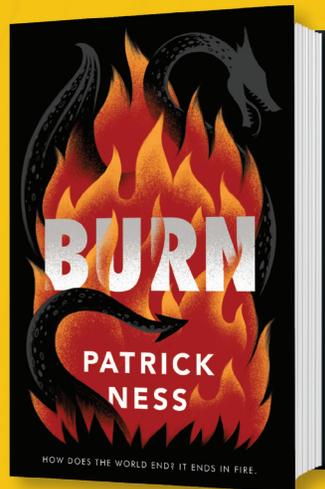
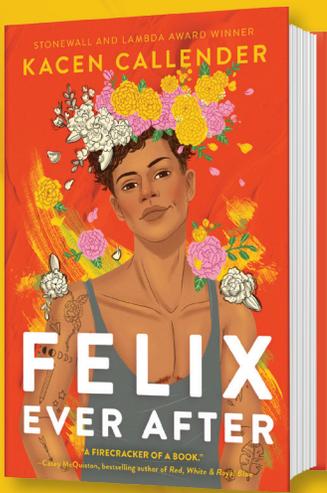


GREAT PICKS FOR YOUR *Teen Book Club*



Featuring booktalks, thematic discussion questions, and tips on how to run a successful book club for teens!



FELIX EVER AFTER

by Kacen Callender

BOOKTalk

When seventeen-year-old Felix Love isn't worrying about his less-than-stellar grades, an impossibly competitive spot at Brown University, and an utter lack of inspiration for his art portfolio, he laments the fact that he's never been in love. He wants to know why it seems so easy for everyone but him to find someone. What's worse is that, despite being fiercely proud of his identity as queer, Black, and trans, he secretly worries that he might be one marginalized too many to be seen as worthy of love at all. As if this isn't more than enough pressure, an anonymous gallery at school and transphobic messages on Instagram send Felix reeling into a revenge spiral that unexpectedly lands him in a quasi-love triangle . . . and has him questioning everything, even himself.

QUESTIONS FOR *Group Discussion*

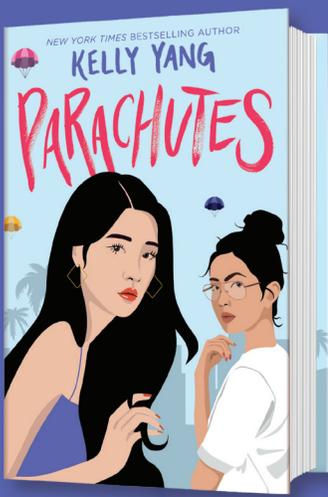
IDENTITY. When the Instagram troll starts sending Felix transphobic messages, Felix responds by saying “you [don't] get to say who I am and who I'm not. You don't have that power. Only I [do]” (pg. 144). Why is this true? What parts of ourselves do only we have the power to define? How does this power relate to other areas of Felix's identity and sense of self where others' views seem to matter more—the quality of his art, getting into Brown, being lovable?

PARENTS. Felix has a complicated relationship with his parents. His dad has made efforts to support Felix's transition and art aspirations, yet he won't use Felix's name and even deadnames him sometimes. Felix's mother is entirely absent, having left Felix behind for a new life and family, but Felix writes her hundreds of unsent emails about the very things he cannot talk about with anyone else. How do you see Felix's parents or his relationship with them impacting his choices and the way he sees himself? What about other characters and their parents? How do parents or parental figures influence you and how you make decisions?

MONEY. What role do money and wealth—both access to it and lack of it—play in the novel? Felix calls out both friends and enemies on the privilege that wealth affords them; he tells Ezra that he's wasting the opportunities that wealth and talent afford him, and he tells Declan that he is selfish to apply for a scholarship when he already has money. Do you agree with Felix? How might Felix's angst about worthiness connect to money and class?

COMMUNITY. What are some of the ways it appears in the novel? What are some of Felix's communities? Does he feel like he belongs in all of them? Why or why not? Think about the communities in your own life. Did you choose to be a part of them? What impact do they have on you? What does it mean for a community to be supportive?

LABELS. When the group is discussing their sexual identities, Ezra says he doesn't care much about labels but acknowledges that they might be important to others. He wonders “if there were no straight people, no violence or abuse or homophobia or anything, would we even need labels...?” (pg. 81) What do labels offer people in the face of discrimination and violence? Why might they matter? What are some of the labels that feature in the book, and why are they important for Felix and other characters? How do you use labels in your own life? Which are the most important to you and why?



PARACHUTES

by Kelly Yang

BOOK *Talk*

They're called parachutes: teenagers dropped off to live in private homes and study in the United States while their wealthy parents remain in Asia. Claire Wang never thought she'd be one of them, until her parents pluck her from her privileged life in Shanghai and enroll her at a high school in California.

Suddenly she finds herself living in a stranger's house, with no one to tell her what to do for the first time in her life. She soon embraces her newfound freedom, especially when the hottest and most eligible parachute, Jay, asks her out.

Dani De La Cruz, Claire's new host sister, couldn't be less thrilled that her mom rented out a room to Claire. An academic and debate team star, Dani is determined to earn her way into Yale, even if it means competing with privileged kids who are buying their way to the top. But Dani's game plan veers unexpectedly off course when her debate coach starts working with her privately.

As they steer their own distinct paths, Dani and Claire keep crashing into one another, setting a course that will change their lives forever.

QUESTIONS FOR *Group Discussion*

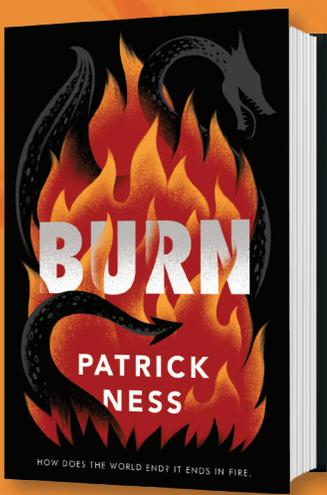
POWER. Describe the many ways the issue of power arises in both Claire's and Dani's lives. Who are the figures of power in Claire's life? Who holds power in Dani's life? What does Claire mean when she says, "Here we go again, life by committee" (p. 10)? Who does Claire think lives a "life by committee"? How do both girls find ways to channel their own power? What do they do with it? How do various power dynamics impact the way both girls deal with assault and harassment?

WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE. Claire and all the other parachutes live in a world steeped in riches and privilege. Though the parachutes do not have the comfort of their Chinese family and friends, they have many riches that provide power, strength, and security in their place. What aspects of the lives of the parachutes surprised you? Dani also must deal with wealth and privilege, though her experiences are very different from those of her more affluent classmates. How does her relationship with privilege and wealth differ from that of the parachutes?

FRIENDSHIP. Deep loyalty among friends is interwoven throughout the chapters. When both Dani and Claire are in trouble or need a friend to talk to, both girls have friends they can lean on and who come running to their side. What do you learn about friendship through Dani and Ming? What characteristics do you see that blossom through and because of their friendship? What do you learn about friendship through Claire's group of friends, Jess, Florence, and Nancy? How do they uniquely rely on one another as parachutes?

INSECURITY AND SECURITY. Dani relies heavily on her talents to secure her spot for the Snider competition, which allows high ranking debate students to compete for scholarships to prestigious universities such as Yale. Why do you think Dani desires the financial security of a scholarship? What makes her wish for better outcomes through a college education? Despite her talent, she wrestles with imposter syndrome, and the feeling of not being good enough. For Claire, who does she seek security from throughout the book? What insecurities does Claire leave behind in China? What security does she leave behind as well?

INDEPENDENCE. Dani, a first-generation student, has always solved her own school issues. How does Dani take it upon herself to prepare and travel for debate competitions on her own? Why does Dani feel as though she owes it to her mom to be successful? On the other hand, Claire has been forced into independence, living across the ocean from her family, friends, and the comfort of her home. In what ways does Claire show independence at school? What obstacles does she overcome in her studies after her initial arrival to the U.S.?



BURN

by Patrick Ness

BOOK *Talk*

Dragons and humans have coexisted for centuries, but the truce has been uneasy at times. When Sarah Dewhurst's father hires a dragon named Kazimir to work on their farm, she has no idea that her family, and the entire world, are about to become part of the culmination of an ages-old prophecy. Under the influence of the leader of a dragon-worshipping cult, Malcolm makes his way from Canada to fulfill the prophecy by confronting, and possibly killing, Sarah. The only problem is that when everything seems to come to fruition, absolutely nothing goes as anyone expected, especially in the eyes of Kazimir and the leader of the cult.

QUESTIONS FOR *Group Discussion*

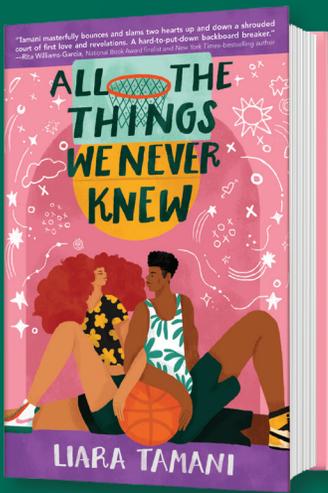
POWER. Almost every aspect of *Burn* relates to power in some way, whether it's the power to fulfill a prophecy (Malcolm), the power to intimidate and hurt (Deputy Kelby), the power of being a dragon—"How could they live day by day with this, this power, and not use it?" (pg. 241). What other forms of power do you see at work within the novel? What is the driving force behind these acts of power or the desire for power? How do you understand the concept of power in your own life or in the world around you? Is it possible to keep power in check when some people seem to have so much of it?

PREJUDICE. Prejudice comes in many forms. Sarah's father claims that dragons have no soul—"An animal without a soul is still an animal, no matter how many words it's learned to lie with" (pg. 3)—and Deputy Kelby repeatedly targets Sarah because of her skin color, "so much darker than her father's, so much lighter than her dearly departed mother's" (pg. 3). How else does prejudice show up throughout the narrative? How does Ness push back against various forms of prejudice through different characters and scenarios?

PURPOSE. Malcolm feels that his entire existence is pre-determined—the terms "purpose" and "destiny" show up throughout the narrative—at least until he meets and falls for Nelson. And Sarah is regularly referenced as a necessary part of the prophecy—"The prophecy had told of a girl who would save the world" (pg. 219)—though nobody in the text seems to quite understand how. When you think about "purpose" or "destiny," how do you see such concepts play out among other characters in the book? What about in your own life? Do you consider your life path to embody a particular purpose?

PERSPECTIVE. Perspective is a pretty broad topic, to be sure, but varying perspectives complicate and bring complexity to the world and the relationships at the heart of Ness's book, from the differences in perspective between the Mitera Thea and Kazimir, to the differences in perspective between Sarah and Darlene in the parallel world. How do differing perspectives bring necessary depth and breadth to the understanding of complicated life events? How do you deal with differing perspectives when you come across them in your own life? How do you reconcile these differences to create your own perspective?

RELATIONSHIPS. Relationships of all kinds—familial, romantic, platonic—develop and change within the heart of this story. Malcolm and Nelson find each other in a world intent on defining their love as deviant. Sarah and Jason develop a relationship in the face of overt racism and discrimination from Deputy Kelby. Consider these and other relationships within the narrative and think about how they are mirrored in your own world, or how they diverge from your own experience. Think about how social perspectives have changed and how they continue to reinforce ideas of what is considered "normal" in society.



ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER KNEW

by Liara Tamani

BOOK *Talk*

For Carli and Rex, two Black Texas high schoolers whose futures in basketball look bright, it's love at first sight. Their intense feelings after just one encounter on a basketball court convince them that they are destined to be together, and they quickly come to depend on the happiness they feel together. But while they seem like a perfect match, staying together is not so easy. The family situations they each want to avoid and the things they can't love about themselves stand in the way of their closeness. After uncertainty, misunderstandings, betrayal, and anger strain their relationship, can they find their way back together again? And more importantly, how will their lives change if they each can accept themselves before looking to others for love?

QUESTIONS FOR *Group Discussion*

LOVE. Carli's mom tells her that "love is not just some feeling;" that "there's a deep responsibility to it, and a deep trust. And no matter how your dad *feels*, he's failed to love me." (pg. 274) What does it mean to love someone when love is seen as an action rather than a feeling? Do people treat romantic love and other forms of love (for examples, platonic and familial love) differently? Do you think Carli and Rex are better at some forms of love than others? When do they succeed at loving others, and when do they fail?

SELF-LOVE. When Carli's mom mentions loving herself, Carli thinks, "I wish I knew what that felt like. I don't even know myself. How can I love what I don't even know?" (pg. 275) Do you think it is possible to love yourself before you understand yourself? How does Carli's opinion about this change over time? When Rex breaks up with Carli, he says he can't keep trying to figure her out. Do you believe her internal struggles are to blame for their relationship problems? How do Rex's struggles to love himself affect his relationships—with Carli, with his father, and with the world?

HONESTY, TRUST, AND FORGIVENESS. Carli keeps secrets from Rex—about her family and about herself—telling herself she can't share because she is not ready to face the facts herself. Do you think she had an obligation to be completely open and honest right away, or was Rex expecting too much, based on his own need for closeness? When she discovers her father's secret, Carli is angry with him for keeping it from her. Do you agree with her mom that Carli has to forgive him and work it out because he's her father? Which relationships require forgiveness, and which ones can't be repaired once trust is broken?

EMOTIONAL PAIN AND CRUELTY. Carli's mean behavior when Rex visits her at home and Rex's outburst at the championship both come from a place of emotional pain. Is bad behavior that is rooted in pain more excusable than bad behavior that's simply inconsiderate? How can people become self-aware, to avoid lashing out at those they care about? Do you think Carli and Rex learn from their mistakes?

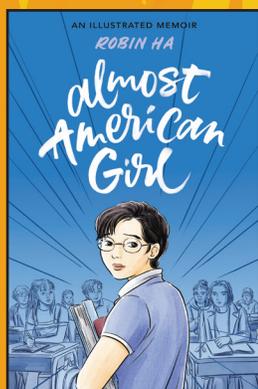
SOCIAL MEDIA. What role does social media play in Rex and Carli's love story? If this were real life, would this be fine, or over the line? Rex admits his behavior is a bit stalker-like. If Carli didn't share his feelings, this would be a different story. Do we feel differently about the exact same actions depending on the circumstances? Do the ends justify the means in the world of digital morality? What do you think about the video of Rex yelling at Carli that is shared online? Do you admire his ability to get back in the game after the online world judged him?

More discussion-worthy titles for your book group...

NOT SO PURE AND SIMPLE by Lamar Giles

★ “A compelling story of young people sorting through conflicting messages and social pressures around sexuality and relationships. Powerful.”

—School Library Journal (starred review)



ALMOST AMERICAN GIRL by Robin Ha

★ “With unblinking honesty and raw vulnerability... [and] presented in full-color splendor, her energetic style mirrors the constant motion of her adolescent self, navigating the peripatetic turbulence toward adulthood.”

—ALA Booklist (starred review)

RED HOOD by Elana K. Arnold

★ “At once a sharp critique of male entitlement and a celebration of sisterhood and feminine power, this story will linger with readers long after the final page.”

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)



IF THESE WINGS COULD FLY by Kyrie McCauley

“A hauntingly intense tale thrumming with hope! A stunning, powerful debut.”

—Tiffany D. Jackson,
award-winning author of
Monday's Not Coming



STAY GOLD by Tobly McSmith

★ “A necessary read that favors compassion and understanding. A first choice for all high school and young adult collections.”

—School Library Journal (starred review)

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING A *Book Group for Teens*

The fastest way to advertise is through word of mouth. Social media accounts run by the grown-ups are only successful in starting a book group or promoting your event if you have teens sharing your posts. Recruit a few enthusiastic readers who are willing to get things started!

Give teens options and let them decide.
Pull a list of potential books and share information about them with your readers.

Come prepared with a few good questions, but let them drive the discussion. Begin each meeting by letting the teens introduce themselves and share their thoughts and initial impressions about the book. Let their conversation about the book start organically and use the questions if and when you need them.

Don't be afraid of silence. It can be scary to speak up for the first time—especially if you're new to the group—so don't feel the need to fill the silence with chatter. The quiet gives them some time to think about how to answer a question you offered or to build up the courage to say something.

Be ready with information about the next book club selection before they leave!