The Girl on Fire

A female protagonist who takes on roles often reserved for boys—adventure/action, fighting, infiltrating, leading, surviving, rescuing, solving puzzles, creating social change, and facing down corruption.

Most often 16 or 17 years old, but sometimes 15 or 18 (flashbacks in the story portray events from girlhood).

Most often a lower socio-economic class and/or living in survival mode.

Heterosexual or non-sexual. A non-heterosexual orientation—or a lack of a male love interest or love triangle—is rare. Romance is a frequent theme.

Sometimes has special abilities or skills. Able bodies and sound minds are challenged and sometimes compromised.

She tells her story in the “I” or via an omniscient narrator, speaks up for what’s right, questions the way things are.

A “mainstream” girl who is described or assumed as white, but may reflect a future of racial ambiguities.

She is often an outsider or an outcast of some kind.

An “Other” girl is non-white as established by name, skin color or hair texture, ancestry or parentage, ethnic group, or combination of these; race is overt.

Identity and Character Norms

gender
age
class
sexuality
ability
race
The Human Side:
Adolescence, coming of age
Family, friends
School, hobbies, work
Love, community

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Culture and Context

Overlapping Genres in YA Dystopian Lit:
Romance
Fantasy
Science fiction
Horror
Speculative fiction
Action/adventure

The Dystopian Context Cultural, Institutional, Structural
Social organization/power/politics/justice/corruption
Health/disease/genetics/bioethics
Landscape/geography/climate change
Resources: food, water, shelter, clothing, education, technology
Timeframe/relationship to the past