhaou, H.

(letterer). (2022) *Chef's kiss*. Oni Press.

Chef's Kiss (160 pages) is a graphic novel featuring a queer college graduate who takes a job at a restaurant after he is unable to find a job related to his English degree. This

focuses on the incredibly common difficulty of finding a post-grad job, finding your path, falling in love, and trying to maintain college friendships.

Rio, M. L. (2017). *If we were villains*. Flatiron Books.

If We Were Villains (354 pages) is a dark academia novel featuring a close-knit group of seven actors studying Shakespeare at a small college. Their intense friendships are put to the test after one of the seven is murdered, leaving the other six are the only suspects. Two of the main characters of the book are queer. This book focuses on the complexity of friendships in a uniquely written mystery perfect for college students who like a twisted story.

Rogers, M. (2021). *Honey girl*. Park Row Books.

Honey Girl (283 pages) is a coming of age story that takes place post-college, when the queer, Black protagonist is 28 and has just completed her PhD program. In a classic Vegas accident, the protagonist ends up married to an Asian American woman who she barely knows. While figuring out this relationship, she also needs to examine if she is on the right path, or if she's just doing what her father wants. A Vegas marriage provides an interesting backdrop for finding yourself, learning to communicate with family, and building a relationship from a very odd square one.

Taylor, B. (2020). *Real life*. Riverhead Books.

Real Life (329 pages) is about a queer Black college student who moves from Alabama to the Midwest. Because of a complicated childhood, the protagonist has a difficult time being open with the men he calls his friends, until an event "conspire[s] to fracture his defenses while exposing long-hidden currents of hostility and desire within their community" (Goodreads, n.d.a). This story confronts the trauma of the past, the experience of moving and starting again, and the work it takes to build friendships.

Ukazu, N. (2018). *Check, please! Book 1: #Hockey*. First Second.

Check, Please! (288 pages) is a graphic novel about a Georgian baker, vlogger, and figure skating champion who moves to a small Massachusetts college and joins their hockey team. The protagonist embraces his queer identity and comes out to the team, making true friends for the first time, and grapples with his crush on the team captain. This popular graphic novel format gives students a different way to experience stories.

Webber, T. (2012). *Easy*. Berkley Trade.

Easy (336 pages) is another early classic of the new adult genre. In this book, a college student struggles to connect with the boy she has always had a crush on after she is sexually assaulted. This is an experience that is unfortunately incredibly common for college students, and this book gives the readers a character to connect with a story that may provide some relatability or comfort.

Wood, M. (2021). *Fresh*. Henry N. Abrams.

Fresh (352 pages) is about a lesbian college freshman who would much rather party, make friends, and have sex than go to class. When reality strikes in the form of finals, though, the protagonist must start trying to find her path and perhaps start a real relationship. This coming of age story reflects the experiences of college students who have no idea what their futures may look like.

Display

The books will be displayed on a three-tiered table, an example of which is seen in Appendix A. This table will be at the front of the library where there is a lot of foot traffic. If college students do not have much time to spend in the library, this display will still catch their attention immediately. The poster featured in Appendix B will be on the top tier of the display table. This poster is eye-catching and unique, and it clearly states the theme of the display (*Quick reads for college students!*) in a bright, clear font.

I divided the twelve books into four categories, so readers have even more assistance when it comes to choosing books. The categories are as follows:

Charming Graphic Novels: *Check, Please!*, *Chef's Kiss*

RomDrams: *Easy*, *Slammed*

Flirts & Friends: *Fresh*, *Honey Girl*, *Let's Talk About Love*, *Losing It*

Darker Dramas: *If We Were Villains*, *The Incendiaries*, *Real Life*, *Sweetbitter*

Each grouping of books will have a small sign to signify the sub-genre, of which one example is displayed in Appendix C. Charming Graphic Novels and RomDrams will be on the middle shelf, and Flirts & Friends and Darker Dramas will make up the bottom shelf. My aim is to allow students to look for interesting books without having to spend too much time hunting for them.

The ultimate goal of this project is to have students check out both something from the display and possibly something else in the library. While the display is designed for quick picks, I hope that an interesting book make students want to look around the library for something similar. The display will be within view of the circulation desk, which will make it easier if students decide to ask for assistance. However, I do not want to exclude students who prefer to read digitally. The twelve books will also be available on OverDrive in eBook format. In order to guide students toward OverDrive, in case they do not realize that the library has online services, I made a flier with the website information, shown in Appendix D. These fliers will be stacked on the display table.

Conclusion

College students in the 18-25 year age range often disappear from the library while they're in school. This is very understandable considering their increased workload and the opportunities for socialization (Gilbert & Fister, 2011, p. 482). However, reading can be a good form of escapism for college students during stressful days, and it builds cultural empathy that

helps when meeting new people (Dewan, 2013, p. 312). This reader's guide and display aims to keep college students interested in going to and coming back to libraries, so they still have the gift of recreational reading in their lives.

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Appendix A

Display Example



@EZuelow. (2018). 8. *This librarian who will never get around to finishing this display* [Photograph]. BuzzFeed. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/pablovaldivia/librarians-who-deserve-a-raise>

Appendix B

“Quick Reads for College Students!” Poster



Pendrick, K. (2023). "Quick reads for college students!" Poster [Flier]. CC BY NC SA.

Appendix C

Example Label Sign



Pendrick, K. (2023). *Example label sign* [Flier]. CC BY NC SA.

