

NEW ENGLAND CHILDREN'S BOOKSELLING ADVISORY COUNCIL

SPRING REVIEWS, 2009

This list is our annual attempt to identify as many high-quality titles as possible from among the numerous January-June middle-grade and young-adult fiction releases. 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 NECBA website, <http://www.necba.net>.

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 otherwise might have missed.

REVIEWERS

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore (Shelburne, VT)

Kenny Brechner, Devaney, Doak & Garrett (DDG) Booksellers (Farmington, ME)

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers, Ltd. (Kinderhook, NY)

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford, NH)

Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins (Falmouth, MA)

Linda Devlin, Linda's Story Time (Monroe, CT)

Heather Doss, Children's Merchandise Manager – Bookazine (Bayonne, NJ)

Rebecca Fabian, The Odyssey Bookshop (S. Hadley, MA)

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop (Northampton, MA)

Katherine Ferguson, Bunch of Grapes (Martha's Vineyard, MA)

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft (Great Barrington, MA)

Judy Hanley, BookEnds Winchester (Winchester, MA)

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books and Music (Rhinebeck, NY)

Laura Lucy, White Birch Books (North Conway, NH)

Beth Reynolds, Norwich Bookstore (Norwich, VT)

Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith (Wellesley, MA)

Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books (Cambridge, MA)

Val Tate, Village Book Store (Littleton, NH)

Vicky Uminowicz, Titcomb's Bookshop (E. Sandwich, MA)

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library (Bridgeport, CT)

The NECBA Spring 2009 Top Ten

The Chosen One, by Carol Lynch Williams

978-0312555115, \$16.95 St. Martin's Griffin May 2009 |

Thirteen-year-old Kyra has grown up in an isolated, polygamous religious community; she has twenty brothers and sisters, with two more on the way. Her secret visits to the Mobile Library on Wheels to read forbidden books, and her meetings with Joshua, a boy she hopes to choose for herself instead of having a man chosen for her, are both expressly forbidden. When the Prophet decrees that she must marry her sixty-year-old uncle--who already has six wives--Kyra must make a desperate choice in the face of violence and her own fears of losing her family forever.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Last Straw, by Jeff Kinney

978-0810970687, \$12.95 Amulet, January 2009

When Greg's dad threatens to send him to military academy, Greg realizes he has to shape up . . . or get shipped out. Greg and his family and friends, who make the "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" books a must-read for middle school readers, are back and at their best in this hilarious new installment of the series, which is sure to please current fans while attracting new ones.

Evolution of Calpurnia Tate, by Jacqueline Kelly

9780805088410, \$16.95 Henry Holt May 2009

As 11-year-old Callie Tate explores the natural world around her in 1899 Texas, she develops a close relationship with her grandfather, navigates living with six brothers, and comes up against just what it means to be a girl at the turn of the century.

Gentlemen, by Michael Northrop

0-545-09749-5, \$16.99 Scholastic Press 4/15/2009

Gritty, fast-paced, and brutally real, this debut novel takes an unflinching look at what binds friends together--and what can tear them apart.

Gooney Bird Is So Absurd, by Lois Lowry, illus Middy Thomas

9780547119670, \$15.00 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, March, 2009

Mrs. Pidgeon is teaching her class about poetry. Who knew there could be so many different ways to write a poem? Haikus, couplets, limericks--Gooney Bird Greene and the rest of the class soon find that writing good poetry takes a lot of hard work and creative thinking.

If I Stay, by Gayle Forman

9780525421030, \$16.99 Dutton April '09

A sophisticated, layered, and heartachingly beautiful story about the power of family and friends, the choices we all make, and the ultimate choice one teenage girl commands, this emotionally arresting novel is sure to captivate readers.

The Rock and the River, by Kekla Magoon

9781416975823, \$15.99 Aladdin, January 2009

Set in 1968 Chicago, this powerful debut novel follows 13-year-old Sam Childs, the son of a known civil rights activist who questions the possibility of change after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Scat, by Carl Hiaasen

9780375834868, \$16.99 Knopf January 2009

Mrs. Bunny Starch, the most feared biology teacher ever, was last seen during a field trip to Black Vine Swamp. The school's headmaster and the police seem to have accepted the sketchy, unsigned note explaining that her absence is due to a "family emergency." There's no real evidence of foul play. But still, Nick and Marta don't buy it. Something weird is definitely going on.

Secrets of Truth & Beauty, Megan Frazer

9781423117117, \$15.99 Hyperion, July 2009

In this powerful debut novel, a young woman who had won a beauty pageant as a child must now contend with her classmates after they find out about her past, her control-freak mother, and a family secret that comes to light.

Wintergirls, by Laurie Halse Anderson

978-0670011100, \$17.99 Viking Children's Books March 2009

Six years after Cassie and Lia resolved to become the skinniest girls in their school, Cassie dies. Unable to bear the sadness and guilt following Cassie's death, Lia spirals deeper into her own eating disorder. Elijah, the last person to see Cassie alive, helps Lia find the strength to face her own demons and enter recovery.

NECBA SPRING REVIEW PROJECT 2009

TITLES REVIEWED

43 Old Cemetery Road #1: Dying To Meet You, by Kate Klise
Absolutely Maybe, by Lisa Yee
all the broken pieces, by ann e. burg (lower case is on cover)
The Amaranth Enchantment, by Julie Berry
Any Which Wall, by Laurel Snyder Illustrated by LeUyen Pham
Because I Am Furniture, by Thalia Chaltas
Blade: Playing Dead, Tim Bowler
Blue Mountain Trouble, by Martin Mordecai
Burn My Heart, by Beverly Naidoo
Calvin Coconut: Trouble Magnet, by Graham Salisbury
Camilla, by Madeleine L'Engle
The Chosen One, by Carol Lynch Williams
Cookie, by Jacqueline Wilson
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Last Straw, by Jeff Kinney
The Dog Days of Charlotte Hayes, by Marlane Kennedy
The Dork Diaries, by Rachel Renee Russell

Emmaline and the Bunny, by Katherine Hannigan
Evolution of Calpurnia Tate, by Jacqueline Kelly
Forest of Hands & Teeth, by Carrie Ryan
Goddess Boot Camp, by Tera Lyn Childs
Gooney Bird Is So Absurd, by Lois Lowry, illus Middy Thomas
Heroes of the Valley, by Jonathan Stroud
Highway Robbery, by Kate Thompson, illus Jonny Duddle
Highway to Hell (Maggie Quinn: Girl Vs Evil #3), by Rosemary Clement-Moore
If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever? by M. E. Kerr
If I Stay, by Gayle Forman
It's Not You, It's Me, by Kerry Cohen Hoffmann
Kaleidoscope Eyes, by Jen Bryant
King of the Screw-Ups, by K.L. Going
The Last Olympian, by Rick Riordan
Lifting the Sky, by Mackie D'Arge
Lucky Breaks, by Susan Patron
A Map of the Known World, by Lisa Ann Sandell
Marcelo in the Real World, by Francisco X. Stork
Maze Runner, by James Dashner
Mudshark, by Gary Paulsen
My Brother Abe, by Harry Mazer
Operation Redwood, by S. Terrell French
Paisley Hanover Acts Out, by Cameron Tuttle
Peace, Locomotion, by Jacqueline Woodson
The Red Blazer Girls, by Michael Beil
Return to Sender, by Julia Alvarez
The Rock and the River, by Kekla Magoon
Scat, by Carl Hiaasen
Secrets of Truth & Beauty, by Megan Frazer
Seven Keys of Balabad, by Paul Haven
Smoke, by Mavis Jukes
Soul Enchilada, by David Macinnis Gill
Sunny Holiday, by Coleen Murtagh Paratore
Surface Tension, by Brent Runyon
Swim the Fly, by Don Calame
Tales from Outer Suburbia, by Shaun Tan
The Uninvited, by Tim Wynne-Jones
Wings, by Aprilynne Pike
Wintergirls, by Laurie Halse Anderson
Year of the Bomb, by Ronald Kidd
The Year the Swallows Came Early, by Kathryn Fitzmaurice
You Are So Undead to Me, by Stacy Jay

NECBA SPRING REVIEW PROJECT 2009
~ REVIEWS ~

43 Old Cemetery Road #1: Dying To Meet You by Kate Klise

9780152057275 \$15.00

HM Harcourt Children's Books

April '09

Audience 8-12 yr. olds who want less text, more illustration and lots of chuckles
Notable for humor, appreciation for ideas of family, caring for others

This is a very short book, filled with quirky characters (a ghost-story author with writer's block, an 11- yr- old boy left to live alone in an old Victorian mansion, a lovely female ghost who cooks his dinner every night, and a cat), absurd newspaper columns, ideas about what makes good writing and relationships. Totally off-the-wall humor (and fun illustrations by M.

Sarah Klise) is a cover for a tale about finding oneself and the importance of family. This is obviously the start of a series for kids who like light fantasy. Cemeteries are in! It was fun.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop Milford, NH

Rating: 7

Absolutely Maybe, by Lisa Yee

9780439838443 \$16.99

Scholastic

Feb. '09

Core audience teen girls

Notable for issues of relationships involving family and friends and esteem

Maybelline "Maybe" Chestnut was named for a mascara shade, colors her hair with Kool-Aid, deals with an alcoholic Mom, classmate bullies, and a soon-to-be-stepfather who tries to rape her. When her Mom takes his side, she decides to run away with a couple of friends driving cross-country to a summer school program in LA. Her intent is to find the biological father she never knew. Ted and "Hollywood" are loyal, talented and quirky and all three of them manage to find a way to survive with little money. With Ted's help, Maybe moves in with a caring and supportive ex-step-father and manages to make friends with his new live-in girlfriend. She finds a new purpose and much-needed self-esteem working on a taco truck. When she finds her father, and he doesn't care about her, she is ready to find herself. There are more surprises involving these likeable, assertive and quirky kids. At book's end Mom and Maybe are reunited in LA, where Mom finds an interesting job with an aging movie star and goes to live in her gorgeous mansion. This ending for Mom seems a bit too "pat", but readers will enjoy the whole story from beginning to end and devour it eagerly. Maybe is an inspiring and gutsy teen who will get her life together and make readers wish for more.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 8

all the broken pieces, by ann e. burg (lower case is on cover)

978-0545-080927 / \$16.99

Scholastic

April 2009

Core audience: ages 10-14

Notable aspects: manages to get a lot of viewpoints into a short, powerful verse novel

Review: From Scholastic: "Two years after being airlifted out of war-torn Vietnam, Matt Pin is haunted: by bombs that fell like dead crows, by the family - and the terrible secret - he left behind. Now, inside a caring adoptive home in the United States, a series of profound events force him to choose between silence and candor, blame and forgiveness, fear and freedom."

Burg gets a lot of perspectives on the Vietnam War into this little book, without really taking sides. From the Amerasian main character, Matt, to the high school baseball star who became a legless vet in a wheelchair, to Matt's adoptive family, where the father went to medical school instead of war, to Matt's teammate Rob who hates him because his older brother was killed in the war. She also gets a a lot of love and caring in. Matt's mother loves him enough to send him to the U.S., his "now mother" comes to him when he has nightmares, the baseball coach and the piano teacher both play important roles. The language is lovely, the end is uplifting. Very fine debut.

Quibbles - I know Burg is using pronouns to make you think about who Matt's referring to, but sometimes it's just confusing and not thought provoking. There's a powerful scene with Matt and Rob near the end, where they both come to understand something about the other. It's very well done, except I thought the coach did not need to add anything. In the book there are randomly placed bass clefs. Symbolism? Decoration? Chapter markers? Why bass clefs and not the more easily identifiable treble clef? Not every child in middle school is in the band.

Reviewer: Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brower

Rating: 7.5

The Amaranth Enchantment, by Julie Berry

9781599903347, \$16.99

Bloomsbury

March 09

Core audience: girls age 12+

Notable for fairy tale motifs with strong female character

Lucinda was born into wealth and influence but loses both parents to an accident at an early age. She is taken in by nasty new aunt and kindly uncle. He dies and her life becomes total drudgery and unhappiness. Fifteen and feisty, her opportunity to turn things around arrives when Beryl, whom some consider a witch, comes into Lucinda's life. She is from another world and has entered this one through a Well. She gives Lucinda a magical gemstone which is promptly stolen by a young pickpocket. From this moment on, Lucinda's feistiness comes into full play! There is a charming young prince, lessons on how to pick pocket to get the stone back, new knowledge about her parents' deaths and threats for her own demise. With spunky retorts and courageous actions, Lucinda meets all the challenges. Humorous and exciting, this well-detailed fairy tale will hook readers and reward them with surprises!

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

Rating: 8

Any Which Wall, by Laurel Snyder Illustrated by LeUyen Pham

9780375855603, \$16.99

Random house

May 2009

Core Audience: boys and girls, ages 8-12

Notable aspects: Features boys and girls, of a variety of ages. Magic, Adventure, and Time Travel. Illustrated throughout.

An obvious homage to Eager and Nesbit, it's been a long time since something has been written to fill this void. These kids are not wizards or endowed with special powers, but ordinary people who stumble onto some type of magic. It's the kind that doesn't come with any instructions or guidebooks, but rather that which must be deciphered. (*Half-Magic*, anyone?) Reading a book by Eager or Nesbit always gives me hope that someday I could happen upon some magic and perhaps visit another world. But where, and when? These are questions I ask myself-- often. I've heard that all you need to do is be open to the possibility. Seeing as that hasn't happened yet, I was delighted to have discovered this book. Let's hope today's kids will be just as thrilled.

Of course, one of the first things that caught my eye was the cover. LeUyen Pham's illustrations are simply wonderful. They are also featured throughout the book, complementing each of the chapters. One is even a double-page spread--when's the last time you saw something like that in a chapter book? May this be the beginning of a fabulous new trend! Snyder's story focuses on two families who live next door to each other. There are four characters, two boys and two girls: Roy and Henry are friends and of a similar age. Emma is younger and has her own idea of fun. Susan is older and though she feels like most of this magic business is beneath her, she plays along. Bravo to Snyder for having a younger sister tag along, and an older girl not sneer at every suggestion.

Like the Penderwicks, this story harkens back to a simpler time. Though set in the present day, the kids find themselves visiting the past. Merlin, Witchita Slim and Blackbeard's son are just a few of the people they meet on their journey through time. There is some violence and some graphic imagery which made me pause while reading. But it's a minor quibble and most likely will not even register with the kids while they are reading. These situations aren't gratuitous and certainly help to move the story along, but I found myself wondering "Would this happen to the Penderwicks or even to the kids in Edward Eager's books?" A silly question that only an adult reading this book would bother contemplating. The kids who read this book will be more caught up in the "sort of" ending and be wondering if there are more adventures in store for this foursome. Perhaps wishing hard enough can make it so.

Reviewer: Beth Reynolds @ The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 8

Because I Am Furniture, by Thalia Chaltas

9780670062980, \$16.99

Viking, April 2009

Core audience: ages 12+, grades 7-12

Notable: Novel in verse, subject of parental physical/sexual abuse

Review: This beautifully crafted debut novel in verse tells the story of 9th grader Anke, whose brother and sister bear the brunt of their father's abuse while she is completely ignored. Thalia Chaltas deals with this difficult topic both delicately and honestly. Anke's main struggle (beyond witnessing the abuse to her siblings) is dealing with the fact that in a sick way she feels jealous of the attention they are getting. The book thoroughly explores the complexities of domestic violence without becoming graphic. Overall, it's an intense

quick read with an excellent and sympathetic narrator and a happy ending.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9.0

Additional rating for *Because I Am Furniture*:

I can't add much to Suzanna's fine review. This is a one-sitting book that mesmerizes a reader with its honesty and spirit. It's a terrific book for teens (even those who struggle with reading) with a struggling but strong and resilient narrator, along the lines of *Shark Girl* by Kelly Bingham, *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* by Sonya Sones, and other powerful, realistic YA novels.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8.75

Blade: Playing Dead, Tim Bowler

9780399251863, \$16.99

Penguin, May 09

Core audience: Boys, 13+

Notable aspects: British - uses some slang that takes getting used to

The book starts with a scene in a police station. Our narrator is being questioned about something and with some quick thinking, he manages to escape. Then we learn that this scene happened when Blade was 7 and now he's 14. He's obviously on his own. The book is told as though he is talking to someone, though we never really know who that is. He has been living invisibly in an unnamed city, but through a series of circumstances, he is forced to join up with others. It's breaking all of his rules to do this and he especially needs his rules now, because his past is about to catch up with him.

Once you get the slang and give up trying to figure out where he is and just follow the story, this is quite a compelling read. Blade's past is never fully revealed - obviously coming in future books - but you can see the chinks in his armor. There are plenty of surprises in the book - just when you think you know where it's headed, there's another twist. The book does really leave you hanging, though, and that would be my only minor complaint.

Reviewer: Laura Lucy, White Birch Books

Rating: 7.5

Blue Mountain Trouble, by Martin Mordecai

978--0-545-04156-0

Scholastic

April 2009

Core Audience: middle school boys and girls

Notable Aspects: unusual setting (Jamaica), characters, language

Pollyread and Jackson are 11-year-old twins who live in a small village in the mountains of Jamaica. Their world is upset when Jammy, the exemplar of a boy gone bad, turns up again in the village. The twins must face some upsetting family secrets as well as the end of their schooling in the village and decisions about their future. This book gives a real sense of life in this village, with lots of interesting characters, beautiful scenery and lovely language. My one concern is the disparity between the age of the twins, and therefore the age of potential readers, and some of the content, include drugs and teenage pregnancy (which is presented in a fairly positive way).

Reviewer: Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

Burn My Heart, by Beverly Naidoo

978-0-06-143297-2/ \$15.99

Amistad/HarperCollins Publishers

{Pub Date}

Core Audience: older elementary and middle school students interested in history

Notable Aspects: setting, showing two sides of a complex historical event

REVIEW: *Burn My Heart* is the story of the fight for independence and the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in the 1950's. We see this struggle through the eyes of Mathew, the son of a British settler, and Mugo, the son of one of the workers on the plantation. At the beginning of the book, the two boys share adventures and some kind of friendship. As the fight for freedom moves closer to the area of the plantation, both boys must struggle with their confusion and doubts as their families and events pull them in different directions. We see the fear of the white settlers and the pressure on the Africans to join the revolution. We also see the mistreatment of the Africans and the arrogance of the whites. This complex story is told simply but not simplistically. At the end of the book, Mugo and his family are taken away to be resettled in a "reserve" and both boys are left with their confused feelings about each other and what is happening to their country.

Reviewer: Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

Calvin Coconut: Trouble Magnet by Graham Salisbury

978-0-385-73701-2, \$12.99

Wendy Lamb Books

March 2009

Core Audience: Ages 7-10, many characters are in 4th grade

Notable Aspects: appealing characters, new and different setting for this age, fun illustrations*

Review: Publisher description - "Fourth-grader Calvin lives near the beach in Oahu with his mom and little sister. Mom says: "You're the man of the house." But Calvin's not great at being the man of the house, or taking care of his responsibilities. He's too busy having fun with his pals, and avoiding Tito, the bully.

Trouble Magnet is the first book in a new series for younger readers full of all the fun of growing up in Hawaii. It introduces a wonderful multicultural cast of characters, including Mr. Purdy, who calls his fourth-grade class Boot Camp; Uncle Scoop, who runs the lunch wagon at the beach; Ledward, Mom's 6'7" boyfriend; and gorgeous, intimidating, 15-year-old Stella-from-Texas, who arrives to be the live-in babysitter and to step all over Calvin's turf."

What's not to like? There is plenty of humor. There are issues, but not angst. Calvin's father has left the family to pursue dreams of musical stardom on the mainland, but not before legally changing the family name to Coconut. There's lots to learn and explain about Hawaii and it's assorted ethnicities and foods, but Salisbury has Stella from Texas and a new boy from California, so the explanations are mostly a seamless part of the story and not pedantic. Calvin is mischievous and likable, not as dysfunctional as Joey Pigza or as dark as Jack Henry (another Gantos character), more like the two boys in *Mercy on These Teenage Chimps* by Gary Soto. There are plenty of interesting characters, both boys and girls, and the adults are mostly admirable, without being boring. I'm really looking forward to the next book (*Calvin Coconut: Zippy Fix*, Sept. '09) to see how the characters develop. Scheduled to be at least a four book series, this middle grade chapter book is a cut above. Price also nicely done. Its longer than *Magic Tree House* books, but at 160 pages too short to be the standard \$16 for a jacketed hardcover. Scheduled to be at least a four book series, this middle grade chapter book is a cut above.

Reviewer: Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 8.5

*Jackie Rogers is a good friend and I am definitely biased, but here's what Ian Chipman wrote for Booklist - "Rogers' lighthearted illustrations help flesh out the characters and establish moods without dominating the proceedings."

Camilla, by Madeleine L'Engle

#9780374310318 \$16.95

FSG

April '08

Core audience: teen girls

Notable for family issues

Camilla is a coming-of-age tale involving first love, parental instability (mother has affair right under Camilla's nose), friendship issues and a sensitive portrayal of young wounded war veteran. It is a romance with an old-fashioned feel in NYC apartment-life setting in the past. It is one of L'Engle's (*Wrinkle In Time*) first books. Camilla's great interest in astronomy leads to discussions of God and one's individualism vs. common good. Here there is some food for thought. Overall the story is an enjoyable romance and Camilla is likeable although not contemporary enough for those teens who prefer edgier stories. The Washington Sq. in snow front cover is wonderful and might be a visual draw!

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

Rating: 7.5

The Chosen One, by Carol Lynch Williams

978-0312555115, \$16.95

St. Martin's Griffin, May 2009

Core audience: ages 13+

Notable: Premise, strong voice, interesting setting, timely subject handled beautifully

Review: I bit the insides of my cheeks the whole time I was reading this suspenseful, realistic story of a young girl in an isolated polygamous community whose enforced "engagement" to her 60-year-old blood uncle wakes her up to the truth about the religious leadership's corrupt motives and controlling, misogynistic underpinnings. As Kyra struggles to hold on to her family,

The power in this story lies in its warm, human depiction of Kyra's large family and the solid though often complicated love that connects them — the same for all families, regardless of circumstances. Williams shows great delicacy with a subject that could lend itself to easy moralizing and caricature characters; one of the most horrifying aspects of the story is that the over-the-top violence and craziness of the leaders' actions mirror what has actually happened in communities like these across the country.

The age range is listed as 12-up, but this will be an intense read for some sixth graders. I had to skim a few pages, barely reading, because the disciplining of a very young child was so harrowing and helpless-making I couldn't stand it. (*Shabanu*, a book with similar themes but a vastly different setting and context, might be a better choice for slightly younger readers, though it has an intense scene itself.)

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 9.0

Additional review of *The Chosen One*:

Core audience: 12 & up

Notable for: topical issue, value of books & reading, high interest

Thirteen year-old Kyra lives with her family in a polygamous cult. It is the only life she has ever known. She enjoys life with her sisters and brothers and even appreciates having multiple mothers and a caring father. Although she does sneak off to visit the mobile library when it stops near the compound, she is generally a loyal member of the community. All that changes when she becomes "Chosen" to marry her middle-aged uncle.

Utah author Williams offers a very complete look at the issues & choices facing Kyra and Kyra's family as they proceed through the days leading up to the planned union. The concept of the marriage bed is mentioned but kept in the background allowing the book to be suitable for a wider range of young readers.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

Additional review of *The Chosen One*:

I read it also and found it thought-provoking about any controlling religious community, particularly ones where women and girls are subservient to the demands, lusts, and legislation of the men. Free hearts are not allowed. Free will is not allowed. I loved the bookmobile as part of the story--thus proving that Libraries Change Lives, an ALA slogan that shows up in many a library mission statement. Williams avoided Hollywood happy endings and did show the cost taking a stand can have on a variety of the characters. The reader is left wondering about what will happen to Kyra and her family, especially her beloved younger sisters. A non-fiction book on this theme could show the post-compound life of those young women lucky enough to escape and those families that ultimately reject the restrictive life.

Reviewer: Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

Rating: 8.5

Additional rating of *The Chosen One*:

This is an exceptional book. I definitely think this a 13+ and up read. The developmental jump from sixth to seventh grade will come in handy time and again. For example, one death in particular of a character who tries to help Kyra would be very difficult to process for most children under 13. I know it haunted me.

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9

Additional rating of *The Chosen One*:

Reviewer: Vicky Uminowicz

Rating: 8

Cookie, by Jacqueline Wilson

978-1596435346 \$16.99

Roaring Brook Press

October 2009

Core Audience: Girls ages 12-14 (though book states 9-12)

Notable Aspects: Violent, abusive father; resourceful, strong girl; family relationships, bullying; cookie baking; art

REVIEW: Cookie is the story of a girl in a affluent family with an abusive and domineering father and an immature but loving mother. Named Beauty by her father, she is shy and

average looking and viciously teased at school, in part because of her name. For reasons that are not explained, her only friend also happens to be the best friend of Beauty's worst enemy. Beauty lives in a dream world as she watches a television show for pre-schoolers featuring a bunny and its kind and gentle owner. Beauty's mother discovers that the one thing she can do really well is bake cookies and decides to use her skill to help create a new nickname for her daughter - "Cookie."

When the father's abuse finally leads Beauty and her mother to run away, they seek refuge first with an ex-wife and later at the fortuitously named "Rabbit Cove." There, they immediately meet a kindly older divorced man who is an artist and runs an inn with an available room. He also needs help with cleaning and - surprise! - cookie baking!

I wouldn't normally review a book I wouldn't recommend, but I'm concerned that the pretty pink cartoonish cover and the suggested age range for the book, 9-12, might convince a child to read it who would not be expecting or ready to read a book which includes a father whose very realistic and terrible rages erupt at any moment - including hitting and verbally abusing his wife during Beauty's birthday party.

Most of all, I was disturbed at the strong implication that the father tore the head off Beauty's baby bunny, a gift from her only friend!! (Though to be fair, it is explained to Beauty that a fox probably got the bunny that the outraged father had let loose the night she got it.)

As I looked more closely at the cover, I could see that there is a hand smashing a rabbit cookie at the bottom corner - but given the dark situations in this book, I don't think it's enough of a warning and would never want to see this in the hands of an unsuspecting 9 year old girl who likes to bake cookies!! Has anyone else read this book? What do you think? Am I just getting older?

Reviewer: Vicky Uminowicz, Titcomb's Bookshop

Rating: 4.5

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Last Straw, by Jeff Kinney

978-0810970687, \$12.95

Amulet, January 2009

Core audience: ages 9-14, grades 5-8

Notable: diary style, drawings

Review: This third installment of the Wimpy Kid series certainly measures up. Our unlikely hero, Greg Heffley, is a fairly average middle-schooler, and that's what makes him so great. Through his hilarious hijinks and laugh-out-loud drawings, we get a glimpse into the world of this wimpy kid, who has to deal with such challenges as a dad who blasts classical music to scare away neighborhood teenagers and a best friend who isn't exactly the brightest crayon in the box. Greg is always getting into trouble and scheming to find new ways to get out of homework and chores. A great read for kids who don't like fantasy.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9.0

The Dog Days of Charlotte Hayes, by Marlane Kennedy

978-0061452413, \$15.99

Greenwillow/Harper Collins, March 17, 2009

Core audience: 9-12

Notable Aspect: pet owners, postpartum depression

REVIEW A delightful book for the elementary reader. Ironically, Charlotte, who is not a dog person, is the only member of her family who is concerned about their dog, a huge Saint Bernard named Killer (aka Beauregard). Charlotte feels sorry for Beauregard because he is constantly outdoors, is not walked, and gets no attention. No one in the family, except Charlotte, pays any notice to Beauregard. Her dad is too busy hunting for bargains; that's how the family got Beauregard. Her mom is preoccupied with caring for the baby, Justin Lee, and recovering from postpartum depression, and her sister Agnes is concerned about her "true love." Charlotte is determined to help find the dog a better home. Charlotte's first attempt in relocating Beauregard is a disaster, but eventually she finds the ideal new home for him. The book not only has an entertaining story, but also points out the problems of getting a pet for the wrong reasons.

Judy Hanley, BookEnds, Winchester

Rating: 5

The Dork Diaries, by Rachel Renee Russell

9781416982029 \$12.99

Simon & Schuster

June, 2009

Core audience: Credulous Middle-Grade Girls

Notable aspects: Exceptionally derivative

REVIEW: If you've been waiting for one more book to come along to convince you that the "as long as it gets them to read" line has been stretched beyond the breaking point and become a kind of moral placebo, then *The Dork Diaries* is the book for you. The catalog copy bills it as "*The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* for Girls" and the layout features the same notebook lines as the Kinney books as well as the same text to line drawing ratio. The lead character, eighth grader Nikki Maxwell, declares herself to be not at all like the lead character of *The Princess Diaries*. Drawn into a conflicted matrix with the popular Mackenzie, and struggling with state of the art middle school angst, as well as slapstick annoyances provided by her younger sister, Brianna, Nikki fears that she will lose the art contest smack-down with Mackenzie, the friendship of Chloe and Zoey, and the possible love interest of Brandon. These concerns turn out to be unfounded. Will *The Dork Diaries* emulate the ultimate success of its heroine and sell through its 70,000 print run? I'll be an interested bystander.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 3

Emmaline and the Bunny, by Katherine Hannigan

9780061626548, \$17.99

Greenwillow

March 2009

Core Audience: Ages 6-12

Notable Aspects: fairy tale-ish, read-aloud

REVIEW: In this delightful read-aloud, little Emmaline wants a bunny to play with. But in her town, Neatasapin, bunnies are not allowed because they are too messy. So Emmaline goes on an expedition to Untidy, where she meets a wonderful bunny. Can she make her home in Neatasapin bunny-friendly without getting in too much trouble? This is a great modern-day fairy tale with rhythmic read-aloud potential: "Emmaline was not tidy. Dirt she dug. Shrubs she scoot-skedaddled under. Puddles she hop, hop, splash, splash, hopped

through. Emmaline yelled, 'Hoopalala!' and 'Dinglederrydee!' when she was happy."

This is a very fast read for us grownups (about 30 minutes) and happily in the end she gets to keep her bunny, but only after learning some important lessons along the way. Overall, very fun and sweet.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8

Additional rating of Emmaline and the Bunny:

I felt that it underestimated the comprehension of its audience. Two reads by young readers seemed to bear that out, as one eight year old girl reported, "the writer doesn't think we're very smart."

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 6

Evolution of Calpurnia Tate, by Jacqueline Kelly

9780805088410, \$16.95

Henry Holt

May 2009

Core Audience: Middle grade girls / fans of adventurous females i.e. Laura Ingalls, Caddie Woodlawn.

Notable Aspects: Debut author

As the only girl in a family of 6 brothers in 1899, Calpurnias life seems to be all planned out for her. Her mother has decided she's ready for cooking lessons in addition to the piano & sewing lessons already taking up her days. But an attentive Callie has other things in mind, like why there are more yellow grasshoppers than green ones in her yard that summer & what that patch of strange looking grass by the lake really is. Under the tutelage of her cantankerous grandfather (who is attempting to concoct a new type of beer from Pecans) she discovers a love of science & finds that life can be more fun if you simply open your eyes to the world around you.

With each chapter starting off with a quote from Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species, this is an entertaining read-aloud of a feisty girl trying to make her own voice heard in a world that is changing fast. All of the characters are fully developed in their own little stories, from the oldest brothers' first attempt at courting to her best friends' fear of performing piano in public. Definitely one to watch for next year's Newbery!

Heather Doss, Bookazine

Rating: 9

Forest of Hands & Teeth, by Carrie Ryan

9780385736817, \$17.99

Delacorte/Random House

3/24/09

Core Audience: YA 13+ & Zombie fans

Notable Aspects: Debut Author & member of the 2009 Debutantes (a blog group of debut YA/MI authors that all support each other)

Review: Mary has never questioned that the Sisterhood are the all knowing protectors of their village from the relentless Unconsecrated; their rules have kept them alive & safe from a non-existent world outside the fence. She dreams of seeing the mysterious ocean of her mother's stories & marrying the boy next door. When the Sisterhood forces her to instead

marry her crush's brother & the fences are breached, Mary & a group of survivors must venture into the unknown territory in search of a new safe place to call their own.

A great addition to the Supernatural YA category that will grab the attention of both boys & girls – the violence is bloody, the romance intense yet clean.

Heather Doss, Bookazine

Rating: 8.5

Gentlemen, by Michael Northrop

0-545-09749-5, \$16.99

Scholastic Press

4/15/2009

Core audience: 15 and up

Notable Aspects: Well-drawn suspense, great companion to *Crime & Punishment*

Review: This debut novel is something like *The Wednesday Wars* meets *The Outsiders* — a school-based story focused around a group of semi-bad-boy buddies, the kind of teens who sit in the back of the class and direct their smarts toward out-of-school pursuits. When one of their number confronts a teacher and then disappears, the group begins to wonder if another teacher, their English instructor, might have something to do with his disappearance. Northrop expertly leads the reader through the unfolding of the mystery and its aftermath, set against the backdrop of a class studying Dostoevsky's *Crime & Punishment*. Literary parallels are not uncommon in YA literature, but this one is particularly well done. The author creates an impressive ramping up of suspense and realistic, not supernatural, horror — the kind we can get ourselves into, inch by inch, step by step, despite our best intentions.

One of just a few one-sitting books I've come across this year.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore (Shelburne, VT) Rating: 9.25

Goddess Boot Camp, by Tera Lyn Childs

9780525421344, \$16.99

Dutton, June 2009

Core audience: 12 and up

Notable: Written for fans of the Percy Jackson books though with more emphasis on an audience of girls

Review: *Goddess Boot Camp* is the second book in a series of which I did not read book one. Its setting strongly resembles that of Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson books. The Greek Gods are still around, the offspring of their carnal encounters with mortals have powers, go to a special school or camp to develop them, and so forth. The lead character here, Phoebe, had apparently gone to The Academy, the private school for young demigods, in book one. In book two Phoebe is sent to the Dynamotheos Development Camp (goddess boot camp) where she must learn to use her powers and jog a great deal. Childs makes a point of finding new words to replace existing fantasy terms, preferably with Greek elements, for example each chapter begins with a definition of some special power employed by 'hematheos' such as PSYCHODICTION (telepathy), and VISIOMUTATION (transfiguration), and so forth. In goddess boot camp kids like Phoebe are not called demigods, as in the Percy Jackson books, but rather are referred to as "part gods", or "hematheos*," which we are told means "godly blood." In order to prepare for the elite Pythian Games Phoebe must enroll in goddess boot camp, learn to control her powers, sort through friendship and relationship angst, and come into contact peripherally with Nike, her

immortal forebear. All in all goddess boot camp is excruciatingly derivative but otherwise tolerable okay upper middle grade fare.

* for what it's worth The Greek for demigod, Ημιθεος (Himitheos) resembles Hematheos. Himitheos however literally means semi-god. Αίμα (aima) is Greek for blood.

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 6

Gooney Bird Is So Absurd, by Lois Lowry, illus Middy Thomas

9780547119670, \$15.00

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, March, 2009

Core audience: ages 6-10, grades 1-4

Notable: Poetry, characters, emotional validity

Review: That darned Lois Lowry. She can move me to tears with a 105-page second grade reader full of pedagogy. In this latest *Gooney Bird Greene* volume, Mrs. Pidgeon is teaching her class about poetry. But like the good teacher she is, she's not so much teaching her students as she is helping them to learn. Gooney Bird claims she learns better when her brain is warm, a condition she creates with a hat that accommodates her pigtailed – and looks suspiciously similar to a pair of ruffly green panties. Gooney's so grave about it that everyone respects her choice in spite of themselves – even Mr. Leroy, the principal. There's much more to the plot, but I don't want to give it away, except to say that it demonstrates the power and comfort of poetry more clearly than anything besides *Love That Dog* and *Hate that Cat*. Each of the *Gooney Bird Greene* books could stand alone perfectly well, but up to the present, I believe this one is my favorite.

Reviewer: Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Rating: 9.0

Additional review of *Gooney Bird is So Absurd*:

Ditto, except *Gooney Bird and the Room Mother* is my favorite.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 8

Heroes of the Valley, by Jonathan Stroud

Hyperion, 9781423109662

January 27, 2009, \$17.99

Core Audience: 12 and up: Strong, patient readers

Notable Features: Norse themes interpolated into a moral and emotional allegory

Review: Jonathan Stroud's first release since *Ptolemy's Gate* has been eagerly awaited by those of us who loved everything about *The Bartimaeus Trilogy*. *Heroes of the Valley* has an unspecified Scandinavian setting and its story riffs partly off the mythological roots of *Beowulf* and *The Volsunga*, and partly off the sagas, most particularly from the sort of regional feuds and squabbles at the center of the *Erbyggja*, or *Ere-Dwellers Saga*. The *Erbyggja* is at once the most mundane and the most superstitious of the major sagas, with undead corpses and witchcraft aplenty, and Stroud interpolates both those themes into his omnipresent trolls, which are a kind of earth dwelling troll. *Heroes of the Valley* starts in traditional saga fashion by establishing the troublesomeness of 14-year-old male lead Halli, ala Egil or Grettir, but from there it departs into a convoluted and hand-wringing dynamic very much at odds with the more stoical and direct ethos of the sagas. In brief, the story establishes a primacy of one clan over another, and a strong binding of place, of being trapped in the valley by fear and superstition. Halli's task is to partially straighten out things in the Valley and then break free and see the wide world. He is joined by a daughter of one

of the heads of the rival Clan, Aud. Aud is presumably named after the historical character Aud the Deep Minded, who figures in *Grettir's*, *Njal's*, and the *Ladaxale Sagas*. Though well written, the first part of the book is a real slog. Stroud gets his feet under him towards the end, but I imagine many young readers will set this book aside well before then. For all its depth and complexity, *Heroes of the Valley* is oddly stultifying and inert. Rooted in the more provincial, regional, and mundane elements of Norse literature, it misses out on the more compelling stoicism and high aesthetic of human conduct which drives the sagas and makes them so colorful, entertaining and inspiring. Good teen readers may wade through this book and take some pleasure in its emotional nooks and crannies, but overall it is more likely to be well commented on by adult reviewers than enjoyed by the nation's youth.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 6

Highway Robbery, by Kate Thompson, illus Jonny Duddle

Greenwillow/Harper, \$15.95

9780061730344

June, 2009

Core audience: Ages 7-10, both boys and girls

Notable: Voice, characters, illustrations, debatable ending

Review: The narrator, a barefoot street urchin, might be telling the truth about why he has a black mare to sell, but he gives us plenty of reasons to wonder. Did he once live in a house, have shoes, and eat regular meals? Did a mysterious horseman ride up one day, dismount, hand him the reins and offer to pay him to watch the horse awhile? Did soldiers come looking for the famous highwayman Dick Turpin, and why were they so certain that the horse was Dick Turpin's famous mare, Black Bess? Clearly the narrator was able to con two little girls who came along and admired the horse, and he stood his ground against two conniving would-be thieves. He was able to trust a pair of peasant farmers, and he plays on the sympathies of the passer by looking to buy a horse. But is the horse really his to sell? And if so, is the animal we see before us truly the storied steed, or merely a puny precursor to Grand Theft Auto? The voice is such a perfectly consistent balance between wistful and wheedling. The book will make a great discussion vehicle as readers consider the truth of the matter. The plentiful spot illustrations, if a little heavy on caricature, strike a delightful mid-point between pure text and graphic novel.

Reviewer: Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8.5

Highway to Hell (Maggie Quinn: Girl vs Evil #3) by Rosemary Clement-Moore

9780385734639, \$16.99

Random House

March 10, 2009

Core Audience: 12+ girls, Buffy fans

Notable Aspects: Smart snarky strong female hero who fights demons

Review: First, a warning... the copies we just received have 20 pages missing. The jump happens just after p.154, so if you just got this in, you might want to check.

The Maggie Quinn novels are one of my great page-turner guilty pleasures. If anyone's not read the series yet, highly recommend if you like your snark with a side of sarcasm and topped with many random pop culture references (1st chapter has Jeopardy, the Griswolds,

Warcraft, Rolling Stones and more). In this installment, Maggie is on her way to spring break with friend Lisa when they get stranded in a tiny Texas town where there are rumors of El Chupacabra killing cattle. Turns out, evil demon must be vanquished. Great fun read as always, but this one is a little less Buffy-popular-cliques-are-actually-evil-cults and more X-Files-aaah!-goat-sucker! On the Granny approval rating: Our underage heroes are given a beer, but no mention is made of drinking, and still no sex mentioned with hunky older boyfriend.

Reviewer: Katherine Fergason, Bunch of Grapes

Rating: 6.8

If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever? by M. E. Kerr

978-0-7614-5545-5, \$16.99

Marshall Cavendish

March, 2009 (original copyright, 1973)

Core Audience: ages 12+

Notable aspects: teen boy narrator, serious issues - divorce, alcoholism, adultery - lightened by a great sense of humor

Review: Publisher description "Stein, the new boy at Cayuta High, is nicknamed "Doomed" by classmates who never guess he'll soon be the school star. He invents a newspaper called REMOTE, with ads everyone wants to imitate. Before long, Stein, the nerd who seemed like a loser, is most WANTED himself, particularly by the girl dating the school's star jock, star writer, star everything!"

This book got great reviews when it first came out, so the big question was whether it stood the test of time. So many books about high school become outdated rapidly. The use of contemporary clothes, styles, and slang does not age well. In that sense, I think some readers will look on this as historical fiction (frightening thought!) because no one has a computer or a cell phone. But the social politics of high school haven't changed and Kerr is spot on. Lots of the issues involve adults - the football coach drinks, Alan's relationship with his father is not good, and he has a crush one of the Moms. The main character gets his comeuppance, as he announces on page 4, and he definitely deserves it, but you feel for him anyway. Very well done coming of age story.

Little quibble. Black and blue cover is nice, but I would have skipped the flower if I really wanted boys to read this book.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 8

If I Stay, by Gayle Forman

9780525421030, \$16.99

Dutton April '09

Core Audience: teen girls

Notable for sensitivity to teen issues like death, friendship, romance

Mia's family has been killed in a horrific winter auto accident. Most of the story is remembrances of her life while she is in an out- of -body experience viewing the happenings at the hospital. Music plays a wonderfully important role in her life and will be a defining factor when she has to make the ultimate choice. The characters are very likeable and the story is 100% engrossing. The power of music makes this memorable! All girls will enjoy this, but for musicians, it will sing!

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

Rating: 9

Additional review of If I Stay:

Core Audience: 14 and up Primarily Girls

Notable Features: Strong Musical Elements, Lots of tragic pathos

Review: If Aristotle had reviewed *If I Stay* in his Poetics as an exemplar of Young Adult tragic fiction he would almost certainly have expressed great displeasure in Gayle Forman's new novel. After all, he considered the proper engine for pathos to be the fall of an otherwise virtuous person based upon a single tragic flaw. The seriously flawed were already fallen, and thus not eligible, and the fall of the blameless was obscene, rather than tragic, in his reckoning. *If I Stay* succeeds mightily however, in evoking pathos from arbitrary tragic circumstances befalling its blameless heroine Mia. Mia is a gifted musician, a caring intelligent young woman who very much loves her caring, intelligent, supportive family. She also loves her wonderful rock star musician boyfriend Adam, and is completely torn at the thought of drifting apart from Adam in order to attend the prestigious music academy to which she has been accepted. Forman begins the novel by super-charging it with tragic emotion as she deftly draws Mia's sympathetic family and then sends them off to a car accident on a snowy road in which her parents die straightway and her seven year old brother Teddy lingers in the hospital. Mia is badly injured in that accident and the story is told partly retrospectively, as she lies in the hospital, and partly in the present, where the question, 'if I stay' has taken on new meaning. If *If I Stay* were a 10 meter platform dive it would start out with a low degree of difficulty, given the benefit of all that tragic material, but Forman pulls it off amazingly well. The character are clearly drawn and our sympathies are engaged on many levels. In the end Adam makes a heartfelt plea for Mia to stay in which all thought of any perspective but her own well being and continuance are stripped away. One part of the reader's mind is registering that Adam is an impossibly good guy, but somehow it doesn't matter. *If I Stay* is a tear jerker that works because it is both heartfelt and tightly constructed. Teen readers should be more than ready to incur Aristotle's wrath and embrace this book

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 9

Additional ratings for If I Stay:

I also give *If I Stay* a big 9 and Kenny's review a big TEN. Happy New Year!!

Carol Stoltz, xxx

Rating: 9

I totally agree with you Kenny. This was a one-sitting book that required a big book of tissues & a

Yo-Yo Ma CD playing in the background (gift from my Penguin rep at the author dinner).

Highly recommend it for fans of *Lovely Bones* or *Elsewhere*.

Heather Doss

Rating: 9

Me too! *If I Stay* totally deserves a 9. Such a fantastic read.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

I loved this book, too. And, yes, I cried. I usually read my children and YA fiction during my lunch break and it is sometimes difficult to explain the sobbing.

Usually I just mumble something about a cold...

Laura Lucy, White Birch Books

Rating: xx

What a beautifully written book! It is both a story of tragedy and utter, wrenching sadness, and also a celebration of life, love, friendship and family.

Vicky Uminowicz, Titcomb's Bookshop

Rating: 9

Reviewer: Beth Reynolds @ The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 8

It's Not You, It's Me, by Kerry Cohen Hoffmann

978-0385736961, \$17.99
Delacorte/Random House
June, 2009

Core audience: Girls 13-15

Notable: Emotional credibility, heartbreak, humor, friendship

Review: Zoe and Henry have had an intense 6-month romance, so Zoe's devastated when Henry calls a halt. (Values alert: Zoe's still a virgin, but she's contemplated the alternative, and there's been some heavy making out.) Her pain exceeds her common sense, and she decides to win Henry back, with predictable futility. Her two best friends see she's making a fool of herself, but try as they might, they can't stop her from sneaking into the boys locker room to slip a note into Henry's pocket, and other similarly disaster-bound efforts. Written as a daily account of the 31 days after the breakup, the book reads quickly and delightfully. Following all the melodrama (silly melodrama, IMHO) of books like *Twilight*, *Gossip Girls*, and their many imitators, this book is a breath of fresh, unpolluted air.

Reviewer: Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins, Falmouth, MA

Rating: 8.5

Kaleidoscope Eyes, by Jen Bryant

9780375840487 \$15.99
Knopf/Random House
May, 2009

Core audience: ages 8-12, more girls than boys

Notable: Free verse form, modern traces of historic pirates

Review: A story of the summer of 1968 and buried treasure. Lyza, about age 13, and neighborhood pals Malcolm and Carolann spend much of their summer vacation following up on a mystery Lyza's grandfather bequeathed her. The mystery has to do with Captain Kidd, the somewhat reluctant pirate, who allegedly buried loot at various locations along the Atlantic seaboard in case he was captured and needed it for bribing his way through the court system. He missed his guess, was executed, and Lyza's grandfather, a history buff, had some strong guesses about where a local stash might lie. The kids follow the clues and find the buried chest. Other complications are proposed: Lyza's missing mother, Malcolm's brother going to Vietnam, Lyza's sister's hippie activities and shaggy boyfriend – but those go nowhere except for the shaggy boyfriend, who helps with semi-adult muscle and common sense when the digging gets tough. Perhaps the dangling distractions were more firmly attached in an earlier version of the manuscript. The free verse format makes a pleasantly approachable page, and gives chapter endings a pleasantly arresting manner.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 7

Additional review of Kaleidoscope Eyes:

I support Carol's review of *Kaleidoscope Eyes* and her rating of 7. A comment I'll add is that I felt the use of poetry as a narrative device here comes across as uneven in that at times it is positively poetic and quite powerful, for example...

"It's been almost two years since that day,
when our family began to unravel
like a tightly bound ball of string
that some invisible tomcat
took to pawing across the floor,"

while at many other junctures the poetry reads more as straight prose with more line breaks than usual. I found it hard to suspend disbelief in the narrative since the powers and tone of the narrative shifted so strongly while the medium of delivery did not and felt that the novel would have been better served to shift in and out of a poetic medium.

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner: DDG Bookseller

Rating: 7

King of the Screw-Ups, by K.L. Going

978-0152062583, \$17.00
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
April '09

Core audience- ages 14+ mostly boys
Notable for teen issues, family relationships, self-esteem

Going's *The Liberation of Gabriel King* was one of my favorite books the year it came out. This one is for a much older audience and it is just as powerful. Liam seems to screw up everything he does, mostly from bad judgment and a sense of powerlessness to please his father. Now he has gone too far and Dad is getting rid of him. Rather than go to his grandparents' home, Liam arranges to go to his cross-dressing Glam Band Uncle ("Aunt") Pete's trailer park home.

His idea of turning his life around is to reinvent himself as an unpopular kid. It doesn't work! His model-perfect good looks and upscale wardrobe attract the popular kids. There he continues to get into trouble with school and excess partying, always excusing himself as a "screw-up". Interwoven between the narratives of today are snippets of remembrance from his past. These give a sometimes heartbreaking glimpse into his formative years. Readers just know that "Aunt" Pete and his patient, accepting, and loving friends will give Liam the support he needs and the right kind of firmness to turn Liam's behavior around. He learns that it is important to be who you are, not what someone else thinks you should be. Like Anderson's *Twisted*, here is a book about father-son relationships that should go down well for teen boys. Too bad the fathers aren't reading these!

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 7

Additional rating of *King of the Screw-Ups*:

I, too, enjoyed *King of the Screwups* and thought it would be a good book to recommend to high school boys. It is a poignant and funny book with a satisfying, if somewhat predictable, ending. I'll add a rating of 7.5.

Nancy Felton, The Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

The Last Olympian, by Rick Riordan

9781423101475, \$17.99
Hyperion, May 2009

Core audience: Ages 10-UP
Notable: Fifth and final book

Slight Spoiler warning:

Kudos to Riordan for finishing strong. Lots of fun twists and great battle scenes, like having Selena pull a Patroclus by wearing Clarisse's armor's, and Percy's stand against Hyperion will thrill the target audience no end. The scene at the Williamsburg Bridge was a little too Bridge of Khazad Dum for my taste, but for the most part the book really stuck to its own established themes. The end was both moving and satisfying, and the way Percy and Annabeth connect without losing their strength of character and identity really sends a good message.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 8+

Additional rating of The Last Olympian:

Reviewer: Beth Reynolds @ The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 7.5

Lifting the Sky by Mackie D'Arge

9781599901862, \$16.99

Bloomsbury Children's

March 2009

Core audience: girls ages 11-14

Notable for family issues, setting, character growth

Since Dad walked out on them years ago Blue and her Mom have moved around from ranch to ranch in Wyoming whenever Mom felt the urge to me on, which was pretty often. Twelve-year-old Blue is pretty tired of making friends, fitting in at new schools then moving at a moment's notice. Finally Mom has taken a very challenging job at a remote ranch, part of an Indian reservation, whose owner lives miles away . Making much -needed repairs to the irrigation ditches, fences, and the old house, and caring for the cattle there take up the waking hours for both of them. Blue makes friends with a local Indian boy named Shawn and is instrumental in finding him and saving his life when he is injured deep in a cave while on a spiritual quest. Descriptions of the land and the way it influences the lives of the local Indians is of prime importance. Blue seems to have a "gift" of healing through touch, and she feels the aura of animals and people through light. Shawn learns that what he is seeking is inside himself. Much of the tension of the story occurs when Blue's Dad comes back and wants things to be as they were before. Readers will be rooting for a new relationship for Mom with the ranch's owner. By story's end, Blue and her Mom will have major changes of attitude, the ranch will be repaired, the animals healed, antelopes frolicking on the hillside, and a double rainbow looks over this magnificent setting. Far Canyon Ranch is a place we would all like to visit. In this engrossing story we can, and yes, enjoy it too!

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

Rating: 8.5

Lucky Breaks, by Susan Patron

Atheneum, 9781416939986

March 10, 2009, \$16.99

Core Audience: 8-12

Notable Features: friendship, non-traditional families

Review: This follow-up to the Newbery-winning *The Higher Power of Lucky* seems like a continuation of the story. Life continues as usual in *Hard Pan* (pop. 43) as Brigitte tries to become more American (but refuses to serve hamburgers in her cafe), Lincoln starts making

a really big net of knots, and Short Sammy gets a delivery that just might be a coffin. As for Lucky, she just keeps plugging along until she meets a visitor in town who is just her age: Paloma. Lucky desperately wants Paloma to become her new best friend, but runs the risk of alienating Lincoln and Miles. Plus, Lucky can be a bit hard-headed, and this leads her and Paloma into all sorts of trouble. A worthy sequel, and though it lacks the intense emotional connection that the first book had, it certainly holds up.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8

Additional rating of Lucky Breaks:

Notable Features: Sense of Place. Hard Pan really comes alive. Long after reading the book, you can still imagine yourself there. happily. Review: My problem with the first book was that the issues sometimes seemed beyond the age of the characters, and by extension, beyond the age of the intended audience. This book's big focus is friendship, and that's a subject anyone can relate to. It's definitely a sequel, though, I don't think it stands alone. Little question. Patron uses the word scrotum in this book too. I don't think the use of that word should have inspired all the hoopla it did in *Higher Power of Lucky*, but since it did, I wonder at its reprise. **Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers**

Rating: 7.5

A Map of the Known World, by Lisa Ann Sandell

9780545069700, 16.99

Scholastic

April 2009

Core Audience: 12+ girls who like weepy fiction with a bit of sweet romance and a hopeful ending

Notable Aspects: dealing with death, dealing with family, friends, boyfriends and being a teen, using art to work through emotions

Review: Cora starts high school as the girl whose brother died last year in a car accident. She slowly becomes friends (then more) with the other boy who was in the car during the accident and learns that her brother was not quite the delinquent everyone thought. She spends the year getting to know him through the art he left behind, working through her memories with her own art and eventually reconnects with her parents. I really enjoyed this book. Some of the dialogue got a bit sappy or melodramatic at times, and it felt like some of the resolutions came a bit too easy. But what was really well done was that the issues she was dealing with: feeling like the freak at school, overprotective mom, distant dad, changing friends, feeling like you don't know a sibling any more, wanting to be anywhere but where you are: these are all the things that 97% of teens are feeling, just intensified by the loss of the brother. So instead of being one of those post-tragedy books, where you think, OMG I can't imagine going through that, you're thinking, wow, she's exactly like me. I'll definitely be handselling.

Katherine Ferguson, Bunch of Grapes

Rating: 8

Marcelo in the Real World, by Francisco X. Stork

9780545054744, \$17.99

Arthur A. Levine Books

January 2009

Core Audience: Ages 14+, leaning toward boys

Notable Aspects: Autism, Asperger's, new experiences

REVIEW: To me, some of the most interesting young adult novels are notable for their unusual narrators. So is the case in "Marcelo in the Real World." Marcelo is different from other seventeen-year-olds. He has Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism that causes him to have difficulties in social interactions. The summer before his senior year at Paterson, a school for kids with disabilities, Marcelo's dad gives him an ultimatum. He must spend the summer working at his father's law firm. If he succeeds in the so called "real world," he will be allowed to choose whether or not he stays at Paterson for senior year. If he fails, he will be forced to attend the public high school.

Marcelo learns much from his time at the law firm, and he sees the ways that people manipulate each other to get what they want, as well as the kindness inherent in some people.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8

Maze Runner, by James Dashner

978-0385737944, \$16.99

Random House

October 2009

Core audience: Ages 12-UP, primarily but not exclusive boys

Notable: Strong experimental/puzzle solving premise somewhat reminiscent of Frank Herbert's classic *Destination Void*

The task of an author of heroic fiction parallels that of her central characters, however many hurdles they pass through, however far along the road they travel, the analogy of Odysseus' return, of Frodo's casting the ring into the fire, can always find a parallel in the author's achievement of a satisfying and truthful culmination. Few books offer a closer parallel of author and narrative than James Dashner's *Maze Runner*. A group of bright teen boys, whose memories have been altered to retain analogous memory, but to remove all personal memory, have been placed in a large glade surrounded by four towering walls. Each wall opens during the day and closes at night. Beyond the walls is a shifting maze patrolled by deadly creatures called Grievers at night, at least for the most part. The boys are aware that they are in some sort of experiment, being monitored by unknown persons they refer to as the Creators, who send them a metal box of supplies daily, and a new member once a month. The boys run an otherwise self contained agrarian society, with a council of keepers, and a select group of maze runners, who attempt to solve the puzzle and find an escape. The first two thirds of the book is tightly focused and very interesting. Most readers will be hooked indeed. The gladers have concluded that there appears to be no solution to the maze, no way to solve the puzzle, and the author seems to have come to the same conclusion about the book. Two telepathically connected character appear in the glade on successive days, announcing that the end game has come. The result is that all the old rules have been thrown away and the gladers will be forced to find a solution or perish, one at a time. They are pushed along this new helter skelter path by their two new citizens, one being a boy, Thomas, who is the lead character, and narrator. the other is a girl named Teresa who starts off in a coma, after making a dire pronouncement. Once Teresa awakens and the end game begins, the whole narrative construction of the book is thrown aside in favor a mad jumbled dash to the finish. Thus, after stoutly carrying the narrative load for two thirds of the book, the load is abruptly dropped, leaving author and characters to make a wild run for it. This is a shame as the book is loaded with potential. The use of an inventive language by the gladers really works, and the cohesion of their society is very persuasive and compelling. It is the first book in a trilogy and I certainly want to see what in the world is going on, what book two will bring to the table I mean to say. Still, it's hard to see how a story line that's already been tossed over the cliff can be rescued

from its own abandonment. Aragorn isn't always following behind to retrieve your brooch, particularly if the brooch isn't tossed with deliberate or sensible purpose.

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 7

Mudshark, by Gary Paulsen

9780385746854, \$12.99
Wendy Lamb Books (RH),
May 2009

Core Audience: 7-12, boys and girls
Notable Features: short mystery novel

Review: Gary Paulsen returns this summer with his newest chapter book, *Mudshark*. A slim 96 pages, this fun mystery will appeal to younger readers, as well as older fans. In a school where everything that could go wrong does go wrong, the quick and agile *Mudshark* (aka 12-year-old Lyle Williams) does his best to help solve mysteries and find lost items. He's perfectly happy being the resident sleuth until a mysterious psychic parrot shows up in the library, threatening to usurp his title. This is a fun, fast read. Paulsen delivers again.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8

*Additional rating of **Mudshark**:*

Reviewer: Beth Reynolds @ The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 7

My Brother Abe, by Harry Mazer

9781416976745 \$15.99
Simon & Schuster
January 2009

Core audience: 8-12 yr. old boys and girls

Notable for : Frontier life period detail, characterization, family relationships

REVIEW: Sally Lincoln tells about the childhood she endured along with her brother Abe. Taught to always be respectful to her elders and do her best in all things and not complain, ever, she had a rough childhood! She tells of the family losing their beloved Kentucky home to rich folk from the East, whose papers displaced many local families. They all made the arduous trek westward to Indiana where they started building homes and lives over again.

Life was hard. Severe illness took the lives of many, including Mrs. Lincoln. Abe and his father had an uneasy relationship, the son rarely able to please his father. The housekeeping fell to Sally. She and Abe often snapped at each other. So subdued and polite with adults, Sally often screamed at her brother out of frustration and loss when Pa went back to Kentucky to get a new wife to help out. It took a while for Sally to accept her new step-mom though Abe was relieved by her presence from the beginning. The book was enjoyable for its often lyrical descriptions of everything from the motion and sounds of the covered wagons to the effects of the weather. The use of frontier dialect adds to the abundance of details of everyday life. There is even a hint of romance for Sally in the guise of a neighbor boy for whom Sally has scorn at first. (She is a feisty one!). Today's kids will find they have feelings in common with young Abe and his sister. Teachers will enjoy using the book to enhance their studies of Pioneer times. There is even an Afterward with Lincoln family details.

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

Rating: 8

Operation Redwood, by S. Terrell French

978-0810983540, \$16.95

Amulet Books, Harry N. Abrams

May 2009

Core Audience: Ages 9-13, boys and girls

Notable Aspects: Environment, Conservation, Redwood Trees, Organic Farming, Divorce, Friendship, Family, Death of Father, Chinese-American Main Character

REVIEW: Operation Redwood is the story of Julian Carter-Li, a city boy who discovers the joy of living on the land and finds a mission in saving an ancient redwood forest. Julian's mother, who is Chinese, has gone to China for the summer to photograph historic sites; his father had died when he was 7. Julian is sent to stay with his father's estranged brother, a stereotypical cold, wealthy CEO, and his family. When Julian discovers that his uncle's corporation is planning to cut down a redwood forest for lumber, he links up with Robin, whose conservation-minded family runs a small organic farm next to the forest. Robin helps him pose as an exchange student on the farm. With the help of Julian's good friend Danny, the children begin their mission to save the trees. Along the way, Julian discovers the joys of a grounded loving family and a deep love of the land.

The characters will appeal to readers and the story moves along well. While a number of the characters were stereotypical, the focus is on Julian, whose more complex relationship with his rather careless, undisciplined mother emerge in part through the eyes of the people around him. The story of the children's attempts to save the redwood forest, most of which are foiled by the adults around them, feel quite real and will inspire and engage both boys and girls.

The author is an environmental lawyer and the book is filled with interesting information for the nonfiction lover. The author's note about the true efforts to save the redwoods is both fascinating and utterly infuriating as she reveals how corporate responsibility yielded to corporate greed and, finally, conservation efforts.

I read this book when I heard that my 11 year old nephew, who prefers nonfiction, loved it and stayed up until 12:30 one night reading it. Here's his opinion: "Kids who are into the environment and science would really like this book (although you would probably still like the book if you weren't into these things)." The book is a rich source for discussion; it's a worthy choice for school or pleasure reading.

Reviewer: Vicky Uminowicz, Titcomb's Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

Additional rating of Operation Redwood:

I just finished *Operation Redwood* and agree with Vicky's review. I think the characters, humor and adventure will have wider appeal than just kids interested in the environment.

Reviewer: Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

Paisley Hanover Acts Out, by Cameron Tuttle

978-0803732865 \$14.99

Dial Press

March 2009

Core audience: Middle Grade Girls who are in danger of reading Gossip Girls
 Notable aspects: Lots of accessories and no sleaze.

Though Paisley Hanover Acts Out comes with more accessories than most Middle Grade books, an interactive website, a decorated box, an illustrated diary (which is apparently becoming de rigueur), and characters named Paisley, Carreyn, Mandy Mindel, Bodie and Bentley, it is as much about what it doesn't have as what it does. Like a Shirley Temple cocktail, Paisley Hanover Acts Out offers the same lingo, and a similar emphasis on social group hierarchies as that found in the Gossip Girls and Clique type books, but without the sleaze and crass consumerism. Tuttle establishes atmospheric credentials with whiffs of mature themes, and valley girlisms such as "I totally did!" In terms of Paisley's individuality the book features 'sidebras' instead of sidebars, and the prefix un is used UnStintingly, as in UnSlogans, UnSane, UnTarded and so forth. Nothing brings middle grade tensions to a head like class president elections and that is the vehicle of choice here for the book to show that underneath all its accessories its heart is in the UnWrong place. I'm not sure that the accessories, website, box and diary, are much of a selling point, yet there's no question but that handing Paisley Hanover to the parent of an eleven year old girl who wants to read the next A-List book has a great deal of traction. So yes, I'll totally be handselling this book.

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 7

Peace, Locomotion, by Jacqueline Woodson

978-0-399-24655-5, \$15.99

Putnam

January, 2009

Core Audience: Ages 9-11

Notable Aspects: Story told in letters, sibling and other family relationships

Review: This description from the publisher: "Twelve-year-old Lonnie is finally feeling at home with his foster family. But because he's living apart from his little sister, Lili, he decides it's his job to be the "rememberer" and write down everything that happens while they're growing up. Lonnie's musings are bittersweet; he's happy that he and Lili have new families, but though his new family brings him joy, it also brings new worries. With a foster brother in the army, concepts like Peace have new meaning for Lonnie."

Definitely a sequel to Locomotion (Putnam, 2003), which was narrated by Lonnie in the form of poems. Lonnie and Lili's parents have died in a house fire, and they have been placed in separate foster homes. He doesn't just want to remember their growing up, he wants the younger Lili to be able to "remember" their parents. His foster brother comes back wounded from the war, which causes emotional stress for everyone. There is so much love and caring - Lonnie for his sister, the foster mother's for the children, Lonnie's foster brothers for each other and for Lonnie, and the writing is so spare and beautiful, that one feels more the hope and resiliency that the grief and hardships.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 8.5

The Red Blazer Girls, by Michael Beil

978-0375848148, \$16.99; audio, 978-0739379585, \$34.00

Knopf, April, 2009

Core Audience: ages 9-12

Notable Aspect: debut novel, mystery, puzzles

Review: Move over Nancy Drew! New teenage detectives are coming. Michael Beil in his debut novel, *The Red Blazer Girls*, has written a "gem" of a mystery for the older elementary and middle school readers. Three students, Sophie, Margaret, and Rebecca, who attend St. Veronica's School, come to the aid of the elderly neighbor of the school, Ms. Harriman. Ms. Harriman asks the girls to help her find the birthday gift her father, Everett Harriman, a noted archaeologist, intended for Ms. Harriman's daughter. Ms. Harriman recently discovered a note, which had remained hidden in a book for 20 years. The note was for Ms. Harriman's daughter and starts a scavenger hunt that Everett had developed for his granddaughter for her birthday. At the end of the hunt is the birthday gift, a priceless ring called the Ring of Rocamadour. In solving the mystery, the girl detectives encounter the usual villains, the supposed villains, and clues in the form of word puzzles, literary allusions, Latin words, and math puzzles. Beil has written a thoroughly entertaining mystery with great puzzles included. I just hope this is the beginning of a series.

Reviewer: Judy Hanley, BookEnds, Winchester

Rating: 7

Return to Sender, by Julia Alvarez

9780375858383, \$16.99

Alfred A. Knopf

January '09

Core audience- middle graders

Notable for sensitivity to family and current events issues

Tyler's father has been injured and his family must hire possibly illegal migrant workers to save the farm. At first, Tyler is very against this "unpatriotic" act, but he gradually sees other sides to this complicated issue. Much of the story is told from his point-of-view. Mari, the oldest daughter of one of the workers, tells her story in letters which she writes to the President as well as her Mom, missing since she went back to Mexico for the funeral of a family member a year ago. She and Tyler become close friends and allies. Cooperation, connectedness, and understanding are themes throughout this well-told story, which shows that sometimes there is no absolute black/white side to an issue. This would be a valuable book for classroom discussion of a far-reaching issue. (The story is set in Vermont!) The use of Spanish words and explanation of some customs enriches the story and our understanding of another culture. There is humor, mostly in the guise of feisty Grandma, who reaches out to the three young Mexican children. Suspense is provided by the questions about the missing Mexican mother and the everpresent fear of "la Migra", immigration officials. While attractive, the cover with the yellow flowers and swallows will not appeal to boys. Perhaps the paperback version will change that.

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

Rating: 8

The Rock and the River, by Kekla Magoon

9781416975823, \$15.99

Aladdin, January 2009

Core audience: ages 9-14, grades 5-8

Notable: historical fiction, civil rights

Review: In *The Rock and the River*, we meet Sam, a 13-year-old growing up in 1968 Chicago. Sam is the son of a prominent civil rights activist: a man whom he loves and respects greatly. Sam's older brother, Stick, begins to drift away from the family, becoming more and more secretive about his whereabouts and activities. Sam discovers literature

about the Black Panther party under Stick's bed, and decides to confront his brother. What ensues is a conflict of ideology that nearly tears their family apart. *The Rock and the River* by Kekla Magoon is a compelling read, with strong characters and a vivid backdrop of Chicago in the year Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9.0

Scat, by Carl Hiaasen

9780375834868, \$16.99

Knopf

January 2009

Core Audience: Ages 9-13, boys & girls

Notable Aspects: Kids vs. Grownups, environmental issues

REVIEW: Not everyone is meant to be a children's book writer. Many esteemed novelists have taken a swing at kid's lit and failed miserably. Others have published mediocre books that, even with plenty of publicity, fail to win over their target audience. Very few established writers can pull off a transition to children's books. Two that come to mind are Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman. One writer made it into this elite group six years ago with his novel, *Hoot*, which won a Newbery Honor in 2003.

Carl Hiaasen is probably known to many parents as the writer of zany, crazy, and downright bizarre mystery novels for adults, such as *Skinny Dip* and *Sick Puppy*. Set in Florida, his novels tend to take on environmental issues in unusual ways. Along with *Hoot*, he also wrote *Flush*, and has now come out with his third kid's novel, *Scat*.

In *Scat*, our hero, Nick, has a mystery on his hands. One day, his biology class takes a field trip to Black Vine Swamp and his teacher Mrs. Starch walks into the swamp and never comes out. The first person to suspect would be Duane Scrod, Jr., class troublemaker and suspected pyromaniac, but as in all of Hiaasen's novels, the most obvious answer isn't always the right one.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

Additional review of Scat:

Core audience: Boys and girls Grades 6-8

Notable for humor, suspense, environmental issues, sensitivity to others' feelings

Review: A much disliked and feared biology teacher goes missing during a class field trip in the swamps of the Everglades. There us a fire that abruptly puts an end to the trip. The class "delinquent" with a history is blamed then truly framed. As with most of Hiaasen's stories, there are the dishonest developers (of oil this time!) and plenty of caring environmentalists. The endangered black panther also makes an appearance. Nick and Marta display plenty of *chutzpa* and courage in trying to find out what happened to their missing teacher and clear their classmate of the unfair arson charges. Of special interest is the fact that Nick's father returns from his National Guard stint in Iraq with a missing arm. Nick has his own right arm taped up in a move of solidarity with his Dad. Together they try to strengthen their left arms with the backyard baseball practice they have always shared. There is something for everyone here. Despite some "too easy" personality changes and a totally unbelievable substitute teacher, a good choice for middle grade teachers to use in the classroom.

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

Rating: 8

Additional rating for Scat:

I, too, had a chance to read it and really enjoyed it. I think I'd even give it an 8.5 rating.

Nancy Felton

Rating: 8.5

I'm just about finished reading it, too! I'll give it a 9 - I love Hiaasen.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

Secrets of Truth & Beauty, by Megan Frazer

9781423117117, \$15.99

Hyperion, July 2009

Core audience: Girls, 12 and up

Notable aspects: Debut novel, set in New England - starts in Portland and ends up in western Mass, author is from Maine

When Dara Cohen was little, she was a singing sensation and brought home the Little Miss Maine crown. Now she's 17 and not so little anymore. When an autobiographical film project is horribly misinterpreted, she is hauled out of school by her controlling mother and set to finish up her semester at home, in between trips to her new counselor. This is where Dara says enough. She road trips to a collective goat farm in Massachusetts to stay with the sister

no one talks about and she has never met.

There are so many books with teens about self-image and I really appreciated this one because Dara emerges from her summer a better, changed person, but its not because she miraculously lost weight and became perfect looking. I think the book deals with her issues realistically and better still, there's blossoming romance, a lesbian sister and gay best friend, and still another pageant, to keep the story going.

Reviewer: Laura Lucy, White Birch Books

Rating: 9

Additional review of Secrets of Truth & Beauty:

Core audience: 12 & up, mostly girls

Notable for : Body image issues, family history, gay/lesbian themes

Review: New author Megan Frazer has done a very good job of weaving together several seemingly disparate themes. Portland, Maine high school junior Dara is assigned to write her autobiography for English class and she decides to use the opportunity to make a statement about the body image issue in general and more specifically, her own experience with it as a toddler beauty queen.

Her teacher is not happy with this approach to autobiography and refers her to the guidance counselor who calls in her parents and the whole thing gets blown up into a suspension from school and the requirement that Dara redo the assignment more correctly.

Discovering that she has an older sister who has run away from or been banished from the family she finds her and sets off to visit her (on a goat farm in MA originally founded as a place where gay/questioning girls and women could find refuge) and forge her own escape from her current problems.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

Seven Keys of Balabad, by Paul Haven

9780375833502, \$16.99

Random House

January 27, 2009

Core Audience: 8-12 year old arm chair travel and adventure enthusiasts

Notable Aspects: Strong cultural setting, not too intense for strong young readers

Review: One question we often get is, "I'm wondering if this is going to be too scary for my son? He's a good reader and this looks like it would interest him but I'm worried it might be too intense." This is not usually an easy question to answer, but it will be for Paul Haven's new book, *The Seven Keys of Balabad*. This book, set in a small, mountainous, fictional middle eastern country, has many attractive elements, such as a likable lead character who has been displaced from New York to Balabad by the careers of his archaeologist mother and newspaper reporter father, an ancient buried treasure of the Baladis', interesting Baladi history, a legacy of carpet dealing protectors of the treasure, a secret society of Baladi treasure heirs each with an ancient key, a cool rug with the secret of finding the treasure woven into it, two Baladi kids, a boy and a girl who join Oliver on his mission to save a kidnapped Rug dealer and save the Baladi treasure, and lots of interesting cultural bits made authentic by Haven's time spent working as a reporter in Pakistan and Afghanistan. What's striking about this book is that it has all the ingredients of a good middle grade reader, but not too much of any of them. *The Seven Keys of Balabad* is a light soufflé of a book which will sift a little too quickly through the hands of adult readers, but will be just right for a bright young audience who likes their adventure fast paced and not too involved or intense.

Reviewer: Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 7.5

Smoke, by Mavis Jukes

9780374370855 / \$16.95

FSG March '09

Core audience: boys and girls 8-13

Notable for family and friendship issues, lyrical descriptions of nature, setting

REVIEW: When Colton's mom decides to leave Idaho and take a new job on a ranch in California, he is sad and more angry than he realizes to be leaving his friends and his grandfather. His dad, a traveling rodeo rider, is rarely in the picture. Dad's motto: "Big windshield, little rear-view mirror." Colt's only connection to him is the coon cat, Smoke, his dad had once given him.

Colt makes a fairly good transition to his new situation with the help of his sixth grade teacher who involves him with a soccer team and instills a feeling of community in his students. The ranch's owner and his mom strike up a good and caring working relationship and include Colt in their activities, including dinners out together. Then Smoke disappears. Cougars have been seen in the area. After unsuccessful searching, Colt seems to be experiencing all the signs of bereavement. One night he decides to explore on his own and a storm blows up while he is gone. He seeks shelter in an old cabin. It is an exciting night. By morning, many people have come out to search for Colt, including his dad, who has driven much of the night. Then "father-figure" ranch owner gives Colt a little kitten and it and Colt begin to bond. Then lo and behold! There comes a phone call from a trucker who had been at the ranch. Smoke had ridden all the way to Boston with him! This is a sudden happy ending to a wonderful story about people reaching out to help one another. It's about change and taking the long way home, in more ways than one. Young readers will identify with Colt. The sudden ending? That's something to talk about!

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop Milford, NH

Rating: 8

Soul Enchilada, by David Macinnis Gill

978-0061673016, \$16.99
Greenwillow (Harper Collins)
April 2009

Core audience: high schoolers
Notable for wackiness, feisty female character, humor

Feisty 18 yr. old "Bugs" Smoot, twice an orphan, about to be evicted from her lousy apartment rental, loses her job delivering pizzas. Now her only possession, the '58 Caddy left to her by her dead grandfather is about to be repossessed along with Bugs' soul. Mr Beals had taken grandfather's soul in lieu of payment. Now nasty Mr Beals wants all of Bugs as well. Luckily her crush, Pesto, who works at a car wash also works for the International Supernatural Immigration Service. He has sidekicks who know tricks to get rid of demons. Major wackiness ensues: Bugs vomits maggots; a coyote appears at dangerous moments; there is a car race with Satan delivering pizzas; crazy basketball and lots of oozing blood and pus. Romance blossoms between Pesto and Bugs. It is a cross between horror, humor and romance! Many teens will thoroughly enjoy it and not mind that there are a lot of loose ends!

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 7

Sunny Holiday, by Coleen Murtagh Paratore

9780545075794, \$15.99
Scholastic
January, 2009

Core audience: Girls 7-11
Notable: Optimistic spirit, realistically challenging setting, supportive adults.

Sunny Holiday takes her name to heart, decides each month should contain a holiday for kids to celebrate, and gets busy inventing them for the months that are missing one. This in spite of her father's absence in prison, her mother's wearying job cleaning hotel rooms, and the drab setting of urban poverty. With unquenchable optimism, Sunny and her mother address one problem after another, and turn liabilities into assets. For instance: "Some people might not know this, but dandelions are so special you can't even buy them at a flower store. You have to wait until they grow naturally." They design little rituals to support each other, the neighbors in their apartment building, the father serving time, the struggling charter school, and the surrounding neighborhood. Though there are setbacks along the way, Sunny perseveres, and her moment of glory comes in at the end, exactly on schedule. As the economic straits wring children's lives tighter with each passing month, Sunny's resiliency takes on even more value. The book is full of ideas for making do, bartering assistance, working together, using scraps to create little spots of joy. Furthermore, all the parts work together: the author has become skilled at weaving motives and actions together to make a tight, satisfying plot. Though the hardcover will sell primarily to libraries, if it kicks off a series, Sunny will be as popular as Judy Moody or Clementine, though without illustrations.

Reviewer: Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8

Additional ratings of Sunny Holiday:

Ditto. **Reviewer: Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers**

Rating: 8

I also give *Sunny Holiday* an 8! What a delightful book!

Reviewer: Alison Morris

Rating: 8

Surface Tension, by Brent Runyon

9780375844461, \$16.99

Knopf/Random House

March 10, 2009

Core audience: Boys age 14 and up; adult reading groups; curious girls 12 and up

Notable: Authentic voice, characters, believable conflicts, satisfying ending

Review: (Full disclosure: author is local to my area, and is a friend) All his life, Luke and his parents have spent two weeks each July at their little cottage by a lake. *Surface Tension* takes us to those vacations in Luke's 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th summers. Luke's interior monologue is believably changeable, his moods as turbulent as a ping pong ball in a dogfight. Initially the familiar setting and routines fill him with anticipation, boyish joy and small-scale adventures. Later, his hormones modify his viewpoint and goals, which swing from awkward to sweet to oafish. The arrival of a new and unpleasant neighbor spotlights some foolish adult behavior, as Luke moves from complete adolescent self absorption, to critical outward observation, to acceptance. Runyon skillfully orchestrates the interplay among adult foibles, failings, conflicts and unexpected virtues, and Luke emerges, somewhat to his own surprise, as a young man who's every bit as complex as those around him, capable of insight, passion, courage, despair, disgust, restraint, and measured judgement. Though the book is told from the viewpoint of a teenage boy, it will be most keenly appreciated by (and amusing to) parents and teachers who work with teens – rather like the pleasure of reading the Zits comic strip, but as serious literary fiction. I rate it as 9 for literary merit, 7 for saleability, and 8 overall.

Reviewer: Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8

Additional rating of Surface Tension:

I'm totally with you on this one. Brent Runyon's first novel *Burn Journals* was one of my favorite hand-sells as a bookseller & this one has the same feel. I sent it to 2 of my nephews (age 14 & 16) & both of them loved it. My rating would be a solid 8 as well

Reviewer: Heather Doss, Bookazine

Rating: 8

Additional rating of Surface Tension:

I will add my two cents on Runyan's new *Surface Tension*. I liked it and I think it will handsell well.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The ToadstoolBookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

Swim the Fly, by Don Calame

Candlewick, \$16.99

9780763641573

April, 2009

Core audience: Boys 12-15

Notable: Humor, characters, hormonal hijinks, strong ending

Review: For a mature reader, 320 pages of fart jokes and situational gags about bodily fluids, their related desires and revulsions, is a long haul. But for a boy dealing with puberty and peer pressure, the snappy dialogue and cinematic pacing, the realistically raw language, will make for one long whoop of grinning amusement. The setup is: three 15-year-old swim team buddies make it their goal to see a live girl naked. Matt, the main

character, has a crush on a girl who's new to the team, and in a desperate attempt to impress her, he volunteers to compete in the butterfly stroke event at the championship meet, and event that requires surpassing skill and strength he does not possess. The book proceeds through one nutty, collapsing scheme after another to either achieve or avoid these dubious commitments. It would be a dour reader indeed who doesn't laugh out loud at the story, but it would be a dingbat who thinks it has lasting value.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8

Tales from Outer Suburbia, by Shaun Tan

9780545055871, \$19.99

Arthur A. Levine Books / Scholastic

February 2009

Core Audience: Ages 12+

Notable Aspects: graphic novel-ish, mystery, fantasy

REVIEW: Reminiscent of Chris Van Allsburg's "The Mysteries of Harris Burdick," Tan's newest work is magically amazing. In short stories and vignettes, he conjures up a suburban wonderland full of strange and unusual happenings. Some pieces are very short (one page) and others longer, and each is accompanied by Tan's stunning artwork.

In one piece ("Undertow"), a large marine mammal appears beached on the lawn of a suburban house. The neighbors all come out and stare. The unhappy couple who lives there each thinks that the other has done it as a joke. A small boy identifies it as a dugong. After the dugong has been taken back to the ocean, the boy returns to the lawn in the middle of the night and lays down in the spot that the animal had been in and stares up at the clouds.

Each piece is fantastical and mysterious. It's wonderful. I would agree with the 12 & up rating on the galley - it will be more appreciated by older readers. It could easily also be an adult crossover.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

Additional review of Tales from Outer Suburbia:

Core Audience: Appropriate for 13+, but 16+ would have a greater chance of really GETTING it

Notable aspects: Beautiful illustrations, surreal humor

Review: Slice-of-life stories meets surreal pictures and ironic writing. Older teens and adults will appreciate the tongue-in-cheek text, the exaggerated tales of suburban humdrum life, and the sly details in the ingenious illustrations. The individual chapters are bursting with deeper meaning, which may or may not be lost on younger readers. Established Shaun Tan fans will rejoice in this new masterpiece; it might be a hard sell as an introductory piece.

Reviewer: Rebecca Fabian, The Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 5.5

Additional rating of Tales from Outer Suburbia:

Reviewer: Beth Reynolds @ The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 9

The Uninvited, by Tim Wynne-Jones

978-0763639846, \$16.99

Candlewick May 2009

Core audience: Ages 12 and up, evenly for boys and girls. For kids who like realistic suspense. Fine for those kids who are ready for YA, but without the sex. Does have some violence, though.

Notable aspects: Excellent setting/mood, building suspense, character development.

Review: College-age Mimi Shapiro, every inch a street-wise city girl, is fleeing a bad relationship with a college professor. Her estranged father has offered her his remote cabin in Canada. When she arrives there, she finds it's already occupied by a slightly older boy, Jay, who immediately accuses her of leaving him strange objects in order to mess with his head. But they decide to both stay in the cabin and start to find a balance between themselves. Then we meet Cramer, another teen boy who lives nearby. Clearly Cramer is troubled - his mother is a controlling nut-job, and that's putting it mildly. Cramer is fixated on Jay, and then on Mimi. Enter old coot Stookie Peters, another neighbor, who tries to befriend Mimi and Jay and warn them about Cramer. Mimi and Jay and Jay's girlfriend Iris slowly put the pieces together, with several false starts for the reader.

The mood of rising tension and mystery is craftily heightened by the remote setting, weather systems, and the alternating points of views of the characters. A well-told, compelling story.

Reviewer: Linda Devlin, Linda's Story Time

Rating: 8

Wings, by Aprilynne Pike

9780061668036, \$16.99

Harper 05/05/09

Core audience: 12+ girls

]Notable aspects: faeries (who are plants), love triangle

Review: Laurel moves to a new town and starts school as a 15 yr old, always having been homeschooled. She's also "different" (vegan & likes to be outside). Then she gets a bump that turns into wing-like petals. Eventually learns she is a faerie-- with an "e", but not scary like most faeries with an "e", in her case it means she's a plant; and she must stop the sale of her old house as it contains the gateway to the faerie world. Eventually her dad gets sick from a mysterious toxin, and some evil trolls must be stopped from buying the house. All while oh-so-confused as to her feelings toward nice, supportive human boy vs. sexy passionate plant boy.

Hmmm... what to say. You know in fantasy/supernatural books how the first 50 pages are kind of slow because the hero is still learning about what's "special" about them, but you slog through it because you know that in 50 pages, stuff is going to start happening? Well, about 200 pages of this book was those first 50 pages. And when you spend 210 pgs of a 293 pg book wondering when stuff is going to start happening, that's not good. Turns out, this is the first in a planned 4 books, and I can't help but think that if this had been condensed into the first 1/4 of a book or first 1/2 of one, I might have loved it, but as it was I spent a lot of time bored. That being said, it's going to sell and sell a lot. The cover is gorgeous, Stephenie Meyer is friends with the author and will apparently be siccing her zombie hoardes upon it, some of the ideas in it are neat, and the fangirls are going to squee over Tamani the sexy faerie boy. As for granny approval: she might not like the concept that since they reproduce using pollen, "sex is just for fun" or the single swear word, but it's an innocent book and the troll battle rather bloodless.

Katherine Ferguson, Bunch of Grapes

Rating: 6 (but many will disagree)

Additional review of *Wings*:

Primary audience: ages 12 and up

Notable aspects: 15 year old home schooled girl moves to a new town and goes to public school for the first time, good parents/child relationship, friendship story with a little fantasy adventure. Sex is mentioned (hot fairy boy tells her "Pollination is for reproduction-sex is just for fun.") but not in any detail. This is the beginning of a series.

Review: I really enjoyed this quick, chic lit read. Laurel is an appealing heroine. She knows she's not like other girls, she's a strict vegan, she wears flip flops and tank tops most of the year and hates being cooped up inside all day. Just as she is adjusting to going to public school and beginning to make a few friends- her world is turned upside down when something starts to grow from the middle of her back. What is it and who can she confide in? Although this is first in a series it has a satisfying ending that doesn't leave you hanging.

Reviewer: Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8

Wintergirls, by Laurie Halse Anderson

978-0670011100, \$17.99

Viking Children's Books

March 2009

Core Audience: Ages 14+, girls

Notable Aspects: Eating Disorders, Cutting, Recovery

REVIEW: Laurie Halse Anderson's newest novel has blown me away. Though I confess it is the first book of hers that I've read, the minute I was finished I couldn't wait to devour everything she has written.

Lia and Cassie have been friends for years, but when Cassie is found dead in a hotel room Lia's life begins to spiral out of control. Both girls had been battling eating disorders, and Lia's anorexia begins to take over as she is haunted by the spirit of her friend. This haunting novel will surely become the go-to book for eating disorder recovery in older teens. In that respect, it is important to note that it does not glamorize anorexia or bulimia. Lia is a smart girl whose disease begins to overpower her, and through her eyes we see her desperation and frustration with the system. I dare say this is one of the best books I've ever read.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 10

Year of the Bomb, by Ronald Kidd

9781416958925, \$15.99

Simon and Schuster

June '09

Core audience grade 6+ boys especially

Notable for timely issues, humor, historical events

From the very first line, "There were Martians in the backyard," I was hooked! Everyone has heard of the movie, "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," and no one has been more excited than Paul and his three thirteen-year-old Best friends when they learn the movie will be made in their home town! Horror movie buffs, they plan to attend as much filming as possible. Before long they befriend a young stand-in actress, meet a secret FBI agent, and get involved in real McCarthy Cold War era issues. The career of one boy's

father is in ruins caused by false assumptions, and newly befriended eccentric scientist, Richard Feynman, is spied upon and "reported" by one of the boys. Despite the serious topic, there is enough humor in the story to keep readers happily gobbling up the pages.

Ideas about living in a climate of fear and letting suspicion overtake common sense are as timely today as they were in the fifties. An author's note at the end separates the fact from fiction and gives great historical background.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH My score: 8.5

The Year the Swallows Came Early, by Kathryn Fitzmaurice

978-0061624995, \$16.99

HarperCollins

February 2, 2009

Core Audience: Older elementary and middle school

Notable Aspects: Characters, language, theme of betrayal and forgiveness

Eleanor "Groovy" Robinson is walking her father to work when they are stopped by a police officer and her father is arrested and taken off to jail. Groovy learns that her father has gambled away the money she had inherited and was planning to use to pay for cooking school. Groovy has a strong support network, including her friend Frankie (who also feels betrayed by his mother), Frankie's brother Luis and a new friend, Marisol, who is as talented an artist as Groovy is a cook. This is a lovely book about growing up, learning to forgive and the power of relationships.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

You Are So Undead to Me, by Stacy Jay

9781595142252, \$8.99

Razorbill / Penguin

January 2009

Core Audience: YA 12+, fans of Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Notable Aspects: Debut author & member of the 2009 Debutantes

Review: Megan Berry is a Zombie Settler meaning the undead teens of her town are drawn to her to unburden themselves of what keeps them out of their graves. Unfortunately, her duties are interfering in her attempt at a social life & it's about to get worse. Someone in town is using black magic to turn the annoying undead teens into crazy flesh-eating Zombies that are aimed right at Megan. Throw in a hottie sent to be Settle Affairs to be her protector & you've got a fun read that teens will gobble up.

Heather Doss, Bookazine

Rating: 7

Following are supplemental reviews from a fifth-sixth grade loop class, aka Mrs. Perry's class, Cape Cod Hill school, New Sharon, Maine. — Kenny Brechner

The Duel, by Judith St. George

ISBN # 978-0-670-01124-7

Publisher Viking a member of Penguin Group

Publication Date June 2009

Core Audience:I would recommend this book to anyone older than 8 because it has some hard words and is confusing at some points.

Notable Aspects:This book has a lot of facts about Alexander and Aaron Burr Hamilton and Burr. It explains everything they did as a kid to when they died.

REVIEW:This book was great because it kept me going in the story it was thrilling all the time. It was about Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. They both did the same thing with their lives and they eventually dueled and someone died. It explains about how they ran for president and fought in war against the British. They were famous and popular but they never liked each other because they always voted against each other whenever they ran for something like senate the other voted against each other and they didn't like that at all.

Reviewer: Michael Webber (age 11) DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9.9

The Potato Chip Puzzle, by Eric Berlin

978-0-399-25198-6

Publisher G.P Putman sons

Publication Date May 2009

Core Audience:Children from 7-12

Notable Aspects:This book has puzzles that you can answer

REVIEW:This is a book where a puzzle loving kid gets in a contest. Winsten Breen enters a contest with his two friends and they are trying figure out puzzles while they figure out who is the cheater. I recommend this book to puzzle freaks. It also has a lot of action. Winsten had to try to stop the cheater. The cheater is doing everything to win the prize money. I think it was a pretty good book. I never could solve the puzzles. It was only pretty good because there were too many puzzles.

Reviewer: Ryan Pratt (age 11) DDG Booksellers

Rating 7

Dodger For President, by Jordan Sonnenblick

978-0-312-37794-6

Publisher - Feiwel and Friends

Publication Date - June 2009

Core Audience: 8-12

Notable Aspects: It is fantasy. It is about a class election. It is about a boy named Willie.

Review - This book is about a boy named Willie. Willie is isn't very popular. But he has friends. Lizzie, his best friend who is a girl but not his girlfriend like everyone else thinks.

Dodger who is a magical, blue, genie chimpanzee (which only Lizzie and Willie can see).

When the book starts out Willie is just getting back from a trip he went on with his dad. When Willie gets back there is a secret Lizzie and Dodger aren't telling Willie. When Willie finally gets them to tell him what is wrong he is really upset. Here is what happened Willie and his dad were on a trip and Willie missed a day of school. So Dodger drank this potion which made him look like Willie. Craig is a class bully who always runs for class president. So during class Craig slipped and fell Dodger laughed at him. Then Craig challenged him to run for class president.

I didn't really like this book because I don't really like fantasy. So I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys fiction.

Reviewer: Amelia Yates (age 11) DDG Booksellers

Rating: 2

Quantum Prophecy 03: The Reckoning, by Michael Carroll

ISBN # 978-0-399-24727-9
 Publisher the penguin group
 Publication Date 2008

Core Audience: Any one that likes a fighting book with humor

Notable Aspects: This book is about super humans

REVIEW: I thought the book was all right. It didn't make much sense until the middle of the book, because the beginning started out slow and they didn't tell me much. That is why the book isn't a 10 on the rating. In the middle they explained about the super humans, and how the war started between the counties. There were only a few super humans left in the world and that the humans are trying to control the super humans by making them do things they didn't want to do. They wanted them to hurt others and lie to others to get info on how to win the war. If you want to find out if they do read the book

Reviewer: Brandon Moody (age 11) DDG Booksellers

Rating: 7 1/2

The Cats of Roxville Station, by Jean Craighead George

ISBN # 978-0-525-42140-5.
 Publisher Dutton Children's books
 Publication Date May 2009

Core Audience: 8-12

Notable Aspects: Realistic Fiction, a sad but also thrilling read that will implore you with all the feelings.

REVIEW: A cat named Rachel was being brutally abused with her old owner. The owner kicked and never fed her and finally threw her off a bridge to drown. Then you think why would the author get rid of the main character so easy. She didn't later on she meets other cats and from the time she got there she moved up 5 places in rank. Rank in this book means like fitting in. Rachel finds a boy named Mike and is still scared from her experienced with humans but read what she does to overcome her fears. That is why this book is totally AWESOME.

Reviewer: Thomas Wing (age 10) DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9.9

Return of the Homework Machine, by Dan Gutman

ISBN # 978-1-4169-7732-2

Publisher Simon&Schuster books for young readers

Publication Date 6/2/09

Core Audience: kids 9 and up

Notable Aspects: Four really close friends that work together to build a homework machine.

REVIEW: I liked this book because it is cool and how kids that don't want to do their homework but they do it anyways. The coolest part is that the homework machine does all the work for you and it does it in your own handwriting. I wish I knew how to build the homework machine because then I could use on my homework too.

Reviewer: Lauren Guppy (age11) DDG Booksellers

Rating: 10

Alibi Junior High, by Greg Logsted

ISBN # 978-1-4196-7959-3

Publisher Aladdin

Publication Date 2009

Core Audience: The book says 10 -14 but I say it should be 9-15

Notable Aspects: Cody Saron is a middle school kid and an undercover CIA agent with his dad.

REVIEW: Its action packed and you never know what is going to happen. In this book Cody Saron can speak five languages and is a undercover CIA agent. Cody and his father have a little problem, so his father sent him to live with his Aunt Jenny. Cody can't sleep so he goes out side and sees someone walking outside so he hides up in a tree. Cody also sees Andy a war veteran who lost an arm and he had a pistol ready to shoot. If you want to know who the masked person is than you will have to read the book. I like this book because the author will make unexpected turns in the story.

Reviewer: Tyler Messer (age11), DDG Booksellers

Rating: 30/10

The Stolen One, by Suzanne Crowley

ISBN # 978-0-06-123200-8

Publisher 'Greenwillow Books'

Publication Date 2009

Core Audience: People who like romance and a mystery

Notable Aspects: a romance with a mystery

REVIEW: This book is about Kat, a girl who wants to know more about her birth parents. When her foster mother dies Kat and her sister Anna run from the country to London. Soon Kat is invited to the queen's ball and becomes a favorite of the queen herself. Now Kat has to choose between two handsome men in London or her country lover. I give this book a 9 because I like how the author uses old language and makes the situation realistic.

Reviewer: Kristen Davis (age11), DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9

Emma Jean Lazarus Fell in Love, by Lauren Tarshis

ISBN #978-0-8037-3321-3
 Publisher , The Penguin Group
 Publication Date , May 2009

Core Audience: Young readers Ages 10 - 14 , grades -5-9

Notable Aspects: Very disruptive and interesting , It never gets boring ! And for someone who hasn't read the first book[Emma Jean Lazarus fell out of a tree]You can pick up right where she left of .

REVIEW: Emma Jean is probably one of the most intelligent girls you will ever meet, but not the best problem solver in William Gladstone Middle School. So , while trying to help cope with her friends dilemmas she is trying to deal with her own . In this book you'll find out how 'illogical' she really is. Like the birds and the bees they might all have caught spring fever ,just like Emma Jean!

Reviewer: Natalie L. Fahn (age11), DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9-10

Tumtum & Nutmeg, by Emily Bearn

ISBN # 978-0316-02703-8
 Publisher Little Brown Books For Young Readers
 Publication Date April 2009

Core Audience: This book is for 6 to 12 years of age.

Notable Aspects: The mice talk and wear cloths that drive Aunt Ivy bananas.

REVIEW: This book is a 454 page book. This is the biggest book I have ever read. This book is pretty good book. you would think that it is a pretty dumb book but its not. The mice are all ways on an adventure . The male march mouse is my favorite character because he is hyper. He caused every adventure.

Reviewer: JARED POIRIER (age11), by DDG Booksellers

Rating: I think this book is an 8.

Slob, by Ellen Potter

ISBN # 978-0-399-24705-7
 Publisher Philomel
 Publication Date May 2009

Core Audience: 10-14

Notable Aspects: realistic fiction with a scientist fiction element-robots, likable, brilliant main character

REVIEW: I'm going to give you the first few lines. 'My name is Owen Birnbaum, and I'm probably fatter then you are. This isn't my low self-esteem talking.' These are great opening lines because they grabbed me. The main character is a boy whose parents died in a murder.

I love this book because its funny and dramatic. It is funny because he blames the wrong person for stealing his Oreos everyday. He is also trying to find out who murdered his parents.

Reviewer: Connor. J. Savage (age11) DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9.7

The Word Snoop, by Ursula Dubosarsky

ISBN#9780803734067

Publisher Dial Books

Publication Date June 09

Core Audience People in to History and words anyone 8 and up

Notable Aspects Nonfiction a secret code to crack

Review This book was a book about the history of the English language and special styles of writing . It even teaches you pig latin. When you start you can't stop reading it and it has more than about 50 cool facts. Did you know that Benjamin Franklin wanted to get rid of the letters Y, J, W, C, X, and Q.

Reviewer: Benjamin Luchini

Rating: 10

Revenge of the Itty-Bitty Brothers, Lin Oliver

ISBN # 9781416980759

Publisher Simon and Schuster

Publication Date 6/23/09

Core Audience: 8-12

Notable Aspects: comedy

REVIEW: Daniel is the main character and he didn't know he had a mini twin brother until a couple of weeks ago. Daniel and Pablo (his twin brother) go through their top five favorite things to do. 1 is going up in a rocket. Revenge of the Itty-Bitty Brothers was a funny book because it had a lot of funny parts like when they were snowboarding down a ice cream sunday, and having the mini man Olympics.

Reviewer: Isaiah Tolman

Rating: 10

Dodger For President, by Jordan Sonnenblick

ISBN# 978312377946

Publisher FEIWEL AND FRIENDS BOOK

Publication Date June 2009

Core Audience 3rd graders

Notable Aspects this was a fantasy it was not believable

Review: I did not like this book because it didn't pull me in to the story. The story line was confusing. I didn't understand why only two kids could see the imaginary blue chimp. I thought it was too kiddish for fifth graders.

Reviewer Trevor Collins fifth grader

Rating 3

Return Of The Homework Machine, by Dan Gurman

ISBN # 9781416954163

Publisher Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Advance Reader's Copy

Publication Date May 09

Core Audience:8-12

Notable Aspects: realistic Fiction

REVIEW: The Return Of The Homework Machine is about four kids Brenton, Judy, Kelsey and Sam. They catapulted the homework machine into the Grand Canon but Brenton was worried about the red blinking light that still blinked even when it wasn't plugged in. The police found every piece but the red blinking light and the kids went looking for it. Read this book to find out where it is who has it and how they will get it back.

I give this book a 9 the reason is because it was interesting through the whole time I was reading it. They always had a problem with getting the chip which makes you not want to stop reading the book because you want to see what happens.

Reviewer: Lilly Kendall

Rating: 9

Oracles Of Delphi Keep, by Victoria Laurie

9780385735728, 16.99

Random House, 5/09

Core Audience: Readers who like fantasy, history, discovery, magic, and mystery. Ages: 11-14.

Notable Aspects: Intriguing plot, likable and believable characters, suspense, supernatural elements, historical references.

REVIEW: In an English castle above the White Cliffs of Dover there is an orphanage. The children there, who have no parents or families, enjoy their quiet lives until one day Theo, age 10, and Ian, age 13, discover a small box. Inside the box they find a three-thousand-year-old prophecy that sends them on a life-changing quest to save the world and everything on it. On this quest they come across many obstacles and often feel like giving up. But Ian, brave and adventurous, and his best friend, the smart and very insightful Theo, are not quitters. To say much about how these appealing characters confront the many challenges and obstacles that come their way would spoil the excitement of the story, but here is just the right amount of magic and suspense to keep readers glued.

Reviewer: Leon Robie (age 12), DDG Booksellers

Rating: 8