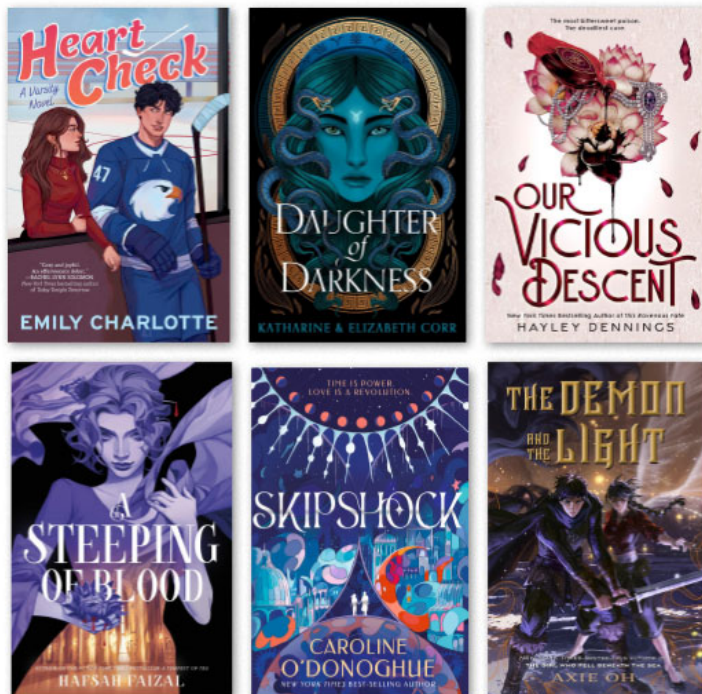


# 19 YA Series That Are Bursting with Emotion | YA Fiction Series

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Whether it's dense and dramatic duology closers, frothy historical romance, or grounded realistic fiction, books in these YA series serve up a generous dose of big feelings.

## Upper Middle School to High School

Card, Orson

Scott. Reawakening. 464p. (The Side Step Trilogy: Bk. 2).

Atheneum/McElderry. Nov.

2025. Tr \$21.99. ISBN



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9781481496223.

**Gr 9 Up**—Although it appears as though the human population has been successfully saved from the rogue planet on a collision course with the original Earth, the most recent clones of Laz and Ivy find themselves created and awoken. While they presume they will be expected to serve humanity once more with their ability to see and sidestep into different timestreams, their handlers are as enigmatic as ever. Intellectually gifted to a degree that requires extreme suspension of disbelief, Laz and Ivy must navigate their existence as clones as well as the fate of humanity to move forward. With very little focus on character development, Card largely uses Laz and Ivy as vehicles for clunky dialogue that is used to rehash philosophical arguments he originally explored in *Ender's Game* and its sequels. Paired with an often glacially paced plot, the book has minimal teen appeal; those drawn to exploratory science fiction will be better served by older, foundational works with established crossover potential. **VERDICT** An uninspired addition to an ultimately skippable series.

Charlotte, Emily. *Heart Check*. 304p. (Varsity: Bk. 1). Atheneum/McElderry. Nov. 2025. Tr \$20.99. ISBN 9781665971423.

**Gr 8 Up**—Hockey bros rule the roost in Hamilton Lakes, and Harper is over it. It doesn't help that the star player for the Hawks, Luke Dawson, snubbed her best friend their freshman year and has been intolerable since. Known for being outspoken against the overfunded hockey team, Harper becomes a social pariah when the head coach is canned for misappropriating funds, and she is blamed for it. Despite this, Luke and Harper find themselves admitting a long-standing mutual crush—and learning a lesson about what life is like on the other side of the tracks. Hockey doesn't just provide the framework for initial conflict but is also heavily featured in the text. The relationship is more focused on social implications than physicality, so there aren't any on-the-page sex scenes. Those social implications also involve the spotlighting of key, lovable side characters who are well-positioned to take center stage in any sequel to this fun, fast read for romance lovers. **VERDICT** A teen-friendly entry into the current hockey romance trend.

**COMERFORD. Helen. The Hero Complex**. 304p. (The Love Interest). Bloomsbury. Nov. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9781547617234.

**Gr 7 Up**—Once an officially designated Love Interest, Jenna now has

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superpowers of her own but can't use them in public—she's a woman, not a Hero. That all changes when the nonbinary mastermind who has held the heroic HPA together for years is chosen to lead it now that King Ron has been deposed. Their first act? Making Jenna a Hero. But Jenna's crush on Blaze, a Hero, and familial ties to the Villains quickly get her into trouble, even as King Ron's evil plans come to fruition. The snarky, genre-aware narrative takes a feminist meta-perspective on superheroes and will appeal to readers who don't traditionally rush to romance. It is also refreshingly diverse, with Black characters taking center stage as both Heros and Villains, and two major queer characters. Despite the fate of the world hanging in the balance, the narrative is light and often comedic without being overdone. **VERDICT** A primary selection for teens of all ages who love a laugh (and some explosions) with their romantic pining.

**Corr, Katharine & Elizabeth Corr. Daughter of the Underworld.** 448p. (House of Shadows: Bk. 1). Candlewick. Sept. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9781536244533.

**Gr 9 Up**—Deina will do anything to earn time off her 41-year indenture and steals coin to buy off the rest from the Order of Hades. As a Severer she can ease the journey of souls into Underworld—or punish them by trapping them in the purgatory of the Threshold. When the tyrannical ruler Orpheus promises freedom to whomever retrieves his wife Eurydice's soul from the Underworld, Deina seizes the chance alongside three rival Severers. This grim reimaging of mythology by way of the "Mycenaean civilization of Bronze Age Greece" (as shared in the authors' note), is filled with animal sacrifice, betrayal, and a brutal fight to escape the Underworld—or die trying. **VERDICT** An action-packed if gory duology starter; a darker successor to Percy Jackson.

★**Dennings, Hayley. Our Vicious Descent.** 512p. (Ravenous Fate: Bk. 2). Sourcebooks/Fire. Oct. 2025. Tr \$18.99. ISBN 9781728297903.

**Gr 9 Up**—Elise's accidental childhood betrayal resulted in Layla's unwilling transformation into a reaper; her intentional betrayal as a near-adult resulted in Layla losing the closest thing she has had to a mother. Since Elise also betrayed her own family to save Layla's undead life, she is currently not the most popular girl in Harlem. Layla's situation is no better, as she is unable to safely feed on humans and is barely holding the Harlem reaper clan together. The two girls, with a complicated

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history of friendship, murderous animosity, and romantic interest between them, find their paths repeatedly colliding as the political situation between the street gangs, the Saint militia, and the reapers slowly combusts. With a plethora of players to track and an evermore serpentine plot, this sequel is far more complex than the duology's first volume. Despite mild pacing stumbles in the first few chapters, the story is enthralling, as is the hot/cold relationship between Layla and Elise. **VERDICT** A well-crafted closer to a must-have fantasy romance duology.

**Doyle, Catherine. Rebel and the Rose.** 528p. (The City of Fantome: Bk. 2). Atheneum/McElderry. Dec. 2025. Tr \$21.99. ISBN 9781665955140.

**Gr 10 Up**—Now with the recipe for Lightfire in hand, Seraphine and her friends have created a countryside manufacturing scheme for the antidote to Shade, the elixir that gives the drinker the power of shadows; neither this nor an explicit threat against her life keeps Seraphine from returning to Fantome. Meanwhile, Ransom has taken charge of the city's assassin's guild, which is noticing the impact of Seraphine's efforts to reduce Shade production. Clearly the world in and around the City of Fantome is well developed, although revealing that world is secondary to spotlighting the romantic tension between Ransom and Seraphine. While the setting is lush and evokes a classic fantasy mood, it is unfortunately interrupted by abundant banter tinged with TikTok-era phrasing. However, that may not be a deterrent for all readers. The plot continues to check all the boxes for tropes BookTok craves—including explicit, spicy scenes. **VERDICT** A passable addition to the romantasy genre, albeit one where on-page sexual content will preclude its inclusion from many school libraries.

**Faizal, Hafsa. A Steeping of Blood.** 384p. (Blood and Tea). Farrar. Sept. 2025. Tr \$20.99. ISBN 9780374389420.

**Gr 9 Up**—Arthie Casimir's crew is in shambles. Her chosen brother Jin doesn't trust her. She and Jin are full vampires. Flick is in hiding. If their last (failed) con unified the group as a crew, trying to get justice against the Ram will cement their bonds in this duology conclusion. The dedication to colonialism ("you suck") telegraphs the incredibly relevant though sometimes heavy-handed messaging of the series. Lush prose and lengthy descriptions set the scene and continue to expand the

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world of *White Roaring* from Arthie, Jin, and Flick's perspectives. While some twists are clearly broadcast and Arthie's romance feels underwhelming, Faizal's vibrant characterizations make this a double-header worth following. **VERDICT** A satisfying conclusion to an intricately built series.

**García McCall, Guadalupe.** *Fall of the Fireflies*. 352p. (Seasons of Sisterhood: Bk. 1). Lee & Low/Tu Bks. Oct. 2025. Tr \$23.95. ISBN 9781643796994.

**Gr 7-10**—Twins Delia and Velia have experience with the supernatural thanks to the summer they spent with their sisters battling creatures from Mexican mythology. Outgoing and ready for anything, Delia engages readily with anything the universe must offer to the chagrin of the more reserved Velia. However, when their dad enters the property owned by an evil sorcerer of local legend and accidentally releases him, the twins find themselves acting in concert with and aided by the Mesoamerican gods to save both their dad and their local community. Between the frequent appearance of gods not often showcased in YA literature and the natural use of fluent Spanglish, Mexican American culture shines throughout. Unfortunately, the narration largely lacks emotional depth. The uncomplicated storytelling is best suited for younger teens, save for the incongruous higher-level vocabulary choices. **VERDICT** Select only for collections where younger YA is in demand and readers aren't picky about their mythology-inspired reads.

**Gratton, Tessa.** *The Crystal Crown*. 448p. (Star Wars: The Acolyte: Bk. 1). Random. Jul. 2025. Tr \$18.99. ISBN 9781368070126.

**Gr 7 Up**—This most recent addition to the Star Wars universe explores the backstory of Jecki and Yord, the young Jedi introduced in *Star Wars: The Acolyte*. It is set in the High Republic era before the "Star Wars" prequel trilogy. Jecki and Yord are on a diplomatic mission to Siline with their Jedi Masters when they are invited to take part in a vital tradition for the bellicose Silinese—the Crowning Convocation. Lionine Graf, human by species but Silinese by birth, and Silinese siblings Sitia and Rhos take the Padawans under their wings as they compete in challenges of combat and survival. Although Lio is a POV character, they are clearly hiding something from their friends and from readers, a tricky narrative choice executed with panache. The plot never slackens, complete with thrilling fight scenes. Well-integrated gender diversity

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features nonbinary Lio and genderfluid Rhos. **VERDICT** A perfect jumping-in point to the Star Wars canon, especially for reluctant readers.

**Jordan, Amie. All the Lost Souls.** 384p. (All the Hidden Monsters: Bk. 2). Scholastic/Chicken House. Nov. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9781546136637.

**Gr 7 Up**—Following the murder investigation he ran with Sage, the only werewolf in the warlock-run Arcānum, Oren, has become astonishingly domestic. Aside from midnight chats with P, Sage’s motherly poltergeist of a best friend, and regular family-style meals, Oren’s new experiences also include brooding over the tragedy of an immortal(ish) warlock assassin’s crush on a werewolf with a human-length lifespan. After Arcānum leadership sends the duo to sort out a deadly mystery involving feuding werewolves and witches, it becomes clear that Sage might be an illegal werewolf hybrid. The paranormal intrigue is baffled by an unfortunate amount of second-book miscommunication and lies, as well as unnecessary romantic jealousy. However, Jordan’s writing has overall matured since the first installment, evening out plot progression and character development that was previously somewhat erratic. The worldbuilding continues in the spirit of Eoin Colfer’s *Artemis Fowl* in the best way, taking creative license with default fantasy elements. **VERDICT** A second installment that makes the series a worthwhile investment.

**Kirchmeier, K.D. The Ravenous Sky.** 368p. (The Shadow Road: Bk. 2). Bloomsbury. Oct. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9781547615582.

**Gr 7 Up**—Thomas and Cassie search for ways to combat the blitz—dragonlike creatures causing mass destruction and the erosion of modern technology and civilization with their attacks. Seeking answers in a prized mythology book from Thomas’s old life and in natural gifts like Cassie’s “supercharged” intuition lead the duo on separate paths. Alternating chapters follow Cassie investigating the origins of the blitz and Thomas forging an alliance with grotesque ghouls as they both try to find a way forward for humanity. New alliances and threats expand the story while hints of romance strengthen Thomas and Cassie’s bonds. Although the narrative voices sometimes lack distinction, unique worldbuilding pulled from folklore from around the world will draw readers in. **VERDICT** An action-packed adventure of survival that series

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fans will devour.

**León, Aya de. *Undisclosed*. 288p. (The Factory: Bk.**

3). Candlewick. Oct. 2025. Tr \$18.99. ISBN 9781536239348.

**Gr 6 Up**—Fifteen-year-old Amani Kendall is the lead operative in her latest mission with her spy parents. Amani must get close to teen Danielle to protect the covert organization known as The Factory and its work to support people of color. Joining Danielle's band at an elite music camp, Amani must stop Danielle from revealing the existence of the agency and that her father died on assignment. With help from returning character from the first book, Andréa, Amani tries to get Danielle to therapy while unpacking her feelings about amorous attention from a band member. She also contends with rampant racism and fatphobia from industry professionals at the camp as a plus size Black girl. **VERDICT** Slow pacing is the only wrong note in this bopping body-positive adventure.

★**McGee, Katharine. *A Queen's Match*. 400p. (A Queen's**

Duet). Random. Nov. 2025. Tr \$20.99. ISBN 9780593710746.

**Gr 9 Up**—McGee concludes this duology with protagonists Helene d'Orleans, Alix of Hesse, and May of Teck completing their tumultuous marriage season. Helene is ready to fight for Eddy's love even if she fears Queen Victoria not accepting her as a suitable wife or a future Queen for England. Alix must admit that love may not conquer all when the tsar and tsarina forbid Nicholas to marry her. May will take any marriage if it means she'll finally be elevated enough to control her own life. Alternating chapters follow Helene, Alix, May and, in one poignant chapter, Eddy, through the season as these real-life characters take their places in history. **VERDICT** A historical romance that is both frothy and insightful.

**Mbalia, Kwame. *The Last Order*. 464p. (Star Wars). Random. Oct. 2025. Tr \$18.99. ISBN 9781368065610.**

**Gr 7 Up**—Set just after *The Rise of Skywalker*, the third and final film in the Star Wars "Skywalker Saga," this adventure follows former stormtroopers Finn and Jannah, as well as a new-to-the-Resistance fighter, Coy Tria. The narrative runs in dual timeline, with flashbacks to Finn and Jannah's time as stormtroopers providing context for the trio's current mission to stop a First Order trafficking ring, told from Coy's

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perspective. Between the initially widely disparate narrative threads and the usage of stormtrooper alphanumeric designations rather than standard character names, readers unfamiliar with the IP will likely struggle to follow along. The characters, once established, are reasonably complex and don't lean so heavily on prior knowledge as to forego exploration, although genuine development is limited. Paired with pacing that very deliberately reveals a generally stolid plot, this addition, more than many recent ones to the print Star Wars canon, does require an existing investment in the IP. **VERDICT** Select for collections where the Star Wars franchise already has a following.

★**O'Donoghue, Caroline. Skipshock.** 400p. (Skipshock: Bk. 1). Candlewick. Jun. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9781536228816.

**Gr 9 Up**—In a universe where days in the North can last mere hours while wealthier Southern worlds have time to spare, Moon ekes out a living as a salesman. Eventually the skipshock from the rapid time changes will kill him. Margo should be arriving in Dublin for boarding school after her father's death. Instead, she is on the same unfathomable train as Moon. Hunted by the authorities, recruited by revolutionaries, and always accompanied by Moon, Margo must figure out how she got here if she ever wants to get home. Vast worldbuilding, distinct characters, and gripping action propel the narrative and underpin the astute commentary on privilege, wealth, and colonialism in this power struggle where time is everything. **VERDICT** This deeply romantic duology starts as fast as a two-hour day on Khaise and never lets up.

★**Oh, Axie. The Demon and the Light.** 400p. (The Floating World: Bk. 2). Feiwel & Friends. Oct. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9781250853110.

**Gr 8 Up**—Ren races to learn more about her heritage and powers as the last Celestial Maiden and heir to the throne. Sunho, meanwhile, struggles to control the Demon within him. Alternating chapters follow Ren, Sunho, and Ren's childhood-friend-turned-advisor Jaeil who offers a needed break from the romantic couple's pining with a wider view of the world and his own light romance plot. Grounded in a search for family both found and biological, Ren and Sunho gain strength from their trust in each other as they strive to save themselves and face encroaching threats from their pasts. **VERDICT** Fantasy and romance elements blend perfectly in this satisfying conclusion to Oh's duology

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inspired by the Korean folktale of “The Heavenly Maiden and the Woodcutter.”

**Reyes, Sonora. *The Golden Boy’s Guide to Bipolar*. 384p. HarperCollins. Sept. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9780063358409.**

**Gr 9 Up**—In a follow-up to *The Lesbian’s Guide to Catholic School*, after going inpatient last year, Cesar Flores is ready to win back his ex-boyfriend Jamal, embrace being out as a bisexual, and continue with his meds and therapy. Except The Thoughts keep reminding Cesar that maybe Father John is right that being queer means going to hell. As Cesar struggles to reconcile his faith with his heart, he experiences a manic episode that convinces him everyone would be better off without him. Forever. Grounded in their own experiences with severe mental illness, Reyes presents a nuanced story centering Cesar’s unreliable narration of his healing journey once he is diagnosed with bipolar disorder and can see his symptoms (including suicide ideation) for what they are. **VERDICT** This companion novel is a perfect entry point for the Flores family and a lovely continuation of their story.

**Rodgers, Erica Ivy. *Lord of Blade and Bone*. 496p. (Waking Hearts: Bk. 2). Peachtree Teen. Nov. 2025. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9781682636671.**

**Gr 9 Up**—Caught on opposite sides in the kingdom of Niveaux’s power struggle, Lady Charlotte Sand and Captain Luc de Montaigne yearn to be reunited in this dense duology conclusion. Cardinal Lorraine the Pure hopes to use Luc to maintain her power while Charlotte joins the rebellion led by the Order of the Guardians, “immortal scarecrow warriors” that the Cardinal outlawed when they refused to serve her—who are intent on Prince Artus claiming the throne. Torn between what is right and what is safe, Luc must choose a side while Charlotte and the rebellion face threats within and without in this swashbuckling adventure. **VERDICT** Readers familiar with *The Three Musketeers* will appreciate the nods to the source material in this epic battle for peace and justice.

**THOMPSON, L.T. *Devils Like Us*. 384p. (Devils Like Us: Bk.**

**1). Bloomsbury Jun. 2025. Tr \$20.99. ISBN 9781547615193.**

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**Gr 9 Up**—When the Order of Lazarus kidnaps Cas’s best friend Henry, he has no choice but to join forces with Remy and Finn to rescue Henry

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from the Order, who may have also killed Remy's father. Years ago, it was Cas's vision of that grisly death that ended his friendship with Remy, and for years, Remy has been collecting information on the Order with Finn in tow. Now armed with a journal full of information, the trio set out for the heart of the occult conspiracy and on the way, find themselves reaching common ground with a seafaring crew of smugglers. Although the narrative has all the trappings of dark academia, the plot is far more linear with faster pacing than most novels in the genre that is nevertheless balanced out by a plethora of well-rounded characters. The bulk of the complexity comes from the emergent queer identities of the three main characters, whose struggles are relatable without being anachronistic. **VERDICT** Don't hesitate to liven up YA collections with this unique and atmospheric, piratical adventure.

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