Social Justice Titles for Middle Grade Readers

Explore these titles that elevate the voices of young activists, inspire calls to action, and explain complex issues such as racism, sexism, environmentalism, and immigration.

A Good Kind of Trouble by Lisa Moore Ramee - When Shayla becomes more involved with the Black Lives Matter movement after a police officer who shoots a Black man is acquitted, she must make difficult decisions about her friends, family, and school. This brilliant exploration of race and activism is ideal for readers not quite ready for Angie Thomas’s The Hate U Give. Recommended for grades 4-8.

Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes - When 12-year-old Black tween Jerome is fatally shot by a white officer, he returns as a ghost alongside the spirit of Emmett Till and hundreds of other “ghost boys,” bearing witness to the resounding effects of his killing. Rhodes unpacks privilege, racial injustice, and implicit bias. Recommended for grades 4-8.

Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Dawn of Jim Crow by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. - A much-needed examination of Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, this non-fiction work looks back at historical perspectives while drawing parallels to current issues of inequity and racism, illustrating how we got where we are, and emphasizing that change is imperative. Recommended for grades 6 and up.

Malala: My Story of Standing Up for Girls’ Rights by Malala Yousafzai with Patricia McCormick – Malala, a remarkable teenage girl who risked her life for the right to go to school, writes her memoir for chapter book readers. Raised in a changing Pakistan by an enlightened father from a poor background and a beautiful, illiterate mother, Malala was taught to stand up for what she believes. Her words and actions will make you believe in the power of one person’s voice to inspire change in the world. Appropriate for grades 3-6.

We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices: a collection edited by Wade& Cheryl Hudson – This collection features an impressive array of authors and artists sharing their experiences through letters, short stories, poems, and music. Whether reading one piece at a time or cover to cover, this collection will bolster and inspire readers when the world falls short of their expectations. The topics here are complex, but never overwhelming. Those feeling hurt, confused, and lost in our persistently chaotic world will find respite here. Recommended for grades 3-7.

Woke: A Young Poet’s Call to Justice by Mahogany Browne with others - The poems in this eloquent and instructive glossary of social justice address allyship, privilege, silencing, protest, and more, providing clear definitions and context. This short but robust title is a great classroom resource, though middle graders will also enjoy reading it cover to cover. Recommended for grades 3-6.