

Reading for Normal

Young People and YA Fiction in the Time of Covid-19

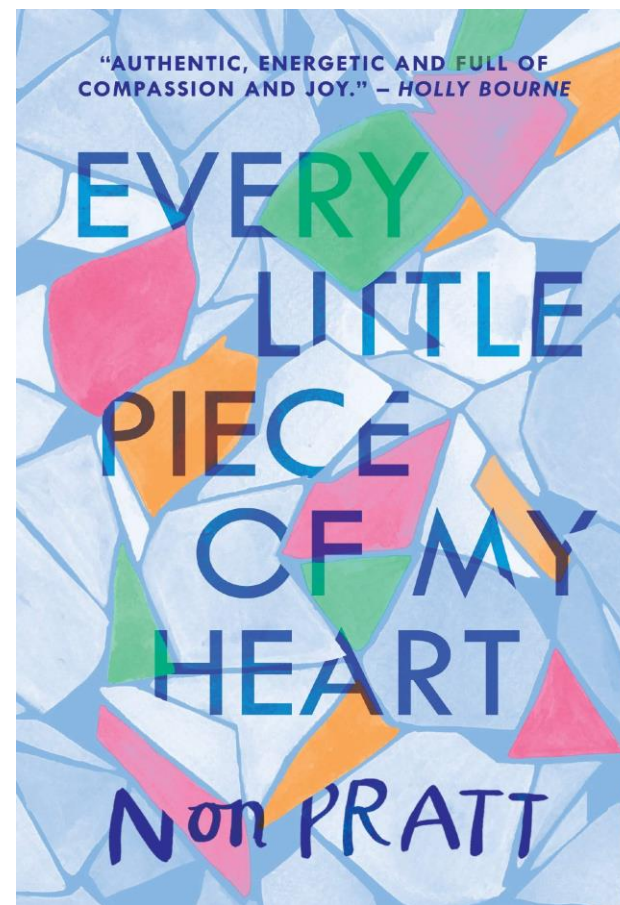
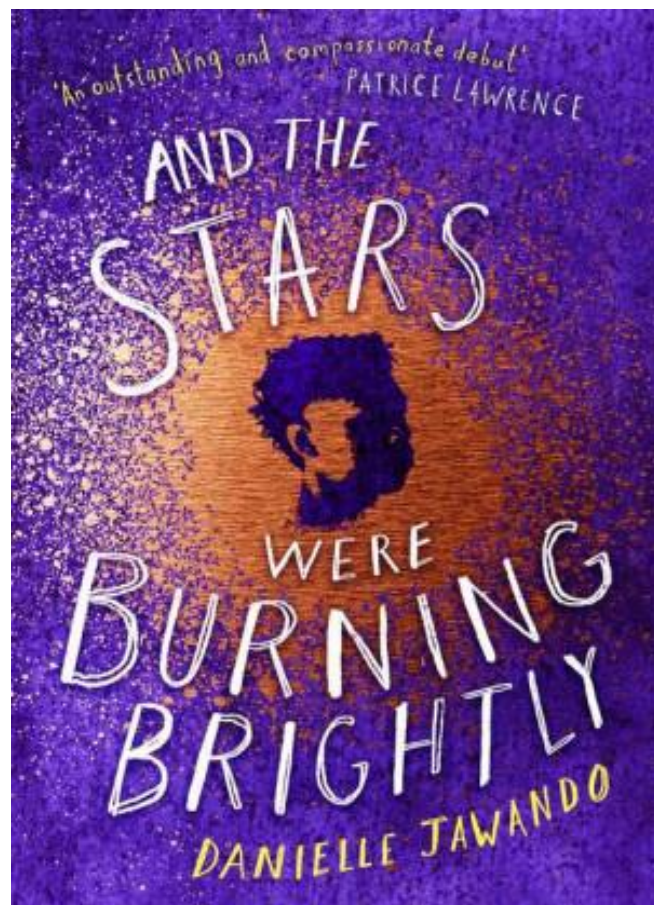
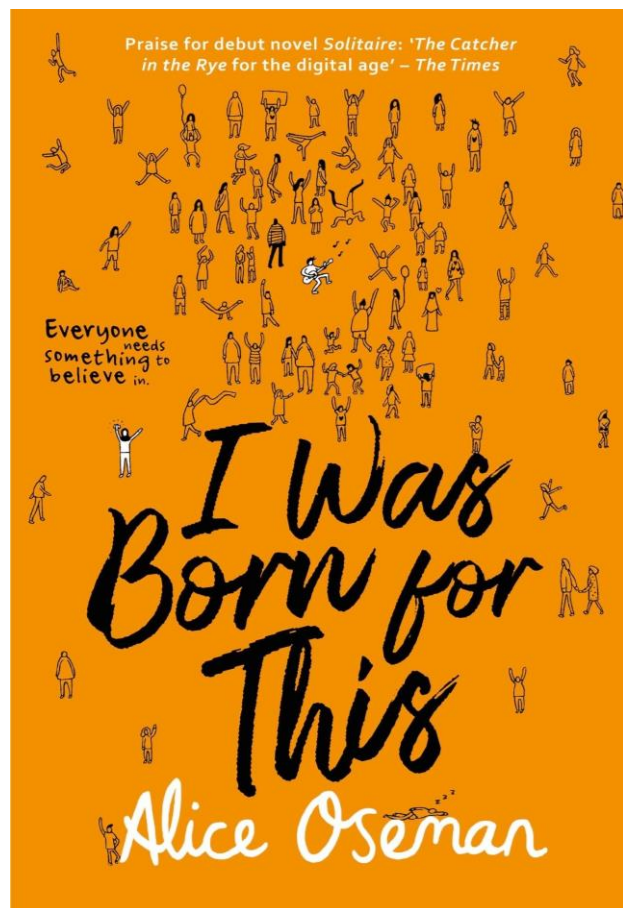
1. Research Project

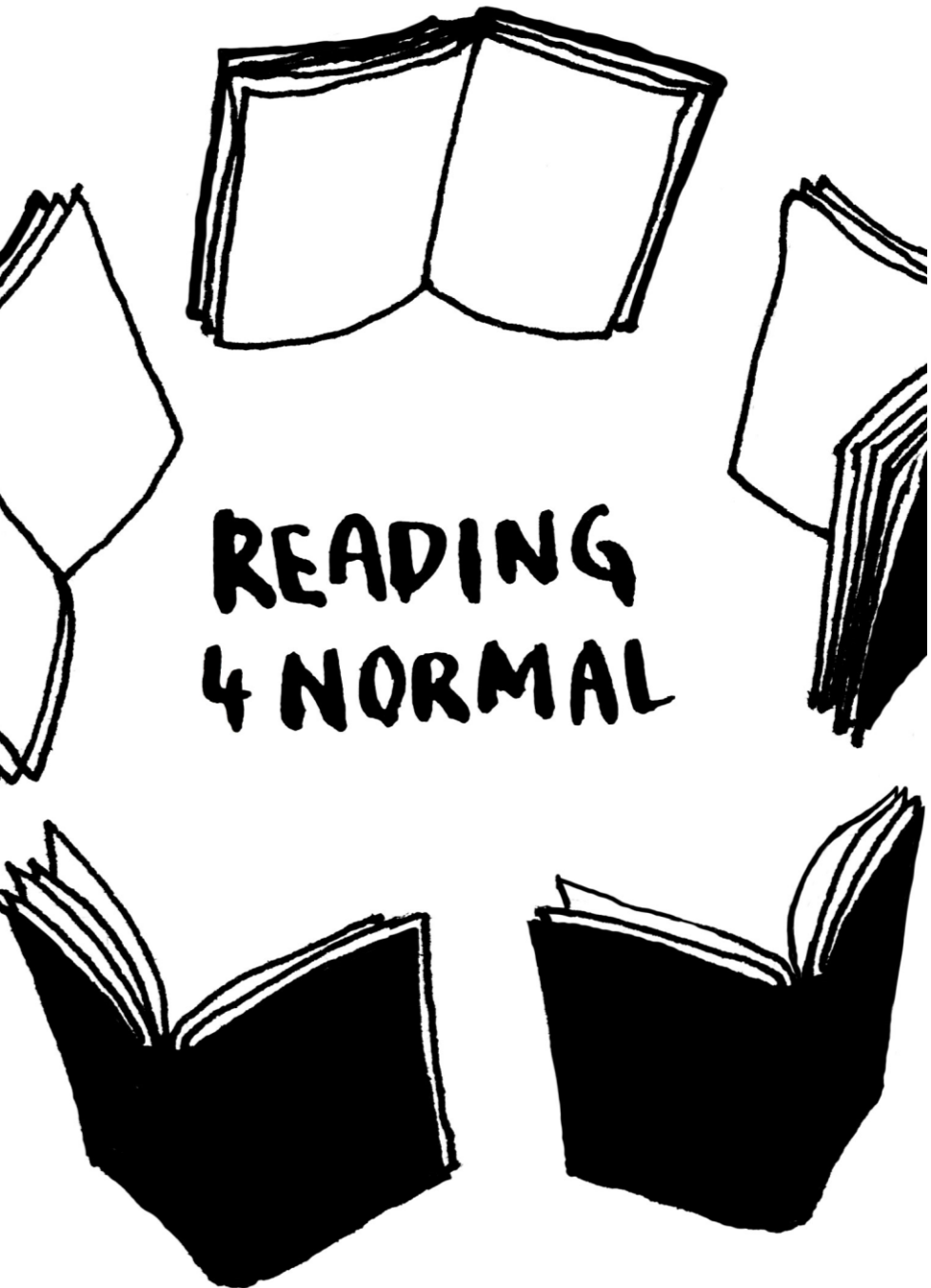
2. Workshop

3. Setting up a Reading4Normal Book Club









We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We consider what the average person does, thinks, earns, or consumes [...] There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated.

Lennard J. Davis. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. 1995

the art of being normal



lisa williamson

HOLLY BOURNE

AM I
NORMAL
YET?

YES

NO

It's tough being a girl

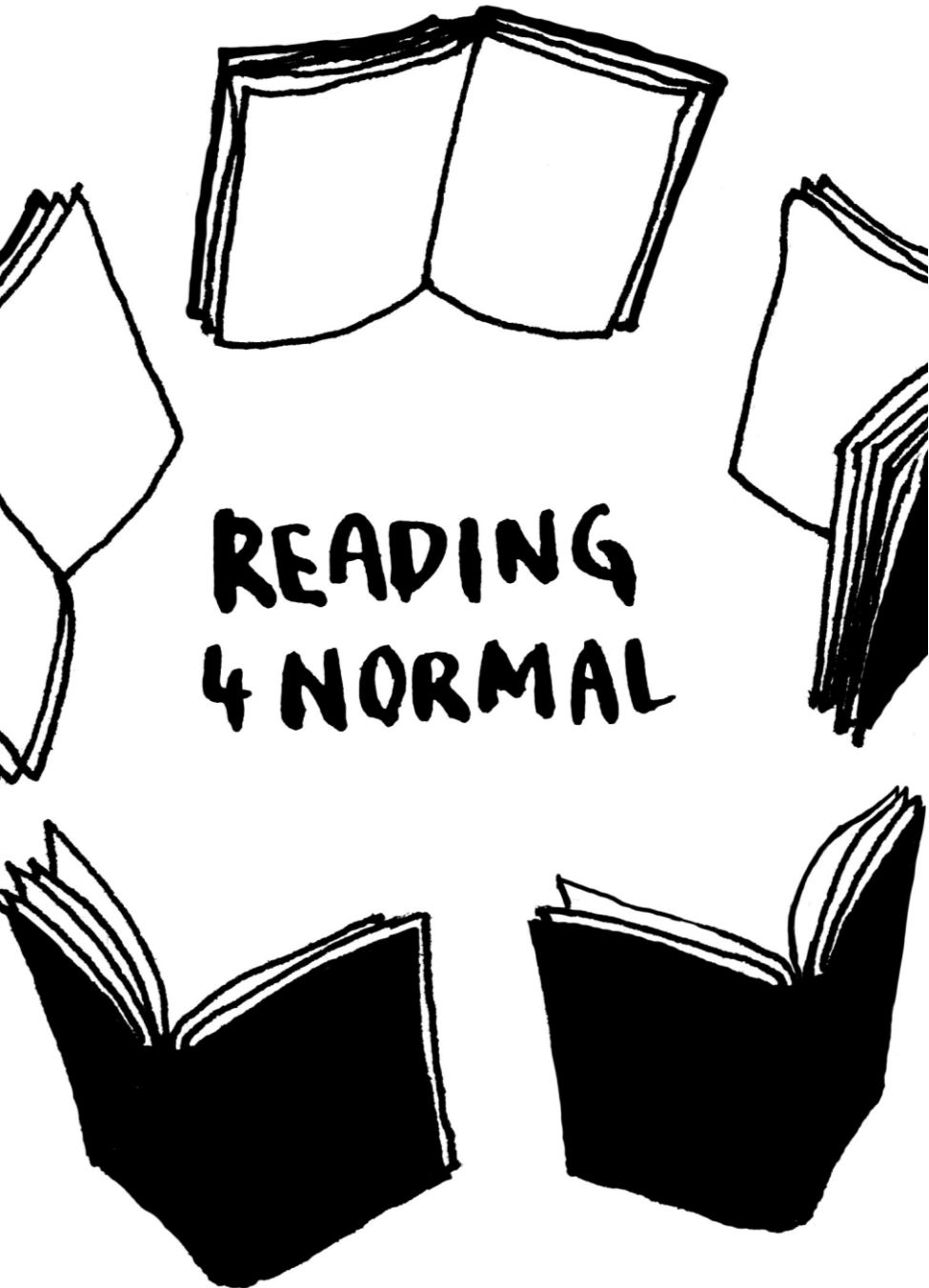


on the 16th March 2020 everything changed (Iris, Year 9)

Life. What even is it at the minute? (Mia, Year 10)

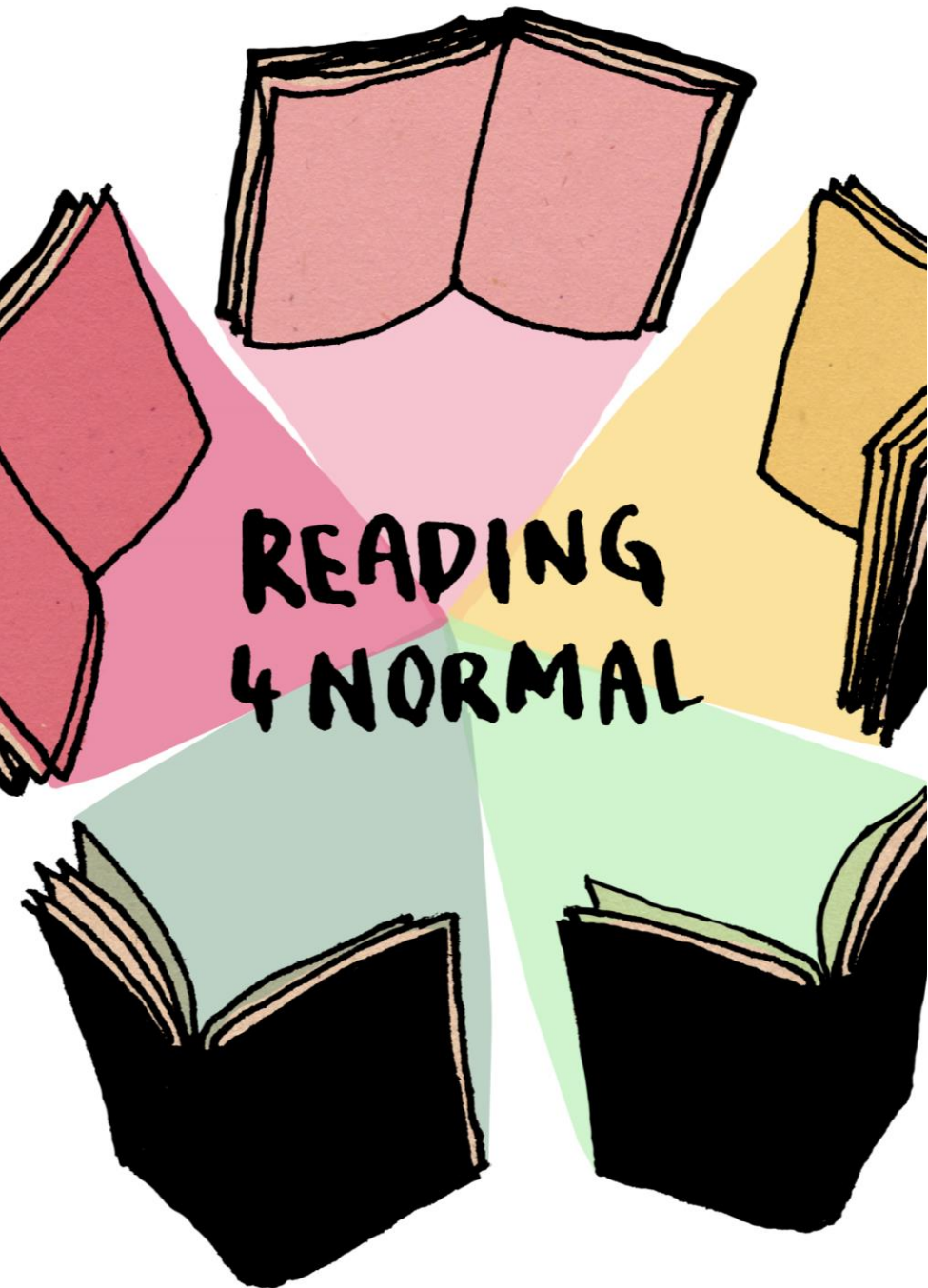
It all became very overwhelming (Rose, Year 12)

My Brain Has Too Many Tabs Open (Otis, Year 10)



reading 'provided refuge in this difficult time, supporting children's mental wellbeing and enabling them to dream about the future'

C. Clark and I. Picton, 'Children and young people's reading in 2020 before and during lockdown', 2020



“I really got into reading for a while and then I didn’t go so well with mental health and it kind of just spiralled, and people kept buying me books and the book pile just went up, and I couldn’t really read because I just couldn’t concentrate.”

(Billie, Year 9)

Praise for debut novel *Solitaire: 'The Catcher in the Rye for the digital age'* – *The Times*

Everyone
needs
something to
believe in.

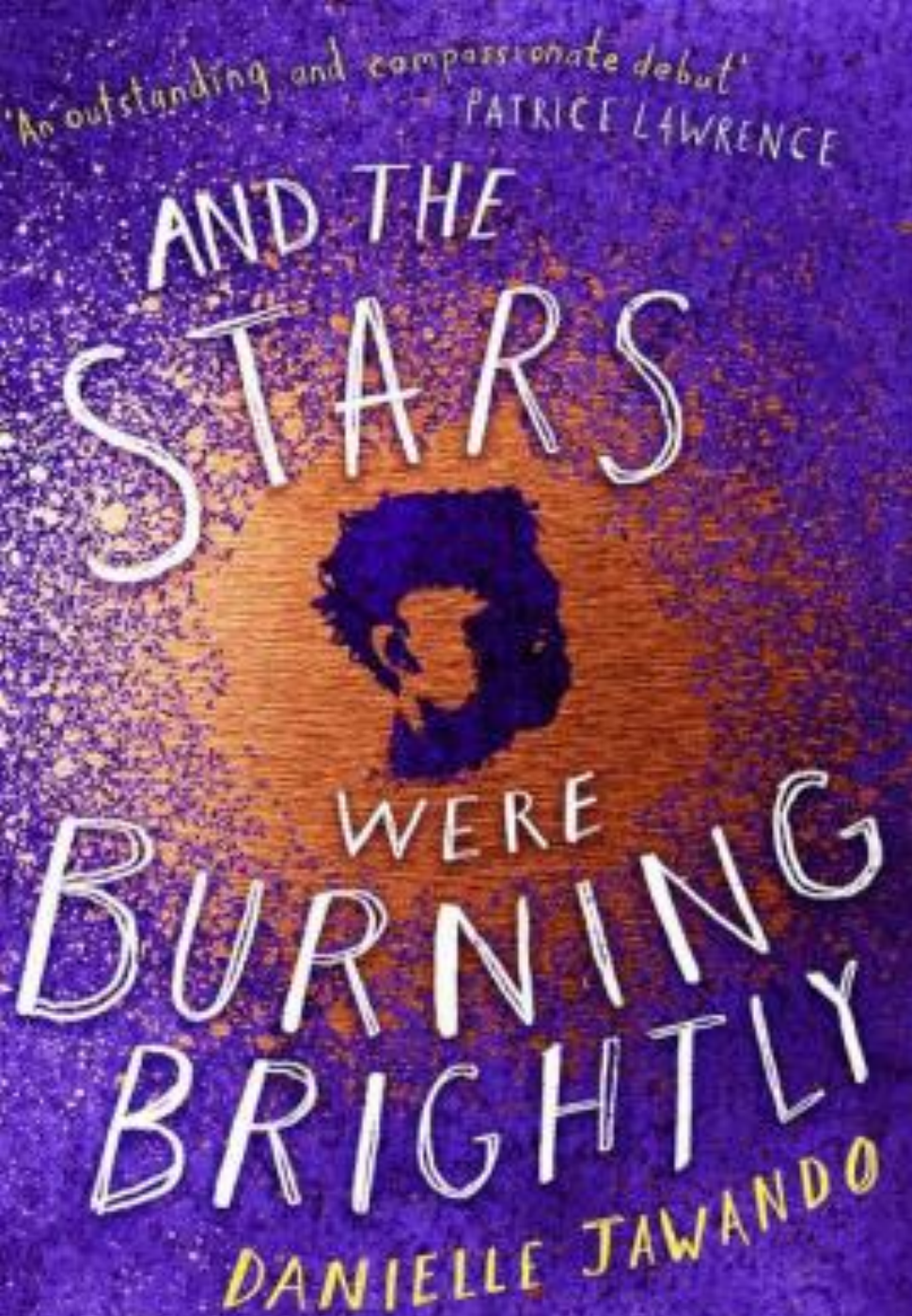
I Was Born for This

Alice Oseman

“I try not to make any sound but I can’t breathe and I’m scared. I’m going to die [...] I can’t stop the tears emerging from my eyes, I can’t make my heart stop pounding, I can’t do anything, I can’t do anything – “(p. 210)

many teenagers have anxiety and they don’t get better. And now obviously it’s going to be worse because they can’t do things that used to make them feel better and happy (Mia, Year 10)

it has really helped knowing I’m not the only one (Iris, Year 9)



the functional building with a few bricks 'painted green, or yellow, or red, to make it look better'

noisy corridors full of pupils '[s]crolling through their phones, taking selfies, watching videos, shoving into each other'

desks that emit a 'chemical smell of bleach or polish'

the school – because it's such a normal thing for young adults, we've all experienced it, we all know what it's like, and it's a good setting for a book to be written in

(Gabe, Year 9)

Because of the similarities between any British school, you can kind of imagine that happening as the storyline unfolded [...] the layout makes sense. (Daisy, Year 12)

Praise for debut novel *Solitaire*: 'The Catcher in the Rye for the digital age' – *The Times*

Everyone needs something to believe in.

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Alice Oseman

the departure board, [...] the crowds of travellers swarming around [...], walking from cafes to escalators to platforms

(p. 257)

there were places in London mentioned that I go quite a lot [...] and I could almost relate to [the characters] because they were doing things that I had done and going to places that I had been to. (Rose, Year 10)

I feel like at the moment if you did live in a city you'd feel very much like Jimmy because, obviously, there are a lot more people in the city and where I live it's quiet countryside, and it's really easy to go out for a walk without seeing anybody, and in the city it's difficult. (Ella, Year 9)

Praise for debut novel *Solitaire: 'The Catcher in the Rye for the digital age'* – *The Times*

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I Was Born for This

Alice Oseman

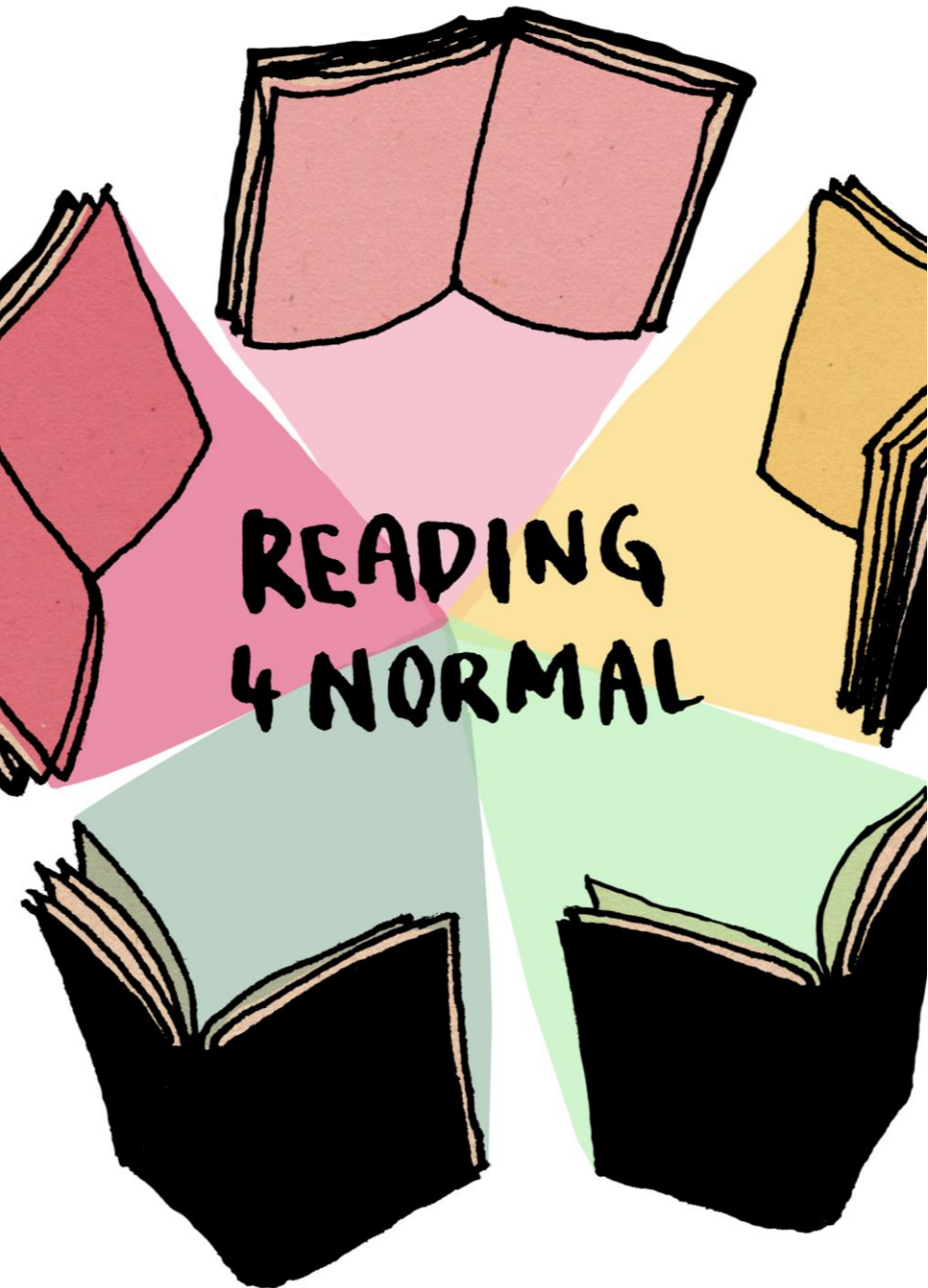
Juliet has been deciding what to wear for twenty minutes. Relatable. 'But it's not like a party, is it?' she says. 'No, but we'll be a at Spoon's.' 'Spoon's isn't fancy, though.' 'Definitely not.'

p. 58

Otis: I agree. I feel like if you weren't British you would find it very difficult to – not necessarily understand – but definitely know what's going on. They don't know what a Wetherspoon's is, that could be for them.

Mia: Yeah, because it says "Spoon's." To us, we don't say Wetherspoon's, we just say "Do you want to go to Spoons?" If you were in a different country you would be like "What is that?"

Otis: Yeah, are they going to go to an item of cutlery?

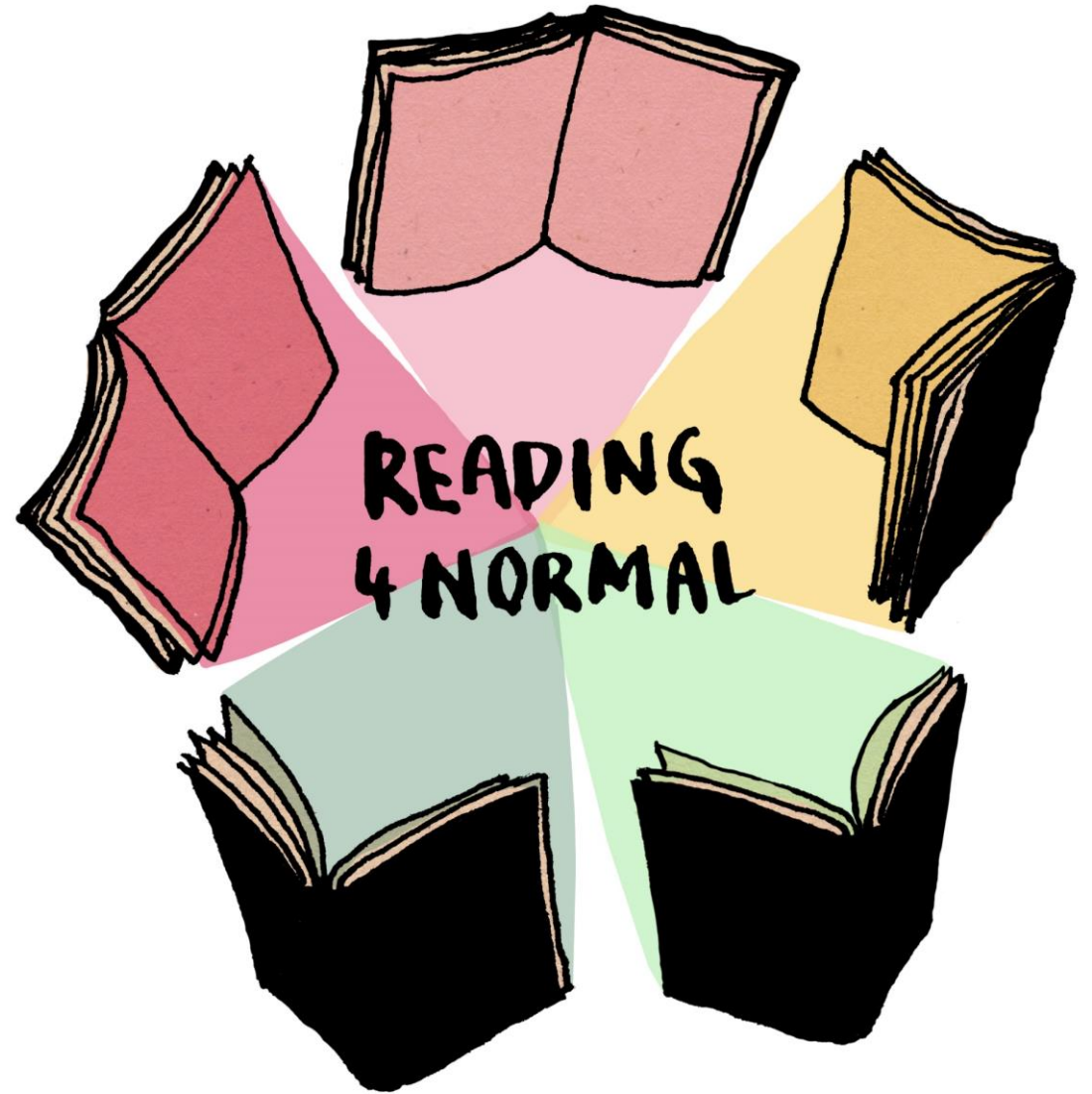


a special connection with these things that nobody else has, which is pretty cool. (Thorns, Year 10)

I think me and my friends, we all have some very similar interests, but especially reading the book made me realise: 'What if there are more people like this?' 'What if there are more people like that?' (Gabe, Year 9)

gave me company, both from people who are sitting in this meeting and also from the characters of the books
(Antonia, Year 10)

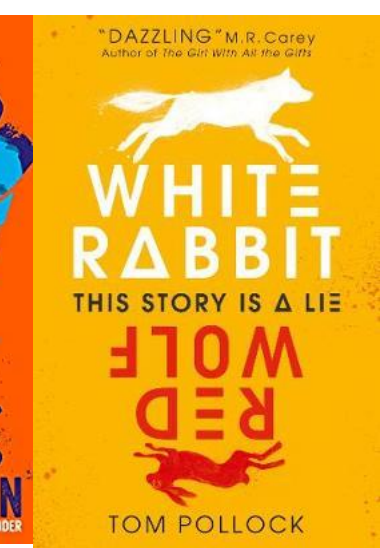
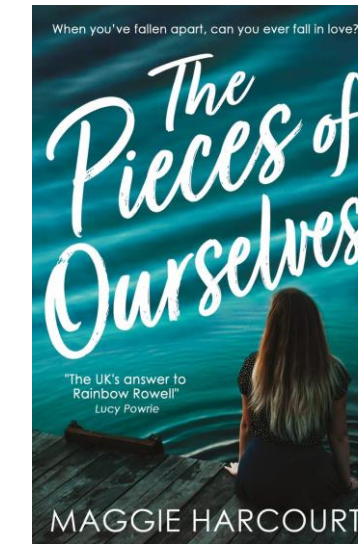
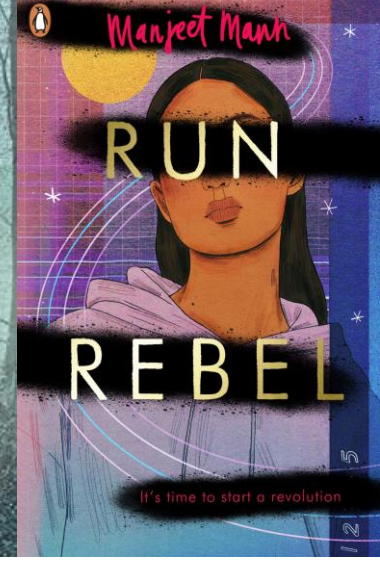
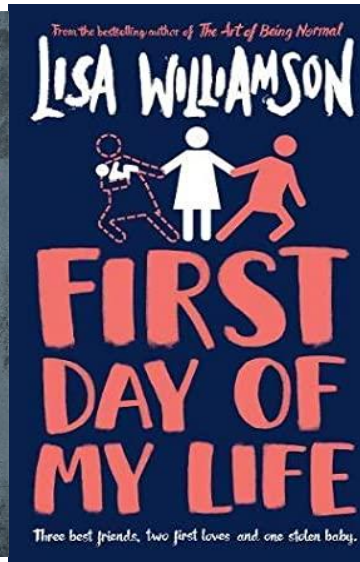
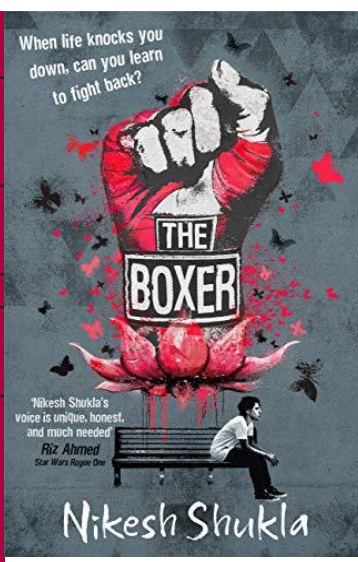
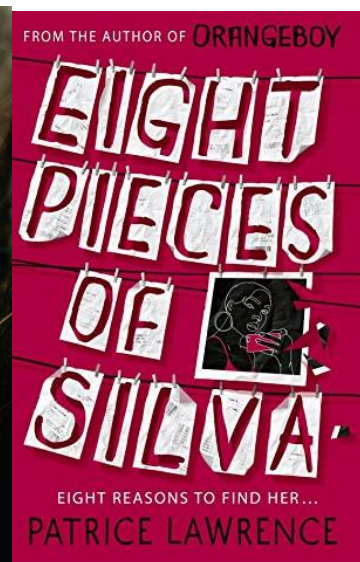
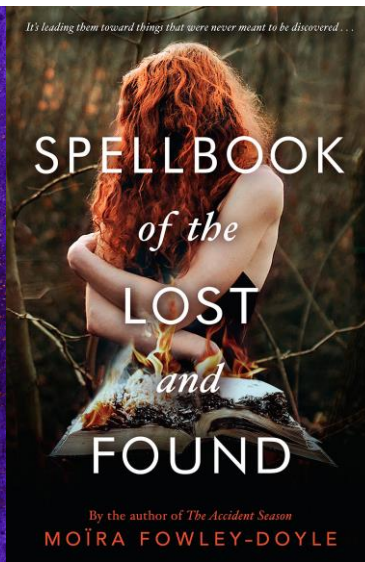
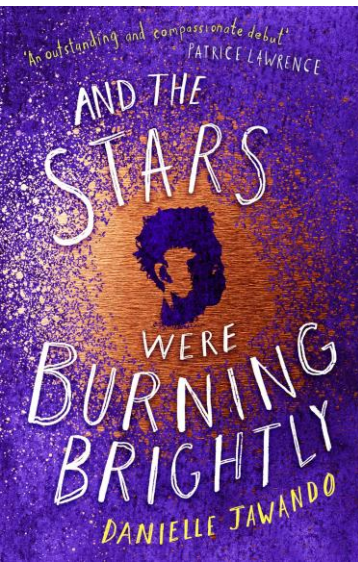
- Authenticity
- Belonging
- Connection

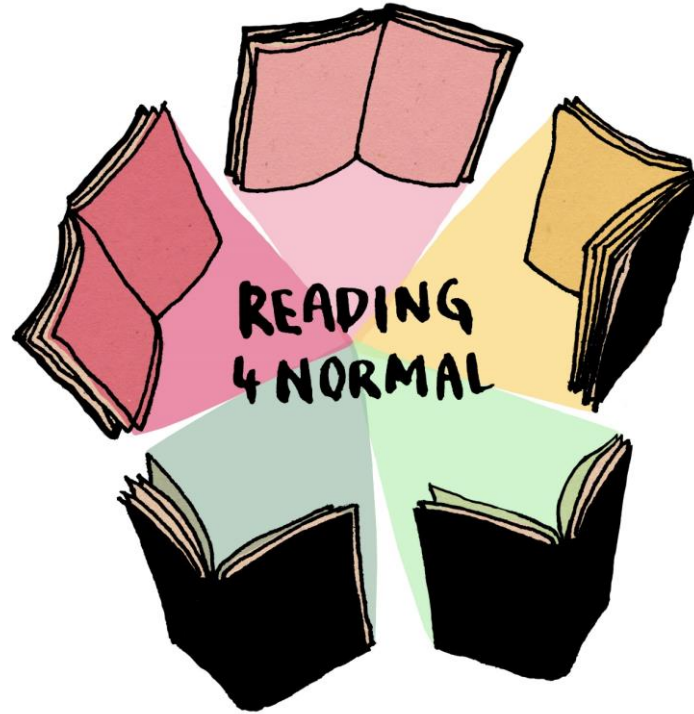




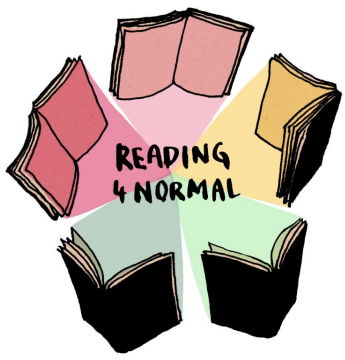
I thought the way that they were so normal – I know this sounds really weird, but they so fit our everyday lives that it was shocking because the other young adult books that I've read have not necessarily been like that.

(Antonia, Year 10)



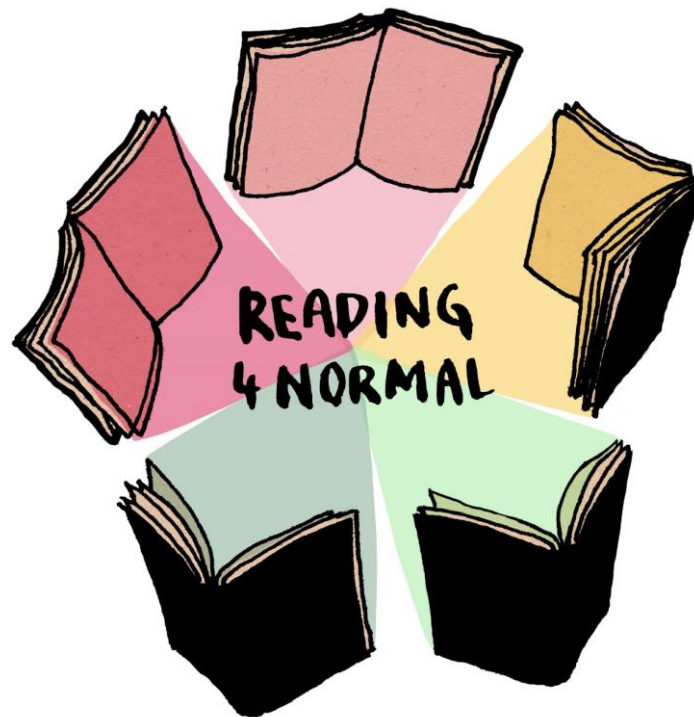
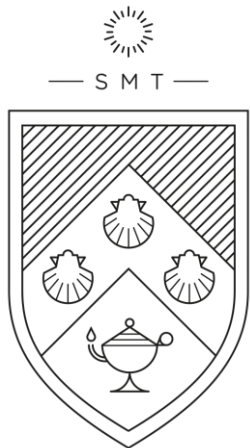


Workshop



Sharing Connections

- Was there anything you liked about this book?
- Can you relate to the characters in the story?
- Does anything in this story remind you of anything in your own life?
- Has anything that happens in this book ever happened to you?
- Which parts of the book seem to you to be most true-to-life?
- In what ways was it the same or different to you?
- Did the book make you think differently about your own similar experience?
- How are events in this story similar to things that happen in the real world?
- How are events in this story different from things that happen in the real world?



Setting Up Reading4Normal Book Clubs

Reading4Normal Book Clubs have been shown to help offer young readers:

1

a shared sense of belonging with their generational cohort

2

an understanding of authenticity and the legitimacy of their own experiences

3

a feeling of short-term connection with diverse peers that complements more intense or longer-term community and friendships

Getting Started: Schools Partnerships

Access or create links with other schools

Identify Leads from each partner school or organisation: they will be responsible for coordinating the Book Club English Teachers, Librarians, and Mental Health Leads all make good Book Club Leads

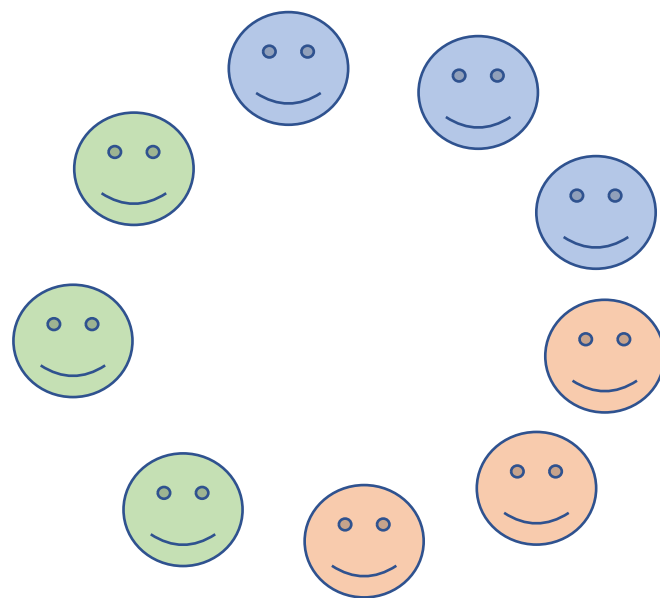
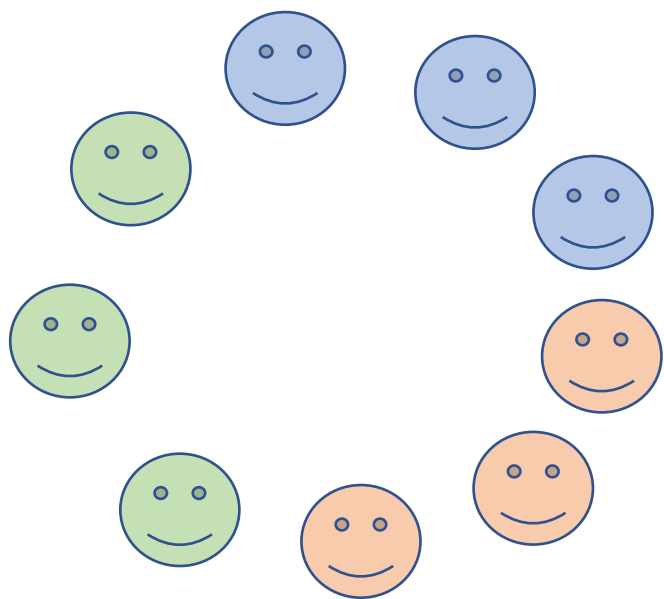
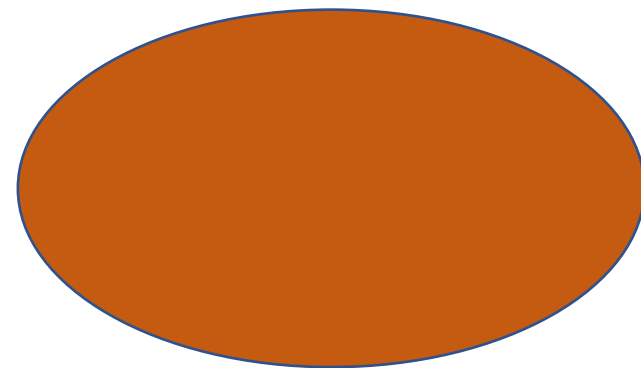
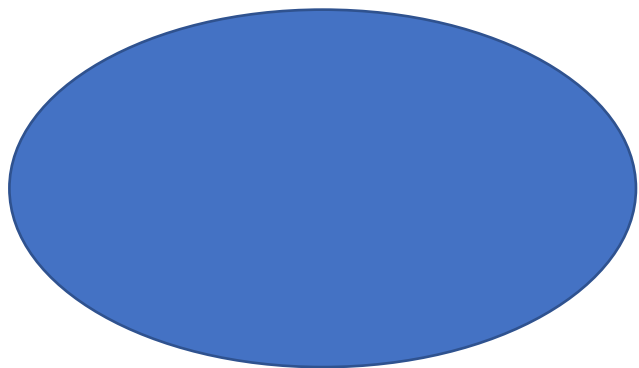
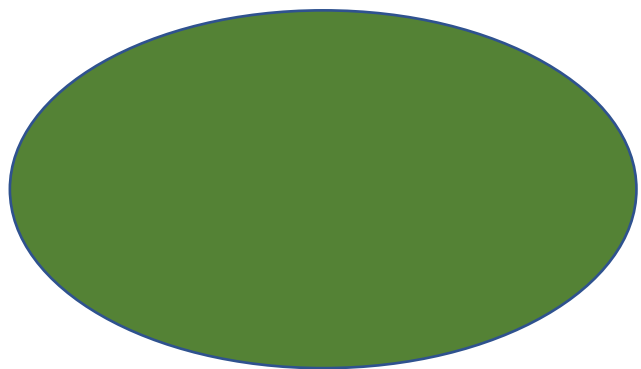
Getting Started: Working with School Partners

Decide with your partners who your Book Club is for

Year 9, Year 10 and Year 12 pupils tend to have more time for 'reading for pleasure' than year groups taking exams.

A Book Club for a single year group is valuable for putting participants at ease and allowing them to share common experiences

A Book Club involving participants from different year groups can be interesting as a way of exploring issues from different perspectives



Getting Started: Finding Participants

Identify participants for your Book Club. Invite enthusiastic readers who you think might benefit from engaging with others.

Plan to create a Book Club with no more than nine participants in total, ideally with equal numbers recruited from each partner school.

It is a good idea to try and create a diverse group of readers for your Book Club, so you might like to think about the gender, ethnicity, and the background of the pupils you invite to take part

Getting Started: Planning Sessions

Decide on practical issues, such as which online platform to use and who will facilitate each session

Since the programme is about building connections and a feeling of belonging, think about how to avoid making your sessions feel like educational activities.

Getting Started: Planning Dates

Set dates for your
Book Club

Plan for a session on
each of the YA novels

Organise an initial
orientation meeting

Facilitating Effective Book Clubs

Priorities

Diverse reading list

- Authors
- Characters

Enabling discussions that favour communication, engagement, and exploring lived experiences over practising literary skills

Gentle touch approach without judgement

Reading4Normal Book Clubs prioritise building connections between teenagers and backgrounds through shared experience of reading contemporary British YA.

Safeguarding

Reading4Normal Book Clubs should adopt the safeguarding principles of the participating schools. We recommend particular consideration be given to:

Ensuring the online safety of teenagers during online Book Club sessions (e.g. hosting sessions in a secure, password-protected space)

Establishing clear guidelines regarding appropriate behaviour and operating a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and harassment (examples of these guidelines and policies are available on our website)

Embracing an approach to online discussion that accommodates how teens wish to participate (e.g. with or without cameras, verbal or written input)

Encouraging teenagers to be aware of the expectations and possible challenges of the Book Club (e.g. reading and discussing novels that may contain triggering themes and content)

Core Activities: Orientation Meeting

1

Invite all your Book Club members to an online meeting. This is a chance for everyone to introduce themselves, and for Leads to provide information about the Reading4Normal Book Club, including guidance on how to prepare for the live sessions.

2

You can use this initial meeting to help everyone feel comfortable with your chosen online platform. You might also use it to give an overview of the YA novels you will be reading

Core Activities: YA Novel #1

1

Ask your Book Club members to read the first YA novel on your list. Give them plenty of time to do this reading, bearing in mind they will have other school work and commitments.

2

Run a live online session for your Book Club members to discuss the novel together (see Reading4Normal Book Club Session Plan for ideas about how to structure this).

3

Use guidance notes to help participants think about their responses to reading these books and how they relate to their own everyday lives.

Core Activities: YA Novel #2+



1

Repeat the process for each book. As your Book Club members become more comfortable talking together, the facilitator can encourage them to ask each other questions and take more of a lead in the discussion

Enhancement Activities: Creating a Reflective Journal

Before running your Book Club sessions, ask members to create a Reflective Journal about their everyday lives (see Appendix B for guidance notes).

Encourage your Book Club members to add to their Journal with notes and passages from the novels selected for the programme, or any other reading they are doing.

Although Reading4Normal is not about building skills, you might help readers recognise that note-taking can help them pay closer attention to their reading.

Children's Literature (Distance Learning)

Postgraduate degree

“This degree remains the benchmark for the subject, nationally and internationally; it is the most robust of the UK HE courses”

Professor Peter Hunt.

<https://www.roehampton.ac.uk/postgraduate-courses/childrens-literature-distance-learning/>

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