It’s a quandary of metacognition: if you’ve gone mad, how can you tell that you’ve gone mad? The Bell Jar’s Esther recounts her long slide into suicidal depression, painstakingly detailing the events that happen along the way. Likewise, Belzhar’s Jam finds herself ensconced in the strange environs of The Wooden Barn, experiencing glimpses of a lost first love. Both women are faced with the conundrum: have they gone mad, or is it just the world around them? Belzhar and The Bell Jar closely examine issues of identity, mental illness, femininity, and transformation, tracing their female protagonists’ paths into madness and back again.

No Safety in Numbers by Dayna Lorentz

William Golding’s classic dystopian novel sees a group of stranded young boys attempt to organize their own society on a tropical island, only to watch as their feral basic instincts begin to take over. In No Safety in Numbers, these same ideas are transplanted to a modern shopping mall, following the release of a deadly virus and the resulting quarantine. Exploring ideas of friendship, loyalty, resistance to authority, and human nature, both texts give rise to the question: what happens when people are forced to fend for themselves to survive?

Matched by Ally Condie

Imagine having many of the experiences that make you human decided for you without your input or consent. For Cassia in Matched, this means the Society construct will choose her mate; for Jonas in The Giver, this means that the Elders will decide upon his life’s vocation. For both characters, these choices will mean eye-opening looks at love, truth, destiny, morality, and the long-reaching effects of the choices we all make as human beings.
Dear Educators and Librarians,

We know book recommendations are such an important part of your job, and we know quite well how fulfilling it is to place the right book into the right hands. For many teenagers, reading feels like a chore, a homework assignment, and like you, we are eager to transform this experience. Teens are forming opinions not only on books, but on their worldview, so these formative years are so crucial. We hope this brochure will help you in your mission to turn those reluctant readers into lifelong booklovers.

Every so often we publish a book that reminds us of our own high school experience: reading literature from the canon of classics, developing opinions and establishing viewpoints, both big and small. We will never forget what it was like to uncover a classic for the first time—to proudly state to family and friends, “I’m reading The Bell Jar” or “I just finished The Secret Sky,” but more importantly, “Here’s what I have to say about it!” These opinions, both positive and negative, shape who we are as readers, as teachers, as booklovers, as community members, as bibliophiles.

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Conversion by Katherine Howe

In The Crucible, the realities of mass hysteria and mob mentality loom larger than the ever-present threat of witchcraft in the small Puritan town of Salem. Likewise, within the microcosm of the elite St. Joan’s Academy, the question arises as to whether a sudden spate of illnesses is the work of faulty medical practices, a dangerous trend in behavior, or something far more sinister. As tensions heighten and the atmosphere of each small-scale society becomes more fraught, readers are left to draw their own conclusions about justice, deceit, reputation, and the potential existence of the supernatural.

All the Truth That’s in Me by Julie Berry

Sometimes it can be all too easy for provincial citizens to blame victims for the crimes inflicted upon them, or to blame a single person for the mistakes made by a few. Such is the case for Judith, the narrator of All the Truth That’s in Me, and Heather Pryme, the A-embazoned heroine of The Scarlet Letter. Both women find themselves embroiled in the meddling of their small-town neighbors for deeds shared by others—bringing up themes of justice, fairness, culpability, and sinfulness before their respective novels’ shocking conclusions.

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The Secret Sky by Atia Abawi

Shakespeare’s classic tale of star-crossed lovers has captured the hearts and imaginations of teenaged readers for decades. Like No Other transplants the familiar story to a Brooklyn neighborhood. Devorah, raised in a strict Hasidic community, and Jaxon, the shy, book-loving son of West Indian immigrants, meet and their love blossoms into a forbidden romance. Likewise, The Secret Sky sets the story in war-torn Afghanistan, and tells of the forbidden love kindled between two young members of conflicting ethnic groups. Setting forth questions of honor, family, love, and fate, all three texts will resonate with students familiar with the whirlwind of first love.

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