

Top 10 coming of age stories

1. [The Catcher in the Rye](#) by JD Salinger

I mean, c'mon. Isn't this the most quintessential coming of age story of all time? The second I finished it, at 16 years old, I started re-reading it. I think, to some, it's become such a cliché to talk about this book and how it has influenced one's life. But, for me, it was about being able to truly identify with a character for the first time. Holden Caulfield's journey to find himself, to see the world as the innocent place he once viewed it as a child, raises so many questions about growing up and changing. I would say that every single thing I have written or will ever write is in some way a result of having read this book as a teenager.

2. [The Perks of Being a Wallflower](#) Stephen Chbosky

I found this book shortly after I'd read *Catcher* for the first time and it meant just as much to me – to have a character speak my truths and emotions so well was such a turning point in my life. I guess if *Catcher* opened up in me that desire to figure out the world, this book encouraged me to try and figure it out through storytelling. *Perks* was also the first book I ever read with a homosexual character, which, for a closeted kid in a conservative Louisiana town, was pretty damn monumental. I think a piece of my heart will always belong to Patrick and I know a piece of it belongs to Mr Chbosky.

3. *Side Effects May Vary* by Julie Murphy

This is a newer book written by one of my favorite people, so I'm a little biased, but it's that good. And it's about second chances, which is my favorite thing. Julie Murphy is a genius, plain and simple. She weaves together two stories, told in past and present by two different narrators (Alice and Harvey). I write a lot about coping with loss and how loss affects relationships, so this story really hit home for me. It's funny too, which is always a plus. The balance of wit and emotional storytelling in this one is really quite breathtaking.

4. [To Kill a Mockingbird](#) by Harper Lee

There are no words to describe how much I love this book. The perfect combination of heart, humour, and purpose. And one of the best narrative voices in literature. There are certain books that every author wishes he or she had written, I think this is one of those for me. Harper Lee balanced southern charm with the brutality of racism and classism in a way that I'm not sure anyone will ever be able to recreate. When I was a teacher, I taught this book and I'll never forget the way my students reacted to it upon first reading. I envy anyone who gets to experience it for the first time.

5. [Winger](#) by Andrew Smith

This book is one of many reasons to be obsessed with Andrew Smith. It's about a rugby player, which I care nothing about, and a boarding school, which I know nothing about. But I loved every page. There's also something appealing and automatically mysterious about a story that takes place at a boarding school – this land where there are no parents, only teachers and peers. And Smith tells his story with such manic humor and graphic detail that you can barely blink while you're reading, much less be immune to the sucker-punch of an ending.

6. [Ready Player One](#) by Ernest Cline

The Catcher in the Rye and Star Wars had a baby: it's this book. And what I love most about this book is that despite its elaborate, sci-fi plot, it is, at its core, a realistic portrayal of a poor kid trying to change his life and figure out the world. Sometimes my favorite stories are the ones that seem much larger than they really are.

7. [Counting By 7s](#) by Holly Goldberg Sloan

This is one of the most charming books I've ever read and tells such a sweet story that breaks your heart and then rebuilds it. Holly Goldberg Sloan has a penchant for telling stories about makeshift families and people who unite to save one another (you'd also love her book [I'll Be There](#)). Through the loss of her parents, gifted Willow must find a place in a world that has left her seemingly all alone. The best part about this book is that every warm fuzzy feeling it gives you is completely realistic.

8. [The Giver](#) by Lois Lowry

The ultimate story of individuality in the face of conformity – I think everyone reads this book in school for a very good reason. And, despite the dystopian setting and futuristic sway, I think Lowry paints a simple, but elegant portrait of teenage angst in this book, exploring that early adolescent confusion about the real world that some coming of age stories skip over.

9. King Dork by Frank Portman

This book is so funny AND it has band names, absurd ones. What I love most about this book is that Tom, the main character, goes on and on about how he hates *The Catcher in the Rye* and the cult of followers it has, but, in several ways, Tom is just a modern day Holden Caulfield. To be a book that I remember as mostly humorous, there is also a very sweet relationship between Tom and his deceased father, wherein Tom finds and reads his dad's collection of books, many of which are coming of age novels (including *Catcher*).

10. Grasshopper Jungle by Andrew Smith

Andrew Smith is the king of ranting teenage angst and I love every word of it. This book deals with sexuality in a way that I will never forget, exploring the main character's love for his girlfriend and his male best friend. Plus, there are man-eating, sex-obsessed giant mutant bugs that are taking over the world AND dancing to The Rolling Stones in an underground survival shelter. Why would you need any more reason to read this book?