Great Stories Club - The Art of Change: Creation, Growth and Transformation
Related Reading List

A Place to Stand by Jimmy Santiago Baca

From *Booklist* - Poetry seems antithetical to the poverty, racism, and violence that wracked Baca's tragic youth, but the power of language is what kept him alive and sane while he served hard time in a hellish federal prison. Now a prizewinning poet and screenwriter, Baca, born in New Mexico in 1952, was abandoned by his parents and put in an orphanage at age seven. He learned to fight but not to read and, in spite of good intentions, ran into nothing but trouble. Baca chronicles his brutal experiences with riveting exactitude and remarkable evenhandedness. An unwilling participant in the horrific warfare that rages within prison walls and a rebel who refused to be broken by a vicious and corrupt system, Baca taught himself to read and write, awoke to the voice of the soul, and converted "doing time" into a profoundly spiritual pursuit. Poetry became a lifeline, and Baca's harrowing story will stand among the world's most moving testimonies to the profound value of literature. Baca has also written a potent new book of poems (Donna Seaman)

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic by Alison Bechdel

From *Booklist* -*Starred Review* This is a father and daughter story. Bechdel's mother and two brothers are in it, of course, but Bruce Bechdel had the biggest impact on his eldest child and so is naturally the other main character in her autobiographical graphic novel. Emotionally and physically reserved, to the point of brusqueness, he busied himself restoring--and then some--the Victorian-era house he bought for the family in the Pennsylvania town in which he was born and lived virtually all his 44 years. He enlisted the kids for never-ending interior and exterior modifications of the place in what obviously was his major creative outlet. For a living, he taught twelfth-grade English and ran the small undertaking business that occupied part of his parents' house and that the kids called the fun home. Bechdel doesn't even hint about how ironic she and her brothers meant to be, because she is a narrative artist, not a moralist or comedian, in this book and because she has a greater, real-life irony to consider. After disclosing her lesbianism in a letter home from college, her mother replied that her father was homosexual, too. Alison suddenly understood his legal trouble over buying a beer for a teenage boy, all the teen male "helpers" he had around the house, and his solo outings during family vacations to New York. Bechdel's long-running *Dykes to Watch Out For* is arguably the best comic strip going, and *Fun Home* is one of the very best graphic novels ever. (Ray Olson)

A Question of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival and Coming of Age in Prison by Dwayne Betts

From the publisher: At the age of sixteen, R. Dwayne Betts-a good student from a lower- middle-class family-carjacked a man with a friend. He had never held a gun before, but within a matter of minutes he had committed six felonies. In Virginia, carjacking is a "certifiable" offense, meaning that Betts would be treated as an adult under state law. A bright young kid, he served his nine-year sentence as part of the adult population in some of the worst prisons in the state. *A Question of Freedom* chronicles Betts's years in prison, reflecting back on his crime and looking ahead to how his experiences and the books he discovered while incarcerated would define him. Utterly alone, Betts confronts profound questions about violence, freedom, crime, race, and the justice system. Confined by cinder-block walls and barbed wire, he discovers the power of language through books, poetry, and his own pen. Above all, A Question of Freedom is about a quest for identity-one that guarantees Betts's survival in a hostile environment and that incorporates an understanding of how his own past led to the moment of his crime.

Love Letters to the Dead by Ava Dellaira

From *Booklist* - The assignment: write a letter to someone who is dead. Laurel falls into this classroom task deeper than she could have ever imagined, writing to deceased stars like Kurt Cobain, Amelia Earhart, Judy Garland, River Phoenix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Amy Winehouse, and others whose lives ended as

abruptly as Laurel's older sister's did. Her methodology expands beyond simply writing to the dead. Rather, she researches each recipient, learning about their lives in order to make each letter relatable to the intended party. These quite savvy letters become Laurel's way of working through her emotions as she begins high school, makes new friends, deals with a crumbling family, falls in love, and continues to grieve for the loss of her sister. With the help of her fantasy correspondence, she is able to find common ground, express herself, and eventually discover the messages and lessons of the deceased addressee's lives—as well as her own. Well paced and cleverly plotted, this debut uses a fresh, new voice to tell a sometimes sad, sometimes edgy, but always compelling narrative. Fans of Sarah Dessen and Jenny Han, get ready. (Jeanne Fredriksen)

March: Book One by Rep. John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell (illustrator)

From *Booklist* - *Starred Review* Congressman Lewis, with Michael D'Orso's assistance, told his story most impressively in *Walking with the Wind* (1998). Fortunately, it's such a good story—a sharecropper's son rises to eminence by prosecuting the cause of his people—that it bears retelling, especially in this graphic novel by Lewis, his aide Aydin, and Powell, one of the finest American comics artists going. After a kicker set on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on March 7, 1965 (the civil rights movement's Bloody Sunday), the story makes January 20, 2009 (President Obama's inauguration) a base of operations as it samples Lewis' past via his reminiscences for two schoolboys and their mother, who've shown up early at his office on that milestone day for African Americans. This first of three volumes of Lewis' story brings him from boyhood on the farm, where he doted over the chickens and dreamed of being a preacher, through high school to college, when he met nonviolent activists who showed him a means of undermining segregation—to begin with, at the department-store lunch counters of Nashville. Powell is at his dazzling best throughout, changing angle-of-regard from panel to panel while lighting each with appropriate drama. The kineticism of his art rivals that of the most exuberant DC and Marvel adventure comics—and in black-and-white only, yet! Books Two and Three may not surpass Book One, but what a grand work they'll complete. (Ray Olson)

Rage: True Stories by Teens About Anger by Youth Communication and Laura Longhine, editor

From *School Library Journal* -Teens from New York-based Youth Communication pen autobiographical essays about their struggles with bullies, anger about bad home situations and unfair treatment, and pressure to conform or be successful. While not graphic or overly profane, their well-written stories are often harrowing to read, with frank accounts of abuse, neglect, sexuality, and crushing loneliness. *Vicious* is the darkest of the three, focusing on the destructive results of cruelty. In contrast, what is most striking about *Rage* and *Pressure* is the teens' resilience as they seek aid, learn coping strategies, or find outlets for self-expression. Introductions and concluding sections provide general information and resources. Teens will identify with the writers, discover that their own problems are not unique, and be encouraged to find help, making these titles, particularly *Rage* and *Pressure*, solid choices.

Dear Marcus: A Letter to the Man Who Shot Me by Jerry McGill

From *Publishers Weekly* - A moment of senseless violence transforms a young man in this inspiring memoir of disability. In 1982, McGill was 13 years old and living in a Manhattan housing project when he was randomly shot in the back by an assailant who was never found (he dubs the unknown gunman "Marcus"). The wound left him a near quadriplegic, and the once athletic boy faced an agonizing struggle to recover some bodily function, and adjust to losing most. McGill takes an unsparing though humorously insightful look at the frustrations and humiliations imposed by his handicap and at the permanent rifts his family suffered from the strain. In time, McGill learns to appreciate his care-givers, finishes college, embarks on a rewarding career, and experiences a tender sexual encounter with a former camp counselor. "Happiness is a thing I can control if I put my mind to it," he realizes. McGill moves from bitter contempt for his attacker to a deeper analysis of the ghetto culture of violence, fatherlessness, and misguided machismo that victimized him—and eventually to understanding and forgiveness. (Lydia Willis)

Great Stories Club - The Art of Change: Creation, Growth and Transformation
Related Reading List

Three Little Words: A Memoir by Ashley Rhodes-Courter

From *Booklist* - “I felt as worthless as the junk in my trash bag . . . once again, I was the one being tossed out and thrown away.” Taken from her mother when she was scarcely four years old, Rhodes-Courter spent the next nine years in foster care with “more than a dozen so-called mothers.” “Some were kind,” she acknowledges, “a few were quirky and one . . . was as wicked as a fairy-tale witch.” She names names in this memoir, which is also a searing indictment of an often sadly deficient system of child care. Given her experiences, one can understand why she is angry and often bitter, but the unrelieved stridency of her tone makes for sometimes difficult reading. Nevertheless, she gives a voice to countless thousands of children who continue to be abused, abandoned, and ignored, and one hopes her book will make a positive difference in their lives. (Michael Cart)

I Capture the Castle by Dodie Smith

From the publisher - Now a major motion picture from the Academy Award winning producer of *Shakespeare in Love*, *I Capture the Castle* tells the story of seventeen year old Cassandra and her family, who live in not so genteel poverty in a ramshackle old English castle. Here she strives, over six turbulent months, to hone her writing skills. She fills three notebooks with sharply funny yet poignant entries. Her journals candidly chronicle the great changes that take place within the castle's walls, and her own first descent into love. By the time she pens her final entry, she has "captured the castle" and the heart of the reader in one of literature's most enchanting entertainments.

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

From *Booklist* - What is this book about? In an appended author’s note, Woodson says it best: “my past, my people, my memories, my story.” The resulting memoir in verse is a marvel, as it turns deeply felt remembrances of Woodson’s preadolescent life into art, through memories of her homes in Ohio, South Carolina, and, finally, New York City, and of her friends and family. Small things—ice cream from the candy store, her grandfather’s garden, fireflies in jelly jars—become large as she recalls them and translates them into words. She gives context to her life as she writes about racial discrimination, the civil rights movement, and, later, Black Power. But her focus is always on her family. Her earliest years are spent in Ohio, but after her parents separate, her mother moves her children to South Carolina to live with Woodson’s beloved grandparents, and then to New York City, a place, Woodson recalls, “of gray rock, cold and treeless as a bad dream.” But in time it, too, becomes home; she makes a best friend, Maria, and begins to dream of becoming a writer when she gets her first composition notebook and then discovers she has a talent for telling stories. Her mother cautions her not to write about her family, but, happily, many years later she has—and the result is both elegant and eloquent, a haunting book about memory that is itself altogether memorable. (Michael Cart)