

FEMINIST BOOKS FOR TEENS

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It is important to have feminist books in your teen collection. The teen years are a great time to start exploring feminism since teens begin developing a sense of social consciousness. They will be seeking answers about human justice and they should be able to explore the various options in your library. Feminist books are an important component in providing a wide range of social theories for teens to learn more about.

It is also important to include a wide range of books that focus on different points in the history of feminism. These books should give teens the option to explore the history of feminism and read about its origins. Your collections should include historical aspects of feminism, new non-fiction books and fictional works dealing with feminist issues.

Trying to identify a feminist book can be challenging, especially when it comes to fiction. The main characteristic of feminist works is that they seek fairness between genders (Kuykendal & Sturm, 2007). Feminist works do not contain a mere role reversal where women are strong and the male characters are weak. For a novel to be considered to be feminist, it is imperative that all characters are seen as having the potential to be equal and women are usually independent (Kuykendal & Sturm, 2007). For non-fiction feminist books it is important that these books discuss the history of feminism, or current feminism, or a how-to book that advises teens how they can become a feminist.

Each year the American Library Association produces a list of best feminist books, called the Amelia Bloomer Project. Books that are nominated for this list exhibit an excellence in writing and have a high level of feminist content (Feminist Task Force, 2008). The list seeks to provide books that are age appropriate however this list is not confined to young adults but contains books for all young readers (Feminist Task Force, 2008). You could utilize this list to keep your young adult feminist collection current after you have created a core collection of feminist books.

The list of feminist works given below focuses mainly on non-fiction since non-fiction is usually a second thought when it comes to teen collections. It contains works that will give a good sampling of the history of feminism as well as works that pertain to today's budding feminists.

Starting at the beginning of the feminist movement in the late 1800s, it would be beneficial for your library to contain a few books discussing the suffragette movement or one of the most popular feminists during this time. Below are two books that outline the lives of popular first wave feminists, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Monroe, Judy. (2002). The Susan B. Anthony Women's Voting Rights Trial: A Headline Court Case.

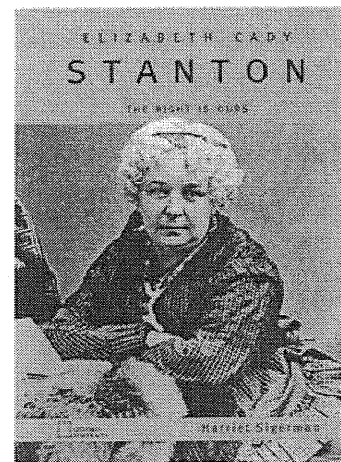
Ages 11-14.

This book is a great introduction to the beginnings of feminism in North America. Susan B. Anthony's feminist activism is outlined and explained as well as the suffragette movement. This book discusses the events that led up to Susan B. Anthony's court case and explains her trial. It also explores the partnership Ms. Anthony had with Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Sigerman, Harriet. (2001). Elizabeth Cady Stanton: The Right Is Ours.

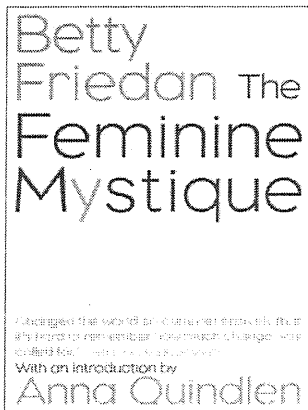
Ages 12+

This biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton retells the story of her life from early childhood and throughout her fight for women's rights. It discusses Stanton's position on various topics including birth control, voting rights for women, and her determination to change the laws concerning divorce. This book also includes original newspaper articles, cartoons and photos. This would complement the book focusing on Susan B. Anthony.



The second wave of feminism started in the 1960s. Books from this period in feminism will portray another element of the historical perspective which was started with the books suggested for first wave feminism. Betty Friedman and Simone de Beauvoir are both seen as poignant writers who outline their respective feminist positions. Books by these two authors should be available to teens in your library so that they can gain an understanding of the history of feminism as well as read the writings of feminists themselves.

Friedman, Betty. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*.



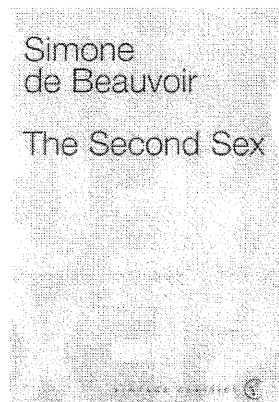
Ages 16+

The Feminine Mystique is often described as the book which launched the second wave of feminism during the 1960s. In this book, Friedman examines the roles society requires women to fulfill and how these views can be changed. This book should be accessible to teens because it is considered a classic in feminist literature. This book would be very approachable to any determined sixteen year old since the language is at a general high school level.

de Beauvoir, Simone. (1953). *The Second Sex*.

Ages 16+

The Second Sex is also considered a classic in feminist literature. The main argument de Beauvoir makes is that the female sex has been established as 'other' in Western culture. There are a few drawbacks to carrying this book for teens. First, the language is not as approachable as *The Feminine Mystique* and can become quite challenging in places. This, of course, does not



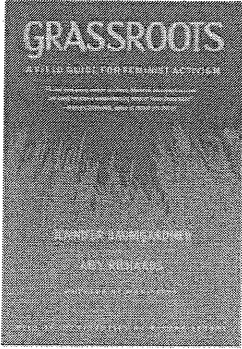
mean that we should not provide a space for this book within our teen feminist collection since teens can determine their own reading level. The second drawback is that the original French text is very well written while the English translation has sections missing and was subject to the translator's opinions of what was important to convey.

Teens are always attracted to books that have been published recently. This is especially important with feminist books because the third wave of feminism has begun. The books below outline how today's young feminists can continue activism and the fight for equality among all people. The history of feminism is also given in some of these books which might spark interest in the first and second waves of feminism. Overall, these books will give a well-rounded view of the feminist movement today as well as the past.

Sills, Leslie. (2005). *From Rags to Riches: A History of Girls' Clothing in America.*

Ages 10-12

In *From Rags to Riches*, Sills includes pictures and interesting background stories that pertain to the history of girls' clothing in America. *From Rags to Riches* also relates how individuals from popular culture, as well as social events, affect the fashion of the times. This book is a great addition to any feminist collection because it focuses on the history of women.



Baumgardner, Jennifer, Richards, Amy & LaDuke, Winona. (2004). **Grassroots: A Field Guide For Feminist Activism.**

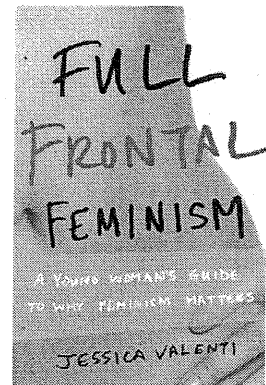
Ages 14+

Grassroots features profiles of women who are making a difference in their communities. This book can be used as a how-to guide for any beginning activist because it contains stories that involve both easy and complex forms of becoming socially involved. It would be useful to any teen who is thinking about getting active in their community and making a difference.

Valenti, Jessica. (2007). **Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters.**

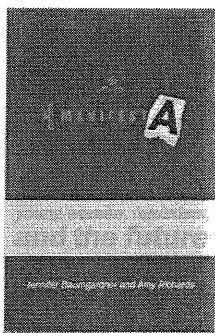
Ages 14+

Full Frontal Feminism examines modern feminism and the current stereotypes of feminists in order to show young women that feminism is still cool. This book covers a wide range of topics including: young women's sexuality, popular culture, education and the workplace. This book contains straight-forward, colourful language that young adults are sure to relate to.



Baumgardner, Jennifer & Richards, Amy. (2000). **Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future.**

Ages 13+

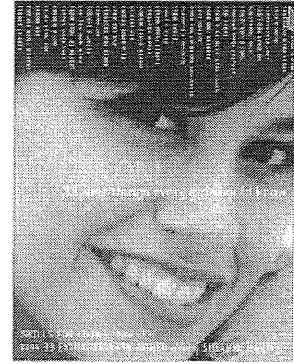


In *Manifesta*, the authors defend contemporary feminism, also seen as the third wave of feminism. The authors argue that the young women of today have been brought up to believe that they can do anything they choose but that they should continue activism to try to establish full equality. This book discusses both the positive and negative qualities of feminism.

Harper, Suzanne. (2001). *Hands On! 33 More Things Every Girl Should Know: Skills for Living Your Life from 33 Extraordinary Women.*

Ages 12+

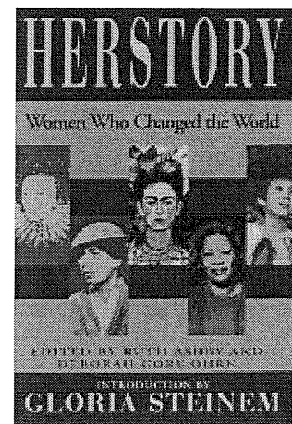
Suzanne Harper brings together essays from 33 extraordinary women who talk about their lives as feminists. The list of contributors includes astronauts, chefs, singers and writers. Together, these essays present a message directed at burgeoning feminists that is filled with positive encouragement.



Ashby, Ruth & Gore Ohrn, Deborah. (1995). *Herstory: Women Who Changed The World.*

Ages 14+

Herstory is comprised of short biographies on women throughout history. There are great illustrations to accompany these biographies. The language is very straight forward and easy to read. This book would be great for a reluctant reader since the biographies are short and it is only necessary to read ones that appear interesting to the reader.



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