

The Big List of Great Books for High School Students Wishing To Improve their SAT or ACT Scores

Sports & Athletics

- **Baseball: *Calico Joe* by John Grisham** (Fiction)
Grisham is famous for his accessible but captivating adult fiction. This is a touching, fast-paced novel about a rising baseball star, a devastating pitch, and a father-son relationship. It reads quickly but deals with mature themes of forgiveness.
- **Soccer: *Out of Nowhere* by Maria Padian** (Fiction)
This YA novel follows a high school soccer captain in Maine whose town—and team—is transformed by an influx of Somali refugees. It's an excellent, moderately challenging read that explores cultural integration, sportsmanship, and community.
- **Dancing: *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Ballerina* by Michaela DePrince** (Non-fiction)
A memoir of a young girl who grew up in an orphanage in war-torn Sierra Leone and eventually became a premier ballerina. The narrative is highly engaging, exposing readers to global issues while maintaining an inspiring, fast-moving plot.
- **Track and Field / Running: *Unbroken (The Young Adult Adaptation)* by Laura Hillenbrand** (Non-fiction)
The incredible true story of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner who survived a plane crash and a WWII POW camp. The YA adaptation preserves the gripping, intense historical narrative while making the dense historical prose slightly more digestible.
- **Hiking / Mountain Climbing: *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer** (Non-fiction)
A high school classic. It tells the true story of Christopher McCandless, a young man who gave away his savings and hiked into the Alaskan wilderness. The vocabulary is slightly elevated, offering a great challenge for juniors, but the mystery of his journey keeps them hooked.
- **Boating: *The Boys in the Boat (Young Readers Adaptation)* by Daniel James Brown** (Non-fiction)
This details the University of Washington's rowing team and their epic quest for gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. It introduces complex historical context (the Great Depression, Nazi Germany) through the thrilling, competitive lens of collegiate rowing.
- **Football: *Friday Night Lights* by H.G. Bissinger** (Non-fiction)
The classic book that inspired the movie and TV show. It follows a high school football team in Texas. It is an adult book that challenges readers with sociological observations, but the high-stakes sports narrative makes it incredibly popular with high schoolers.

STEM & Medicine

- **Aviation and Avionics Engineering: *October Sky (Originally published as Rocket Boys)* by Homer Hickam** (Non-fiction)
A fantastic memoir about a group of teenage boys in a 1950s coal-mining town who teach themselves aerospace engineering to build rockets. It introduces scientific concepts and engineering trial-and-error in a highly readable, story-driven format.

- **Robotics: *Spare Parts* by Joshua Davis** (Non-fiction)
The true story of four undocumented Latino teenagers in a severely underfunded high school who build an underwater robot out of PVC pipe and scavenged parts. It has a Lexile measure of 930L, which is perfect for an 11th grader looking for a moderate, engaging challenge.
- **Biology: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks (Young Readers Edition)* by Rebecca Skloot** (Non-fiction)
This book explores the intersection of biology and ethics by tracing the story of the woman whose cells were taken without her knowledge to create the first immortal human cell line. It challenges students to think critically about medical history.
- **Chemistry: *The Disappearing Spoon (Young Readers Edition)* by Sam Kean** (Non-fiction)
Kean breaks down the periodic table by telling the fascinating, sometimes madcap human history behind the discovery of the elements. It turns abstract chemistry into a series of highly engaging short stories.

Healthcare, Law & Human Experience

- **Disabilities: *Laughing at My Nightmare* by Shane Burcaw** (Non-fiction)
A hilariously honest YA memoir by a young man living with spinal muscular atrophy. Burcaw doesn't shy away from the realities of his disability, but his dark humor and relatable teenage voice make it an incredibly engaging and perspective-shifting read.
- **Nursing: *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* by Theresa Brown** (Non-fiction)
Written by an oncology nurse, this adult non-fiction book details exactly what it is like to work a single 12-hour hospital shift. The pacing is rapid—mirroring the frantic environment of a hospital—which naturally pulls the reader along.
- **Medicine / Doctoring: *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi** (Non-fiction)
A profoundly moving memoir written by a brilliant young neurosurgeon who is suddenly diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. The prose is beautiful and philosophical, providing a great literary challenge, but the raw emotional core makes it very accessible.
- **Law: *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults)* by Bryan Stevenson** (Non-fiction)
Stevenson details his life's work as a lawyer fighting for the wrongly condemned on death row. The YA edition sits at a Lexile level of 1130L, offering robust vocabulary and complex systemic issues, while focusing on a deeply compelling legal thriller-style narrative.