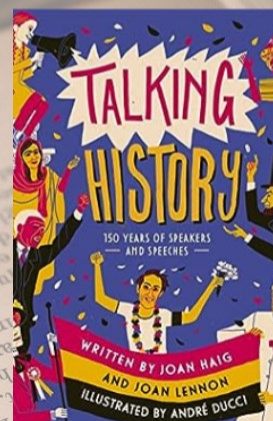
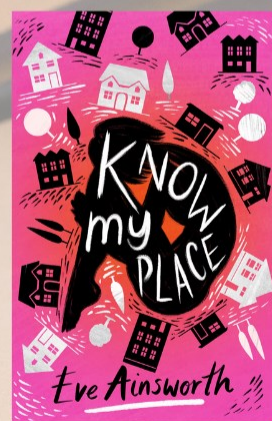
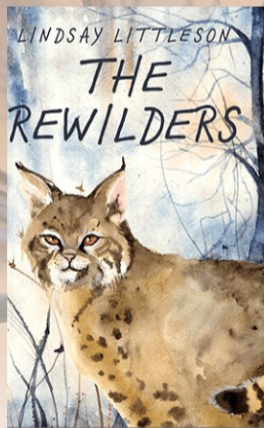
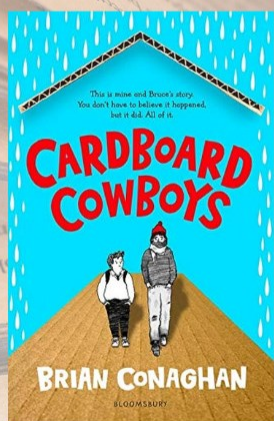
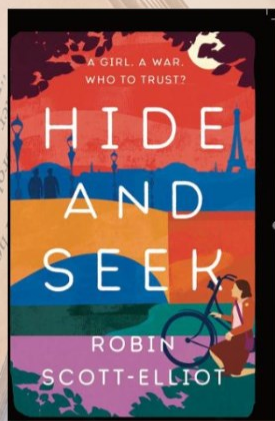
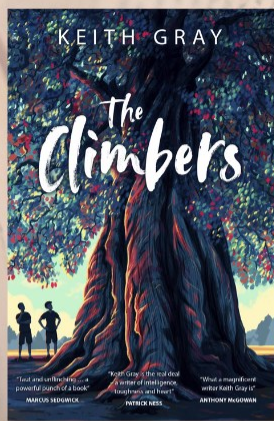


Scottish Book Trust
inspiring readers and writers



Teen book discussion guides 2023

Our list of nine hand-selected Scottish teen books with discussion questions for book groups

Age: 12+

For use in classrooms, libraries or book groups

Resource created by Scottish Book Trust

scottishbooktrust.com



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About this resource

We want teenagers in Scotland to discover the very best homegrown books, so we've gathered a list of contemporary Scottish books across genres. In this resource, you'll find the list of books alongside some questions that you could use to structure a discussion or book group with pupils.

If you are taking part in [Reading Schools](#), the activities in this resource could support delivery of Key Area:

- 1.2.5: Staff knowledge of contemporary children's literature
- 1.5.1: Access to high-quality books
- 2.3.2: Staff meaningful conversations around books
- 2.3.3: Creating learner social networks
- 2.3.4: Opportunities for learners to respond to what they're reading

***The Climbers* by Keith Gray**

Themes: friendship, rivalry, climbing

The Climbers is a moving and highly original story of rivalry and friendship. Sully is the best tree climber in the village. He can scale *Twister Sister's* tangled branches and clamber up *Double Trunker* with ease. But when a new kid, Nottingham, shows up and astonishes everyone with his climbing skills, Sully's status is under threat and there is only one way to prove who's best.

Keith Gray is a master of finding extraordinary stories in ordinary places and *The Climbers* is one of his greatest books. The relationships between the characters and their internal battles with themselves are so rich, you're left thinking about Sully and Nottingham long after you've finished reading.

Discussion questions:

- Why is Sully threatened by Nottingham?
- Climbing is a huge part of the youth culture in Sully's village. Are there special places in your community that mean a lot to teenagers?
- Did the ending surprise you in any way? Was it where you thought Keith Gray was taking the story?

***Hide and Seek* by Robin Scott-Elliot**

Themes: World War II, spies, bravery

Hide and Seek is a gripping, fast-paced wartime spy story which begins in Paris in 1942. When Amelie Dreyfus hides in her mother's cupboard, it's a game. When she comes out, it's a matter of life and death. Amelie soon finds herself involved in the resistance, running messages, and hiding from the enemy. It's a dangerous job that will take her out of Paris and away from her innocent childhood.

Robin Scott-Elliot has created a brilliantly tense and thrilling story which you won't be able to put down. The world of spies and the resistance is endlessly fascinating and having a wartime thriller told from the perspective of a teenage girl is incredibly refreshing.

Discussion questions

- What did you learn about French resistance fighters in the Second World War?
- How does Robin Scott-Elliot create suspense throughout the story?
- Where does Amelie get her bravery from? Do you think she's driven by fear, hope or something else?

***The Summer We Turned Green* by William Sutcliffe**

Themes: family, climate change, humour, activism

The Summer We Turned Green is the laugh-out-loud tale of a family that has been split down the middle by an environmental protest going on across the road.

The plan for a new airport runway to be built nearby has attracted a commune of protesters, who are now living in one of the soon-to-be-demolished houses opposite 13-year-old Luke's family home. The neighbours could not be more horrified. When Luke's older sister Rose moves to join them, the rest of the family has some tough decisions to make!

A life of being a nuclear family, working in the insurance industry, going on holiday to the same resort in Spain every year, and dutifully obeying the status-quo might just be about to get shaken up – in a big way.

William Sutcliffe has created a family of totally believable characters grappling with a serious issue that has affected all of us in one way or another, but with a healthy dose of wit, playfulness, and charm.

Discussion questions

- What kind of stereotypes are explored with regards to the climate protesters at the start of the book? Does this view of the protesters change?
- Do you think it is important for us to be able to think about serious issues like the climate crisis through a humorous lens? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Luke's Dad is so interested in life in the commune?
- Have you ever been to a protest? Why did you go? If you haven't, what kind of issues would you choose to protest about?

***Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu* by Maisie Chan**

Themes: family, friendship, young carers, ballroom dancing, Chinese culture

Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu follows the warm-hearted tale of 12-year-old Lizzie as she tries to get her beloved Grandad from their Glasgow home, to the Tower Ballroom in Blackpool to attend the tea dance. She's really hoping that the trip will help to snap her Wai Gong out of the funk he seems to be in. Lizzie and her grandparents used to never miss an episode of their favourite show, *Strictly Come Dancing* – but since Lizzie's Grandma Kam passed away, things have been slowly changing...

Maisie Chan has crafted a funny, poignant story of perseverance and love that will have you cheering for Lizzie and her Wai Gong through the pages and feeling jealous of some truly fabulous costumes. *Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu* offers a tender, uplifting look at familial bonds and close friendships after grief, reminding us all to keep dancing through life.

Discussion questions

- How did Lizzie's relationship with her Wai Gong change throughout the course of the book?
- What is the significance of the goddess Guan Yin for Lizzie's Wai Gong?
- How do Lizzie's friends support her throughout the story? Would you have done anything differently if Lizzie was your friend?

***Cardboard Cowboys* by Brian Conaghan**

Themes: family, friendship, homelessness, bullying, body image

Cardboard Cowboys is the story of twelve-year-old Glaswegian boy, Lenny Lambert. Lenny chooses to spend most of his days plonked down on a green bench by the canal instead of going to school. It's not that he isn't clever; it's just that, on his bench, he can dream up haikus, sing songs, and think in peace - without the almost relentless taunts of his schoolmates reminding him of his size.

One day, an errant Irn Bru can, flung down into the water, sparks an unlikely friendship between Lenny and Bruce - a man living in a cardboard shelter on the canal's edge.

Full of sparkling dialogue and Glaswegian humour, *Cardboard Cowboys* follows this peculiar duo on their life-changing quest to visit Lenny's older brother in Aberdeen. The physical journey prompts an emotional journey for Lenny, who is learning how to acknowledge his own worth in a world that often seems to dismiss it.

Brian Conaghan's charming narrative will have you hee-hawing with laughter and then blinking back tears from one page to the next. It reminds readers that, in a world that can seem cruel, there's always kindness and connection to be found.

Discussion questions

- How does Lenny view his relationship with his parents? Why do you think this is?
- What qualities make someone a good friend? Is Bruce a good friend to Lenny?
- How is homelessness represented in *Cardboard Cowboys*?

***The Rewilders* by Lindsay Littleson**

Themes: adventure, environmental conservation, bullying, friendship, nature

Set against the backdrop of the Scottish Highlands, *The Rewilders* follows the adventures of Esme, as a 'boring' trip to her Nan's house turns into a high-stakes, dangerous mission to reintroduce a wildcat to its natural home. Cora, the wild lynx kitten, had been found and taken in by Esme's unsuspecting Nan – but now it's up to Esme to make things right. She must get Cora back to the wildlife park that she was born in, as part of an effort to reintroduce wildcats and wolves to Scotland.

The trouble is, the only people around to help are Esme's sworn enemy, Callum, and Shug, the worst guard dog in the history of the world. When Esme and Callum start to hear wolves howling outside of their tent, things look like they might go from bad to worse...

Lindsay Littleson takes the somewhat contentious topic of reintroducing apex predators into Scotland's landscape and handles it with sensitivity and balance. *The Rewilders* is a truly gripping tale that will have readers on the edge of their seats, as well as encouraging them to think carefully about all sides of the rewilding debate.

Discussion questions

- What do you think about the project to reintroduce wolves and wildcats to the Scottish Highlands?
- Callum is seen as the school 'bad boy' at the start of the book. Does this view of him change? Why?
- How does Lindsay Littleson create a sense of menace and tension during the adventure?

***Only on the Weekends* by Dean Atta**

Themes: poetry, LGBTQIA+, relationships, romance, friendship, homophobia

Written entirely in verse, *Only on the Weekends* is the artfully told story of fifteen-year-old hopeless romantic, Mack. Mack has had a serious crush on Karim, the most gorgeous, popular boy in school, for years now – and he can't believe his luck when Karim seems to reciprocate his feelings. The only trouble is, Karim is not ready to come out as gay, and Mack isn't keen on being anybody's secret.

When Mack's Dad moves the family to Scotland for work, Mack is devastated to be leaving Karim behind. A few weeks into his new life in Scotland, Mack meets Fin. Fin seems totally fearless; he's confident in his sexuality, outspoken about being transgender, and a talented actor to boot. In short, he's thoroughly intoxicating. Which *could* be a problem for Mack and Karim...

Dean Atta has created a cast of fresh, believable characters with layers and flaws, who exemplify the highs, lows, and messy moments of first love – particularly through the lens of being both queer and Black. *Only on the Weekends* is a lyrical exploration of self-discovery that will have you gripped from start to finish.

Discussion questions

- What did you think about the story being written in verse? Did it influence the way you read the book and understood the story?
- How does Dean Atta portray toxic masculinity and internalised homophobia?
- None of the characters in *Only on the Weekends* are perfect – many of them make mistakes that hurt people around them. What impact does this have on the reader?

***Know My Place* by Eve Ainsworth**

Themes: foster care, family, belonging

Amy has been in the foster care system since her grandmother passed away when Amy was six years old. She's lived in multiple houses with multiple families over the years, and her most recent and longest stay was with the Gibsons. But that's over now, and Amy knows there's no going back.

When Amy is placed with a new family, the Dawsons, she is initially reluctant to trust them. Their big, spotless house with carpets that your feet sink into is not exactly what she's used to. She knows that they have good intentions but can't understand why she should try to 'settle in' when there's every chance she will have to move again. When she finally begins to let her guard down, a conversation overheard through a doorway throws Amy's whole world back into question.

Throughout *Know My Place*, Eve Ainsworth handles complex themes with sensitivity and realism. She offers a heartfelt and ultimately uplifting insight into the life of a teenager in foster care, in a dyslexia-friendly read that nurtures empathy and understanding.

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think Stephanie treated Amy the way she did?
- How would you welcome a child who had been in foster care into your family?
- Amy says 'I was like a jigsaw piece in the wrong place. I wouldn't fit, no matter how much you tried to ram me into the space.' Why do you think she feels this way?

***Talking History* by Joan Haig and Joan Lennon**

Themes: social justice, history, activism, politics

Talking History is a beautifully illustrated non-fiction book, filled with profiles on some of the most influential activists and speakers that modern world history has to offer. For each of the sixteen featured people, Joan Haig, Joan Lennon, and illustrator André Ducci have created two double page spreads filled with details about their lives, what they stood for, an influential speech that they made, and some contextual historical information.

Readers will find themselves both fascinated and inspired by the lives and words of prominent figures such as Emmeline Pankhurst, Harvey Milk, and Malala Yousafzai, among many others. This book covers a myriad of issues, from colonialism, racism and women's rights to space travel, climate change and world health.

Joan Haig and Joan Lennon also make sure to point out some of the literary devices that have been used in these memorable speeches, which encourages the reader to try their hand at writing their own. *Talking History* is an immersive book that will inspire a new generation of thinkers and speakers.

Discussion questions

- What impact can a very powerful speech have on a community? Can things really be changed just through the power of words?
- Why do you think people still remember the speeches that are featured in this book, even though some of them happened over 100 years ago?
- What did you learn from this book that surprised you?
- If you were going to make a recipe for the perfect speech, what ingredients would you add?

Further resources

- Our [10 things to do with any book secondary resource](#) can be used with any books, and contains activities and ideas that can extend pupil's engagement with any of these titles
- All our learning resources can be filtered by age, including [12-to-14 year olds](#) and [15-to-18 year olds](#)
- For more book recommendations, see our [book lists](#)