

NEW ENGLAND CHILDREN'S BOOKSELLING ADVISORY COUNCIL SPRING REVIEWS, 2008

This is our bi-annual attempt to identify as many high-quality titles as possible from among the numerous new January-June middle-grade and young-adult fiction books. The list was produced by soliciting reading copies from as many publishers as possible, sharing the contributed books among NECBA members, reading and reviewing and rating as many as possible.

From these titles a Top Ten list has been selected as a service to our general bookstore colleagues who are less familiar with the genre. The full text will be available on the NEIBA website, www.newenglandbooks.org.

As is ever the case, contributions are uneven, with some publishers supplying a very large fraction of the galleys, and a few reviewers supplying a very large fraction of the reviews. Such reviews are, by their nature, never soon enough or inclusive enough. Nevertheless, this list is bound to alert the reader to at least one or two — and probably more — excellent titles s/he might have missed.

The Chittenden Rating Scale, revised spring 2008

10 A desert island book for all time: Charlotte's Web, Frederick, Bridge to Terabithia.

9 One of the best of the season, and/or solid Newbery or Printz honor contender, whether I like it or not.

8 One of the best of the season, probably saleable in hardcover, can recommend with honest enthusiasm to customers, will have legs in paperback. Might be a solid Newbery or Printz honor contender, especially if kids were on the selection committee.

7 I will handsell it well in hardcover, but others might or might not.

6 An entertaining read of mixed quality. May have some fine points. Probably can recommend in paperback if not hardcover; OR kids will go wild for it but the enduring literary quality is mixed.

5 Will likely have a small audience. Or, suitable for some school library situations, but unlikely to sell in hardcover as a child's choice or as a gift.

4 An honest but unsuccessful effort, probably an editor's hope that better things will follow. Also unlikely to sell in hardcover as a child's choice or as a gift.

3 Not a book I would want on my store's shelves if I could help it.

2 A book I'd have a hard time embracing even if a friend's child wrote it.

1 Waste of a good tree.

SPRING 2008 TOP TEN (plus ONE)

annotations are from the Library of Congress

The Boy Who Dared, by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

978-04396801334 \$16.99 Scholastic, February 2008

In October, 1942, seventeen-year-old Helmuth Hulbener, imprisoned for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets, recalls his past life and how he came to dedicate himself to bring the truth about Hitler and the war to the German people.

Reviewer: Joyce Miller, Baker Books

Rating: 9

Chicken Feathers, by Joy Cowley, illus. by David Elliot

978-0399247910 \$15.99 Philomel/Penguin, May 2008

Relates the story of the summer Josh spends while his mother is in the hospital awaiting the birth of his baby sister, and his pet chicken Semolina, who talks but only to him, is almost killed by a red fox.

Reviewer: Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Rating: 9

The Diamond of Drury Lane, by Julia Golding

978-1596433519 \$12.50 Roaring Brook Press, June 2008

Catherine "Cat" Royal, an orphan who lives at the Drury Lane Theater in 1790s London, tries to find the "diamond" supposedly hidden in the theater, which unmasks a treasonous political cartoonist and involves her in the street gangs of Covent Garden and the world of nobility.

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

Rating: 9

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 9

Gods of Manhattan: The Hidden Light, by Scott Mebus

978-0525479550 \$17.99 Dutton, April 2008

Thirteen-year-old Rory discovers a spirit world that thrives alongside his contemporary New York City, filled with fantastical creatures and people from the city's colorful past who have become gods and goddesses and who have chosen Rory to perform a dangerous mission.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 9

How to Build A House, by Dana Reinhardt

978-0375844539 \$15.99 Random House, May 2008

Seventeen-year-old Harper Evans hopes to escape the effects of her father's divorce on her family and friendships by volunteering her summer to build a house in a small Tennessee town devastated by a tornado.

Reviewer: Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 8

Reviewer: Carol B. Chittenden, BookStream and Eight Cousins

Rating: 9

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford)

Rating: 9

Lock and Key, by Sarah Dessen

978-0670788835 \$18.99 Viking (Penguin), April '08

When she is abandoned by her alcoholic mother, high school senior Ruby winds up living with Cora, the sister she has not seen for ten years, and learns about Cora's new life, what makes a family, how to allow people to help her when she needs it, and that she too has something to offer others.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford)

Rating: 9

Looks, by Madeleine George

978-0670061679 \$16.99 Viking, June 2008

Two high school girls, one an anorexic poet and the other an obese loner, form an unlikely friendship.

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9.5

Reviewer: Gretchen Baker-Smith, Baker Books

No rating

Reviewer: Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 9.5

Reviewer: Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 9

Once Upon a Time in the North, by Philip Pullman

978-0375845109 \$12.99 David Fickling Knopf / Random House, April 2008

In a time before Lyra Silvertongue was born, the tough American balloonist Lee Scoresby and the great armored bear lorek Byrnison meet when Lee and his hare daemon Hester crash-land their trading balloon onto a port in the far Arctic North and find themselves in the middle of a political powder keg.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 9

Stink and the Great Guinea Pig Express, by Megan McDonald

978-0763628352 \$12.99 Candlewick Press March 2008

Stink Moody, friends Webster and Sophie, and Mrs. Birdwistle visit tourist attractions in Virginia as they try to give away 101 guinea pigs rescued from a laboratory, although Stink is very reluctant to give away his favorite, Astro.

Reviewer: Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 10

Sunrise over Fallujah, by Walter Dean Myers

978-0439916240 \$17.99 Scholastic, May 2008

Robin Perry, from Harlem, is sent to Iraq in 2003 as a member of the Civilian Affairs Battalion, and his time there profoundly changes him.

Reviewer: Carol Chittenden, BookStream and Eight Cousins

Rating: 9

Reviewer: Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 9

Reviewer: Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer

Rating: 9

Reviewer: Mimi at Baker Books

Rating: 8

Reviewer: Heather Doss, Bookazine

Rating: 9

Trouble, by Gary Schmidt

978-0618927661 \$16.00 Clarion, April 2008

Fourteen-year-old Henry, wishing to honor his brother Franklin's dying wish, sets out to hike Maine's Mount Katahdin with his best friend and dog. But fate adds another companion--the Cambodian refugee accused of fatally injuring Franklin--and reveals troubles that predate the accident.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford)

Rating: 10