

**Novel-Ties: New Fiction for Literature Circles**  
**Presented by the Multnomah County Library School Corps**  
**August 13, 2008**  
**North Portland Library**

**Bullying**

**Erskine, Kathryn. Quaking. Philomel Books, 2007. [y ERSKINE]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Quakerism, bullying, foster families, patriotism

**Summary:** In a Pennsylvania town where anti-war sentiments are treated with contempt and violence, Matt, a fourteen-year-old girl living with a Quaker family, deals with the demons of her past as she battles bullies of the present, eventually learning to trust in others as well as herself.

**Booktalk:** Matt calls her dad the Beast. He regularly beat up her mother and when Matt was just a toddler, he dislocated both her shoulders. He's in prison now, because he killed her mother; but he still haunts Matt. Whenever she's confronted by bullies and threats – she quakes with fear and tries to make herself as small and inconspicuous as she possibly can.

At fourteen, Matt's on her last-chance foster home. She's moved in with Sam and Jessica, who are also fostering a child with birth defects who Matt calls the Blob. Despite the obvious affection that Sam and Jessica have for her, Matt is determined to stick to her survival technique of keeping out of the way. But Sam's gentle persistence is eating away at her resolve. Sam and Jessica are members of the Quaker religion, and they've been active in a campaign to end the war in Iraq and bring the troops home. Other religious groups active in the peace movement have had pig's blood thrown on their buildings, and some members have even been attacked. Matt cannot understand why Sam continues to take his stand against the war in the face of this violence. Is it his faith that enables him to face the Beast and not be afraid?

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Publisher Penguin Books has created a reading guide for *Quaking* here: <http://us.penguinbooks.com/static/rguides/us/quaking.html>.

**Related websites:**

**Kathryn Erskine**

<http://www.kathyerskine.com/>

The author shares information about herself and her books, as well as workshops that she offers for young writers.

**Wage Peace Campaign: AFSC**

<http://www.afsc.org/iraq/default.htm>

The American Friends Service Committee represents Quaker congregations throughout the U.S. The Wage Peace Campaign promotes the causes of peace and stability in Iraq.

**Quakers**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/quakers\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/quakers_1.shtml)

This informative site from the BBC provides a thorough overview of Quakerism.

**Prose, Francine. Bullyville. HarperTeen, 2007. [y PROSE]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Bullies, death/healing, family relationships

**Summary:** After the death of his estranged father in the World Trade Center on 9/11, thirteen-year-old Bart, still struggling with his feelings of guilt, sorrow and loss, wins a scholarship to the local preparatory school and there encounters a vicious bully whose cruelty compounds the aftermath of the tragedy.

**Booktalk:** After terrorists attacked the World Trade Center on 9/11, Bart Rangely became known as the Miracle Boy. Here's why:

Read article on page 19.

To Bart it doesn't seem like *total* disaster was averted—it's still pretty disastrous losing his dad.

It's after the article appears in the newspaper that the letter from Baileywell Prep arrives at his house. Baileywell Prep is a boarding school for rich kids, but it's better known as Bullyville or Bullywell, "because that was what it prepared you for. You learned to bully or be bullied, and to do it really well." The letter Bart receives offers him a full scholarship to Bullyville.

Of course, Bullyville is the last place Bart wants to go, but because it seems to make his mom happy, he agrees to do it. The bullying starts the first day, led by Tyro Bergen, the older student who is supposed to be Bart's mentor. Tyro grabs the ketchup bottle and dumps it all over Bart's lunch. Then the mysterious phone calls begin, followed by the nasty text messages. And that's when Bart snaps...

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- What makes someone a bully? Why does Tyro bully Bart?
- How does visiting Nola change Bart?
- What do you think about Bart's response to the bullying? Was there anything he could have done differently?
- Why is Tyro allowed to get away with bullying at Baileywell Prep?

**Related websites:**

**Bullyville Reading Group Guide**

<http://www.harperchildrens.com/webcontent/guides/pdf/0060574976.pdf>

This guide from the publisher contains discussion prompts and extension ideas.

**Stop Bullying Now**

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp>

This U.S. government site has information for students and adults about the prevention of bullying. There are online "webisodes" to watch and games to play.

**Stop Bullying Now: Lesson Planning Article**

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/lesson/lesson191.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson191.shtml)

"Education World offers ten lessons designed to teach students to respect diversity and resolve ideological differences peacefully." Designed for 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders.

**Ellis, Ann Dee. This Is What I Did. Little, Brown, 2007. [y ELLIS]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Bullying, friendship, abuse

**Summary:** Bullied because of an incident in his past, eighth-grader Logan is unhappy at his new school and has difficulty relating to others until he meets a quirky girl and a counselor who believe in him.

**Pixley, Marcella. Freak. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. [y PIXLEY]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Bullying, family relationships, friendship, identity

**Summary:** Twelve-year-old Miriam, poetic, smart, and quirky, is considered a freak by the popular girls at her middle school, and she eventually explodes in response to their bullying, revealing an inner strength she did not know she had.

**Winerip, Michael. Adam Canfield, Watch Your Back!. Candlewick, 2007.  
[j WINERIP]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Bullying, ethics, gentrification, overscheduling of kids

**Summary:** A much-welcomed snow day turns into an embarrassing nightmare for middle-grader Adam Canfield when, after being mugged by high school bullies for his snow-shoveling money, he becomes the focus of major media attention just as his co-editors at The Slash are launching a contest to out bullies at their school.

### Community activism

**Ellis, Deborah Sacred Leaf. Groundwood Books, 2007. [y ELLIS]**

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Major themes:** Community Activism, Bolivia, cocaine industry, third world vs. first world

**Summary:** Twelve year old Diego escapes from slavery at an illegal cocaine operation and is taken in by the Ricardos, coca farmers.

**Booktalk:** What if your parents were both in prison, but they still had to pay for their cells and the food they ate? That's how it is in Bolivia, and Diego Juarez has to help out, although he's only a boy. In *I Am A Taxi*, the book that comes before this, Diego decides to earn money by working for a drug dealer, stomping coca leaves to turn them into the drug cocaine to sell in the United States. But the job is awful: the boss is a monster, Diego's best friend dies, and Diego is forced to escape into the jungle to survive.

In *Sacred Leaf* he's rescued by the Ricardo family who nurse him back to health. Their daughter Bonita resents him, but when he makes a new pen for the guinea pigs (which in Bolivia are raised as food, not pets) and helps them harvest coca leaves, they treat him as one of the family. Even though they're poor, they say he can use some of the money they'll raise from selling the leaves to buy a ticket home.

Then suddenly Bolivian soldiers arrive, and take all the coca leaves they've worked so hard to harvest, and pull up all the coca bushes. The United States has a war on drugs, so the Bolivian government says farmers can't grow coca anymore. "Raise chickens and vegetables instead," the soldiers say.

Coca is the sacred leaf of Bolivians. The coca farmers refuse to give up. They fight back by forming a nationwide protest, building barricades across roads so no traffic can go through. Diego eagerly pitches in, running errands, standing watch, and helping the Ricardos. But he wonders, can the poor farmers stand up to soldiers, who have tanks, bullets and tear gas? How will he ever get the money to go back home? And does he even want to go back to his old life, living in a prison, now that he's done so much else?

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Can someone be right even when they're doing something wrong? Growing coca leaves is against the law, but do you think the coca farmers are criminals?
- Community makes you strong. Find some examples in the book that show how the coca farmers are strengthened by acting together, instead of acting alone.
- When Diego lives with the Ricardo family, their daughter Bonita gives him a hard time. Why do you think she is so tough on him?

**Related websites:**

**Interview with Deborah Ellis**

[http://www.papertigers.org/interviews/archived\\_interviews/dellis.html](http://www.papertigers.org/interviews/archived_interviews/dellis.html)

Find out what else this author is up to, and why she wrote this book.

**Bolivia's Knot: No to Cocaine, Yes to Coca**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/12/international/americas/12bolivia.html>

A New York Times' article explains the problems Bolivia faces with coca production.

**Coca, Food Medicine and Ritual in Bolivia**

<http://www.narconews.com/Issue34/article1025.html>

Read up on the role of coca in Bolivians' lives.

**Sheth, Rashmira. Keeping Corner. Hyperion, 2007. [ySHETH]**

**Genre:** Historical fiction

**Major themes:** Community Activism, India, Gandhi, historical fiction (1940s)

**Summary:** In India in the 1940's, thirteen-year-old Leela's happy, spoiled childhood ends when her husband since age nine, whom she barely knows, dies, leaving her a widow whose only hope of happiness could come from Mahatma Gandhi's social and political reforms.

**Death/healing**

**Henkes, Kevin. Bird Lake Moon. Greenwillow, 2008. [jHENKES]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Death/healing,

**Summary:** Twelve-year-old Mitch and his mother are spending the summer with his grandparents at Bird Lake after his parents separate, and ten-year-old Spencer and his family have returned to the lake where Spencer's little brother drowned long ago, and as the boys become friends and spend time together, each of them begins to heal.

**Booktalk:** When Spencer goes to Bird Lake with his sister Lolly and his parents for the first time, he doesn't count on discovering evidence of a ghost. But who else would have left a mound of sugar on their front porch, with a pattern of a turtle shell and the number

12 drawn in it? Who else stole his swim goggles, tangled them up with a rock and tossed them in the birdbath? Could it be the ghost of Spencer's younger brother Matty, who drowned at Bird Lake when he was only four? Spencer was only two when it happened, and can barely remember his brother, but he knows Matty had a toy turtle that he accidentally swallowed, and if he were alive today, he'd be twelve years old.

Mitch, who is staying next door with his grandparents while his parents go through a divorce, knows there's no ghost. But he keeps his knowledge a secret, preferring to spy on Spencer and his family from his hiding place under the porch. Besides, he has problems of his own to work out. What's going to happen to his family?

Something else knows there's no ghost. The full moon. The full moon sees everything.

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Some of the things Mitch does to Spencer are kind of mean. And even when he gets to know Spencer, he doesn't always tell the truth. Why does he do these things?
- There are lots of secrets in this book. Both families have secrets, and both boys do too. At the very end of the book, Spencer thinks "He'd remember everything. But he might not tell." How do you decide what to tell and what to keep secret?
- Do you think Mitch and Spencer will have an opportunity to be friends again?

**Related websites:**

**Kevin Henkes' Website**

<http://www.kevinhenkes.com/>

Learn more about the author and his other books.

**Wisconsin Lakes**

<http://www.wisconsinlakes.com/>

If you click on "Dane County" on the map (where Madison WI is located), you can explore lakes that might have inspired Bird Lake in Kevin Henkes' story.

**Going, K.L. The Garden of Eve. Harcourt, Inc., 2007. [j GOING]**

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Major themes:** Death/healing, magic, seeds, ghosts

**Summary:** Eve gave up her belief in stories and magic after her mother's death, but a mysterious seed given her as an eleventh-birthday gift by someone she has never met takes her and a boy who claims to be a ghost on a strange journey, to where their supposedly cursed town of Beaumont, New York, flourishes.

**Dystopia**

**Adlington, L.J. Cherry Heaven. Greenwillow, 2008. [y ADLINGTON]**

**Genre:** Science Fiction

**Major themes:** Dystopia, racism, friendship

**Summary:** In this sequel to *The Diary of Pelly D.*, Kat and Tanka J leave the war-torn city, move with their adoptive parents to the New Frontier. They are soon settled into a home called Cherry Heaven, but Luka, an escaped factory worker, confirms their suspicion that New Frontier is not the utopia it seems to be.

**Booktalk:** Cherries. Red, juicy, sweet. Everyone raves about the delicious cherries from Cherry Heaven, but no one seems to grow them anymore. When Kat and her sister Tanka arrive at Cherry Heaven, relocating from the cities to the New Frontier, they find the cherry trees wizened and grey. More people are familiar with greenberry, redberry and blueberry - the flavors of Blue Mountain bottled water – than they are with the sweet taste of cherries.

Tanka is obsessed with boys – especially Aran, the handsome son of New Frontier’s charismatic leader Quinn Essin. It was Essin who brought peace to the New Frontier, and did away with the racism fostered by which gene emblem you wore on your hand - an A, an M, or the despised G.

Kat on the other hand, is inquisitive. It’s Kat who discovers lines on the wall, marking the heights of 3 children, labeled only H, M... and L. She’s the one who stumbles upon a whole freezer full of frozen cherries, and a pale face watching the house from the dark orchard outside. And when rumors surface around town about a dangerous runaway factory worker named Luka, it’s Kat who thinks maybe the Linvenki Hydro factory and its Blue Mountain water aren’t as pristine as they pretend. Maybe people know more about the long-ago murders at Cherry Heaven than they admit. Maybe Quinn Essin isn’t as perfect as he pretends. And maybe the ‘L’ on the wall in her house stands for Luka.

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- In order to create a perfect society, or utopia, Quinn Essin claims he’s done away with racism. Do you think that’s possible? What roll should the government play?
- Is the community of Cherry Heaven a utopian society, or a dystopian society?
- Compare the symbolism of the frozen cherries in the story, with that of Blue Mountain bottle water. What do they each represent?
- Of Kat, Tanka, Aran and Luka...which character did you sympathize with the most, and why?

**Related websites:**

**L. J. Adlington**

[http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/28861/L\\_J\\_Adlington/index.aspx](http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/28861/L_J_Adlington/index.aspx)

A brief bio of the author.

**George Orwell – Dystopia**

<http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/articles/col-dystopia.htm>

Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* was considered a dystopian novel. Read through these definitions, and see if *Cherry Heaven* has some of these characteristics.

**Shusterman, Neal. Unwind. Simon & Schuster, 2007. [j SHUSTERMA]**

**Genre:** Science Fiction

**Major themes:** Dystopia, body harvesting

**Summary:** In a future world where those between the ages of thirteen and eighteen can have their lives "unwound" and their body parts harvested for use by others, three teens go to extreme lengths to uphold their beliefs--and, perhaps, save their own lives.

**Devita, James. The Silenced. Laura Geringer Books, 2007. [y DEVITA]**

**Genre:** Science Fiction

**Major themes:** Dystopia

**Summary:** Consigned to a prison-like Youth Training Facility because of her parents' political activities, Marena organizes a resistance movement to combat the restrictive policies of the ruling Zero Tolerance party.

## Ethics

**Higgins, F.E. The Black Book of Secrets. Feiwel & Friends, 2007. [j HIGGINS]**

**Genre:** Adventure

**Major themes:** Ethics, secrets, family, trust, making choices

**Summary:** When Ludlow Fitch runs away from his thieving parents in the City, he meets up with the mysterious Joe Zabbidou, who calls himself a secret pawnbroker, and who takes Ludlow as an apprentice to record the confessions of the townspeople of Pagus Parvus, where resentments are many and trust is scarce.

**Booktalk:** Read p. 1-2, ending at “Who needs teeth anyway?”

Ludlow Fitch has had a pretty miserable life so far, but when his parents try to sell his teeth for money, it's the last straw. Luckily, Ludlow is able to narrowly escape from his parents and the tooth surgeon. To get away, he jumps onto a carriage that is traveling down the street and hangs on all the way to the small town of Pagus Parvus.

It is there that Ludlow meets Joe Zabbidou. Joe is also new to Pagus Parvus, and he catches Ludlow peeking in his windows. Ludlow expects to be punished, but instead Joe offers him a job as his assistant. And what does Joe do? He tells Ludlow he is a “secret pawnbroker.”

Ludlow's not sure what a “secret pawnbroker” does until one night when the village gravedigger shows up at Joe's house in the middle of the night. Joe tells the gravedigger, “When I look at you, Obadiah, I see a man who has a secret. A secret that is such a burden it threatens to engulf you. It keeps you awake at night and gnaws at your guts every day. It doesn't have to be like that.”

Joe says he will buy the gravedigger's secret. He promises he will tell it to no one. And he has Ludlow write the secret down in *The Black Book of Secrets*.

What is the gravedigger's secret? And what other secrets are kept in the book? Find out when you read *The Black Book of Secrets* by F.E. Higgins.

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- What type of person is Jeremiah Ratchet? Why does he behave the way he does?
- Why do the villagers turn against Joe?
- Have you done anything you feel ashamed of? Write your own confession for the Book of Secrets.
- One mystery that is not resolved is Joe's wooden leg. How do you think he got it? Why do you think he won't tell anyone about it?

**Related websites:**

**The Black Book of Secrets**

<http://www.theblackbookofsecrets.com/>

At the book's official website, students can share their own confessions or learn more about the author.

***The Black Book of Secrets* Lesson Ideas**

<http://www.teachit.co.uk/index.asp?CurrMenu=searchresults&tag=1253>

A variety of lesson ideas based on the book

**Petrucha, Stefan. Teen, Inc. Walker, 2007. [y PETRUCHA]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Ethics, business ethics, families, environmental protection, activism

**Summary:** Fourteen-year-old Jaiden has been raised by NECorp. since his parents were killed when he was a baby, so when he discovers that the corporation has been lying about producing illegal levels of mercury emissions, he and his two friends decide to try to do something about it.

**Jordan, Rosa. The Goatnappers. Peachtree, 2007. [j JORDAN]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Ethics, family relationships, school, sports

**Summary:** Justin's place as the first high school freshman in twenty years to make the varsity baseball team is at risk when his math grade plummets while he is trying to cope with the abuse of a young billy goat he sold and a visit from his estranged father to Lost Goat Lane.

### Fairy tales/fantasy

**Gardner, Lynn. Into the Woods. David Fickling/Random House Books, 2006. [j GARDNER]**

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Major themes:** Fairytales, siblings, word play

**Summary:** Pursued by the sinister Dr. DeWilde and his ravenous wolves, three sisters-- Storm, the inheritor of a special musical pipe, the elder Aurora, and the baby Anything--flee into the woods and begin a treacherous journey filled with many dangers as they try to find a way to defeat their pursuer and keep him from taking the pipe and control of the entire land.

**Booktalk:** When their mother dies and their father takes off on another one of his escapades, Storm and her sister Aurora are left – with their newborn baby sister Anything - completely on their own. Storm's mother gives her a small tin pipe, warning her with her last breath, "Whatever you do, don't let it fall into the wrong hands."

Storm is spunky; her sister Aurora is more of a home-body, but the sisters vow to stick together, no matter what. The town where the sisters live is filled with rats, and the evil Dr. DeWilde and his pack of hungry wolves have been hired to catch the pesky rodents. But Dr. DeWilde is there for another reason; he wants that pipe. So does a mysterious boy with one blue eye, and one green. Storm outfoxes the evil doctor, but the sisters are forced to abandon their cozy home when their baby sister Anything disappears.

To get her back they have to go – into the woods. The deep dark woods, where they stumble upon Bee Bumble's house which is made entirely of candy. "Eat! Eat!" Bee encourages them, and Aurora joins the hungry orphans who live there, devouring donuts and brownies, gumdrops and gingerbread for every meal. But Storm is

suspicious, and soon she discovers the candy is drugged. Bee Bumble is fattening up all the children for her own evil purposes.

Now Storm has to rescue both her sisters. But leaving the candy house means she has to go back into the woods, where she's bound to encounter the diabolical Dr. DeWilde. And wolves. Hungry, murderous wolves. Storm's adventure will lead you through other fairytale landscapes, like Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel, the Pied Piper and the Snow Queen. How many do you recognize?

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Talk about the fairytales the author used in this novel. If you can, get a copy of the original fairytale, and compare the original version to the novel. Can you find some changes the author made?
- Storm is reckless and spunky. How do these characteristics help her in her quest to outwit Dr. DeWilde and find her sisters?

**Related websites:**

**Random House about the Author**

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl/9780385751155.html>

More from the publisher, about this book.

**Grimm Fairytales**

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm/>

The brothers Grimm collected folktales, some of which were pretty grim. Read some of their stories here.

**Myths, Folktales and Fairytales**

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/>

Three kinds of stories...how do you tell the difference? This site will help you sort it out.

**Fractured Fairytales**

<http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/fairytales/>

Just what is a fractured fairytale? Want to try writing one of your own?

**Bruchac, Joseph. Bearwalker. HarperCollins, 2007. [j BRUCHAC]**

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Major themes:** Fantasy, monsters, coming of age, Native Americans

**Summary:** Although the littlest student in his class, thirteen-year-old Baron Braun calls upon the strength and wisdom of his Mohawk ancestors to face both man and beast when he tries to get help for his classmates, who are being terrorized during a school field trip in the Adirondacks.

**Carman, Patrick. Atherton; The House of Power. Little Brown & Company, 2007. [y CARMAN]**

**Genre:** Fantasy.

**Major themes:** Fantasy, social classes, environment

**Summary:** Edgar, an eleven-year-old orphan, finds a book that reveals significant secrets about Atherton, the strictly divided world on which he lives, even as geological changes threaten to shift the power structure that allows an elite few to live off the labor of others.

**Hale, Shannon. Book of a Thousand Days. Bloomsbury, 2007. [y HALE]**

**Genre:** Fantasy.

**Major themes:** Fairytales, identity

**Summary:** Fifteen-year-old Dashti, sworn to obey her sixteen-year-old mistress, the Lady Saren, shares Saren's years of punishment locked in a tower, then brings her safely to the lands of her true love, where both must hide who they are as they work as kitchen maids.

**Jonell, Lynne. Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat. Henry Holt & Company, 2007. [j JONELL]**

**Genre:** Fantasy.

**Major themes:** Fantasy, rodents, humor.

**Summary:** When Emmy discovers that she and her formerly loving parents are being drugged by their evil nanny with rodent potions that can change people in frightening ways, she and some new friends must try everything possible to return things to normal.

**Murdock, Catherine Gilbert. Princess Ben. Houghton Mifflin, 2008. [y MURDOCK]**

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Major themes:** Fantasy, fairy tales, princesses, identity.

**Summary:** A girl is transformed, through instruction in life at court, determination, and magic, from sullen, pudgy, graceless Ben into Crown Princess Benevolence, a fit ruler of the kingdom of Montagne as it faces war with neighboring Drachensbett.

### Families

**Connor, Leslie. Waiting for Normal. Katherine Tegen Books, 2008. [y CONNOR]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships, neglect, loss, friendship, learning disabilities

**Summary:** Twelve-year-old Addie tries to cope with her mother's erratic behavior and being separated from her beloved stepfather and half-sisters when she and her mother go to live in a small trailer by the railroad tracks on the outskirts of Schenectady, New York.

**Booktalk:** Read p. 221, "I had two boxes..." to p. 222, "...six nights in a row."

Addie says her mom, otherwise known as Mommers, is an "all-or-nothing" person. She'll get really excited about something—going to college or a new job—but soon she loses interest and quits.

She treats Addie the same way—sometimes they have lots of fun together, but other times Mommers disappears for days at a time. Addie doesn't really have anywhere else to go, and she's afraid to tell anyone about Mommers, since she doesn't want them to be separated.

But what will happen if the food runs out before Mommers returns?

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Addie has problems with school and learning. Do you know anyone who has difficulty with reading and writing?

- Addie calls her mom an “all-or-nothing” person. Do you agree? How is Mommers a bad parent? Is she ever a good parent?
- At first Addie really enjoys going to the inn to visit Dwight, Hannah and her sisters. But after a while she doesn’t like it so much. Why?
- What does Addie learn from Soula?

**Related websites:**

**Leslie Connor Interview**

<http://lookbooks.wordpress.com/2008/05/06/leslie-connor-interview/>

Leslie Connor talks about writing *Waiting for Normal*, her favorite books, and her advice for writers.

**Waiting for Normal by Leslie Connor**

<http://www.harpercollinschildrens.com/HarperChildrens/Kids/BookDetail.aspx?isbn13=9780060890889&BDMode=9>

In this interview, Leslie Connor discusses her inspiration for writing *Waiting for Normal*, how she created characters, and her writing habits,

**Choldenko, Gennifer. If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period. Harcourt, 2007.**

[y CHOLDENKO]

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships, friendship, secrets

**Summary:** Kirsten and Walk, seventh-graders at an elite private school, alternate telling how race, wealth, weight, and other issues shape their relationships as they and other misfits stand up to a mean but influential classmate, even as they are uncovering a long-kept secret about themselves.

**Tilly, Meg. Porcupine. Tundra Books, 2007. [y TILLY]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships, death/healing

**Summary:** War-torn Afghanistan could not seem farther from Newfoundland, but it is about to change twelve-year-old tomboy Jack Cooper (or Jacqueline, as her mother insists on calling her), forever. When her father is killed in the war, she watches helplessly as her mother crumbles under sorrow and depression.

**White, Ruth. Way Down Deep. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. [j WHITE]**

**Genre:** Historical fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships, secrets, orphans, identity

**Summary:** In the West Virginia town of Way Down Deep in the 1950s, a founding called Ruby June is happily living with Miss Arbutus at the local boarding house when suddenly, after the arrival of a family of outsiders, the mystery of Ruby's past begins to unravel.

**Urban, Linda. A Crooked Kind of Perfect. Harcourt, 2007. [j URBAN]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships, friendship, mental illness

**Summary:** Ten-year-old Zoe Elias, who longs to play the piano but must resign herself to learning the organ, instead, finds that her musicianship has a positive impact on her workaholic mother, her jittery father, and her school social life.

**Booktalk:** (Read p. 1-2, “How it was supposed to be”)

Zoe Elias has big musical dreams. As soon as she gets that glossy baby grand piano, she’ll be on her way. The trouble is, when her dad goes to the mall to buy her a piano, he gets taken in by the man who sells organs, and what Zoe ends up with is a fake-wood-grained, vinyl-seated, wheeze-bag organ. The Perfectone D-60.

How will she ever be discovered as a musical prodigy when her lesson book is *The Hits of the 1970’s*? Not even a cha-cha beat can make the theme song to an old TV show sound like Beethoven. If you add to that problem a mom who’s always at work, a dad who’s afraid to leave the house, and an odd boy who follows her home from school every day, Zoe’s big dreams are looking pretty lopsided.

But when she enters the annual Perform-O-Rama organ competition, Zoe discovers that life is full of surprises – and that maybe a little lopsidedness will help her find what she’s really looking for.

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Discuss Zoe’s friendship with Emma. Why did they grow apart? Have you ever grown apart from a friend?
- How is Zoe’s dad different from other parents? How is he similar?
- Why do Zoe’s dad and Wheeler become such good friends? How does Zoe feel about it?
- This is a very humorous book. What part did you think was funniest?
- Listen to some of the TV theme songs that Zoe plays on the organ. You can check out a CD from the library or listen online at <http://www.televisiontunes.com/>.

**Related websites:**

**Linda Urban**

<http://www.lindaurbanbooks.com/index.html>

Author Linda Urban’s website has biographical information, writing tips, and a link to Linda’s online journal.

**Linda Urban**

<http://www.kristydempsey.com/interviewLindaUrban.html>

In this interview, Linda Urban discusses how she got the idea for *A Crooked Kind of Perfect*, other authors she admires, and more.

**Birdsall, Jeanne. The Penderwicks on Gardam Street. Knopf, 2008. [j BIRDSALL]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships,

**Summary:** The four Penderwick sisters are faced with the unimaginable prospect of their widowed father dating, and they hatch a plot to stop him.

**Crowley, Suzanne. The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous.**

**Greenwillow, 2007. [y CROWLEY]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships, friendship, Asperger’s syndrome

**Summary:** In the small town of Jumbo, Texas, thirteen-year old Merilee, who has Asperger's Syndrome, tries to live a "very ordered existence". But disruption begins when a boy and his father arrive in town and the youngster makes himself a part of the family.

**Staples, Suzanne Fisher. The House of Djinn. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.**  
[y STAPLES]

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Family relationships, identity, traditional vs. modern beliefs, religion

**Summary:** An unexpected death brings Shabanu's daughter, Mumtaz, and nephew, Jameel, both aged fifteen, to the forefront of an attempt to modernize Pakistan, but the teens must both sacrifice their own dreams if they are to meet family and tribal expectations.

### Friendship

**Rex, Adam. The True Meaning of Smekday. Hyperion Books for Children, 2007.**  
[j REX]

**Genre:** Science fiction

**Major themes:** Alien invasion, road trips, friendship, essay writing

**Summary:** When her mother is abducted by aliens on Christmas Eve (or "Smekday" Eve since the Boov invasion), 11 year-old Tip hops in the family car and heads south to find her and meets an alien Boov mechanic who agrees to help her and save the planet from disaster.

**Booktalk:** 'Twas the night before Smekday when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. Wait, Smekday? What's Smekday? Well, Smekday, which did occur on Christmas Day, was the day the Boov arrived. The Boov? Who are the Boov?

So, the Boov are aliens from outer space who needed to colonize Earth because they trashed their own planet. Before they arrived, they abducted a number of people, including Gratuity Tucci's mom. Gratuity – who goes by the nickname Tip -- has been living alone in their apartment ever since, but now the Boov have announced that all humans will be relocated to reservations in Florida and Arizona. Tip doesn't want to relocate (who does?), and she really wants to find her mom, so she takes the cat and the family car, which she *can* drive even though she's not old enough for a license, and hits the road. Very soon, she finds herself with a passenger: a Boov on the lam named J.Lo. And, although Tip is understandably reluctant to have a Boov as a companion on this road trip, considering what faced them as they headed down to Florida, it turns out to be a very good idea. Join her on her journey to discover *The True Meaning of Smekday*.

**Another good booktalk** could be to have two students take the parts of Tip and J.Lo in this skit from the author: <http://www.smekday.com/10reasons.html>.

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Why do you think there was an essay contest about the Boov's invasion? In her essay, Tip fudges some truths about what happened. Why did she do this? What grade would you give Tip for her essay?
- In this story there are a lot of familiar places given different names (Disneyland/Happy Mouse Kingdom). Why do you think the author did that?
- Tip's story is told through pictures and other visual items as well as words. Does this add to the story? Why?

**Related websites:**

**The True Meaning of Smekday**

<http://www.smekday.com/>

Visit here to find out more about Smekday and the Boov, and what's in that Time Capsule.

**Adam Rex**

<http://www.adamrex.com/>

The author's website features his books, his blog and a lot of the visual art that he creates as well.

**Kidnapped by UFOs?**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/aliens/>

The public broadcasting program *Nova* explores the phenomenon of alien abduction.

**Woodson, Jacqueline. After Tupac and D Foster. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2008.**

[y WOODSON]

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Coming of age, friendship, foster children, Tupac Shakur

**Summary:** In the New York City borough of Queens in 1996, three girls bond over their shared love of Tupac Shakur's music, as together they try to make sense of the unpredictable world in which they live.

**Booktalk:** Is it easy to mark the moments when your life makes an important turn? Can you remember that first time when things became before and after? That person or event that you understood changed you forever? Jacqueline Woodson can, in this book that seems so redolent of personal memory that I can only think she is writing about herself.

The unnamed narrator and her best friend and neighbor Neeka hang out on the stoop in their quiet Queens neighborhood. Their mothers don't let them go beyond the block, and – at 11 years old – the girls are chafing under the restrictions. One evening, a stranger comes around the corner, walks up to them and says hi. She is D Foster, and she spends her free time wandering the city – far from the not-so-watchful eye of her foster mother. The three girls discover a mutual love and appreciation of the gansta rapper Tupac Shakur, who – that summer – while on trial for rape, is shot. Far from being a predator, the girls think Tupac is a hero to African Americans as he uses his music to call attention to the racism and inequitable treatment of black people in American society.

Over the next two years, the girls grow closer and more adventurous – ultimately disobeying their mothers and taking off with D Foster to see more of New York City. Even then, the narrator says, we didn't know much about D – she didn't talk much about

herself. But one day, D disappears. And not long after that, Tupac is shot and killed. And Neeka and her friend know after Tupac and D Foster their lives will be different somehow.

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- During the time of this novel, Tupac Shakur was on trial for assaulting a woman; yet Neeka and the narrator believe he is a good role model for them. Can you explain why?
- Why is D Foster so mysterious to the girls? What about her draws them to her?
- What kind of relationship do the girls have with their families? How are they similar? How different? Are their families reflected in their personalities?
- The girls' mothers don't want them to leave the safety of their neighborhood until they are older. Are the mothers being too protective? Is this good or bad for Neeka and the narrator?

**Related websites:**

**Jacqueline Woodson**

<http://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/>

Visit here for Jacqueline Woodson's biography, information about her books and resources for teachers.

**2pac Legacy**

<http://www.2paclegacy.com/>

The singer's official website features biographies of Tupac and his mother, as well as music and games.

**Tupac Shakur Trial: 1994-1995**

<http://law.jrank.org/pages/3625/Tupac-Shakur-Trial-1994-95.html>

This website offers a brief, but understandable explanation of the events surrounding Tupac's trial for rape. Descriptions are not graphic, but *are* factual.

**Banks, Kate. Lenny's Space. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. [j BANKS]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** School counseling, friendship, self-discovery

**Summary:** Nine-year-old Lenny gets in trouble and has no friends because he cannot control himself in school and his interests are not like those of his classmates, until he starts visiting Muriel, a counselor, and meets Van, a boy his age who has leukemia.

**Murphy, Pat. The Wild Girls. Viking, 2007 [j MURPHY]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Creative writing, friendship, self-discovery/identity

**Summary:** When thirteen-year-old Joan moves to California in 1972, she becomes friends with Sarah, who is timid at school but an imaginative leader when they play in the woods, and after winning a writing contest together they are recruited for an exclusive summer writing class that gives them new insights into themselves and others.

**Tarshis, Lauren. Emma Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2007. [j TARSHIS]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Middle school, friendship, interpersonal relationships

**Summary:** A quirky and utterly logical seventh-grade girl named Emma-Jean Lazarus discovers some interesting results when she gets involved in the messy everyday problems of her peers.

**Wilson, Jacqueline. Candyfloss. Roaring Brook Press, 2007. [j WILSON]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Divorce, friendship, families

**Summary:** When her mother plans to move to Australia with her new husband and baby, Floss must decide whether her loyalties lie with her mother or her father, while at the same time, her best friend begins to make fun of her and reject her.

**Zimmer, Tracie Vaughn. Reaching for Sun. Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2007. [j ZIMMER]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Cerebral palsy, friendship, single-parent families, novels in verse

**Summary:** Josie, who lives with her mother and grandmother and has cerebral palsy, befriends a boy who moves into one of the rich houses behind her old farmhouse.

### Identity

**Abdel-Fattah, Randa. Does my Head Look Big in This? Orchard Books, 2007, 2005. [y ABDEL FATT]**

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Major themes:** Identity, Muslims/Australians, hijab, religious differences, high school

**Summary:** Year Eleven at an exclusive prep school in the suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, would be tough enough, but it is further complicated for Amal when she decides to wear the hijab, the Muslim head scarf, full-time as a badge of her faith--without losing her identity or sense of style.

**Booktalk:** When Amal decides she's going to wear the hijab full time, beginning with her first day at her snobby prep school in Melbourne, Australia, she knows it will change how people relate to her. Not her friends of course. Simone, Eileen, Yasmeen and Leila will stand by her no matter what. But her veiled head is perfect fuel for the fire of snotty, racist Tia's remarks.

If she'd pierced her lip, or gotten a tattoo, probably no one would have even noticed. But now, other kids at school make all kinds of assumptions about her. They think her parents forced her to do it, that she's anti-feminist, or they ask her to explain terrorists' actions, as if just being the same religion gives her some special knowledge of why someone would blow up a building.

And then there's her clothes....of course she needs to go shopping to make sure her veils and outfits match. And what about Adam, the boy she sort of has a crush on....will they still talk for hours on the phone, when he sees her veiled head, and is she leading him on, if her religion makes her act more conservatively than other kids?

Amal is a strong, smart girl whose search for her own identity makes her more aware of how her friends, relatives and neighbors all struggle to be recognized.

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Amal, her family and friends all have different attitudes towards Islam. Can you see similarities between how they practice their faith, and how Americans practice Christianity and Judaism?
- Have you ever felt afraid you would be teased because you were more conservative about something, than your friends or classmates? How does Amal handle kids that bully her?
- How does Amal and Mrs. Vaselli's relationship change over the course of the book?

**Related websites:**

**Three Interviews with Randa Abdel-Fattah**

<http://www.abc.net.au/rollercoaster/therap/interviews/s1451590.htm>

[http://www.insideadog.com.au/residence/interviews/randa\\_abdel-fattah.html](http://www.insideadog.com.au/residence/interviews/randa_abdel-fattah.html)

<http://www.abc.net.au/queensland/stories/s1437645.htm>

Find out everything from why she wrote the book, to her favorite kind of chips.

**Muslim Girl Magazine**

<http://www.muslimgirlworld.com/mgmag/>

A magazine for Muslim women and girls around the world.

**Compestine, Ying Chang. Revolution is Not a Dinner Party. Henry Holt, 2007.**

**[y COMPESTIN]**

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Major themes:** Identity, Chinese Cultural Revolution, Communism, persecution

**Summary:** Starting in 1972 when she is nine years old, Ling, the daughter of two doctors, struggles to make sense of the communists' Cultural Revolution, which empties stores of food, homes of appliances deemed "bourgeois," and people of laughter.

**Winston, Sherri. The Kayla Chronicles. Little Brown, 2007. [y WINSTON]**

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Major themes:** Identity, journalism, dance, high school

**Summary:** Kayla transforms herself from mild-mannered journalist to hot-trotting dance diva in order to properly investigate her high school's dance team, and has a hard time remaining true to her real self while in the role.

**Wright, Bil. When the Black Girl Sings. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008. [y WRIGHT]**

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Major themes:** Identity, interracial adoption, divorce, singing

**Summary:** Adopted by white parents and sent to an exclusive Connecticut girls' school where she is the only black student, fourteen-year-old Lahni Schuler feels like an outcast, particularly when her parents separate, but after attending a local church where she hears gospel music for the first time, she finds her voice.

**Jinks, Catherine. Evil Genius. Harcourt, 2007. [y JINKS]**

**Genre:** Science fiction

**Major themes:** Identity, good vs. evil, family relationships, anger

**Summary:** Child prodigy Cadel Piggot, an antisocial computer hacker, discovers his true identity when he enrolls as a first-year student at an advanced crime academy.

**Booktalk:** Cadel Piggott has just started at a new school, a small school, where there are only a few other students in his class. Who are they?

- Twins Jemima and Niobe are accomplished shoplifters.
- Clive, also known as the Bludgeon, starts things on fire.
- Abraham is planning on creating a race of vampires.
- Doris likes to poison people.
- Gazo has a special ability—when he gets stressed out, his body lets out such a bad stench that he can knock out someone across the room. Luckily he wears a protective suit so he doesn't knock out the other students.

What kind of school is this, you wonder?

It's the Axis Institute of World Domination, and it was designed by Cadel's father, Dr. Darkkon, a criminal mastermind who been imprisoned for most of Cadel's life. Dr. Darkkon wants to take over the world—and these are the people he's training to help him do it.

What do they study at the Axis Institute? Basic lying, manipulation, forgery, and explosives are just a few of the subjects in the curriculum. Stealing, hacking and cheating are encouraged, but getting friendly with your fellow students is not.

And what about Cadel? Why is he there? Cadel is a genius, and he knows his father wants him to be a part of his plans. But is it what Cadel wants? And what secrets could his father be keeping from him?

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Cadel says about Thaddeus Roth/Prosper English: "Despite everything he's done, I can't hate him. I try to, but I can't." Why do you think Cadel feels this way?
- Cadel turns against his father and Thaddeus after they try to cut off his relationship with Sonja. Why was Sonja so important to Cadel?
- Create some other characters with special abilities who could be students at the Axis Institute.

**Related websites:**

**Catherine Jinks**

<http://www.catherinejinks.com/default.asp?PageID=2>

Catherine Jinks' official site contains her biography, information about her books and resources for teachers.

**Axis Institute**

<http://www.axisinstitute.org>

Read more about the students and instructors at the Axis Institute or take the quiz to see if you have what it takes to be a student there!

**Alexander, Lloyd. The Golden Dream of Carlo Chuchio. Holt, 2007.**

**[j ALEXANDER]**

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Major themes:** Identity, friendship, growing up

**Summary:** Naive and bumbling Carlo, his shady camel-puller Baksheesh, and Shira, a girl determined to return home, follow a treasure map through the deserts and cities of the infamous Golden Road, as mysterious strangers try in vain to point them toward real treasures.

**Sonnenblick, Jordan. Zen and the Art of Faking It. Scholastic, 2007.**

**[y SONNENBLI]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Identity, religion, family relationships, adoption, friendship

**Summary:** When thirteen-year-old San Lee moves to a new town and school for the umpteenth time, he is looking for a way to stand out when his knowledge of Zen Buddhism, gained in his previous school, provides the answer--and the need to quickly become a convincing Zen master.

### Immigration

**Cooney, Caroline B. Diamonds in the Shadow. Delacorte, 2007. [y COONEY]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Immigration, Africa, Connecticut, refugees, suspense.

**Summary:** The Finches, a Connecticut family, sponsor an African refugee family of four, all of whom have been scarred by the horrors of civil war, and who inadvertently put their benefactors in harm's way.

**Booktalk:** When the Finch family welcomes the Amabos - a family of African refugees - into their Connecticut home, to share their food, living space and their time, they each have very different expectations. Mr. and Mrs. Finch are absorbed in making the accommodations for the refugees through their church group. Mopsy looks forward to a bubbly friendship with a girl just like her. Jared, on the other hand, is resentful he'll have to share his bedroom with a total stranger, and live with people who have never used a phone, driven a car or shopped in a supermarket before.

But the Amabos meet no one's expectations, because they come from a place the Finch's can't imagine. They are refugees of a war where child soldiers kill friends and neighbors, where lives are bartered for smuggling out diamonds – nicknamed *blood diamonds* – and where violence, poverty and death reign. Andre, the father, has had his hands chopped off. Alake, the daughter, has done something so awful she refuses to speak or acknowledge anyone. And Mattu, the teenage son, brings boxes with him that contain the ashes of his grandparents.

As the refugees struggle to acclimate to jobs, school, and winter, Jared and Mopsy begin to suspect they might not even be a real family. Then they discover rough, uncut stones hidden in the ashes in Mattu's boxes.

But what they don't know, don't even suspect, is that there's a fifth refugee, Victor, whose mission it is to find the Amabos. He is on a ruthless hunt to get what's his, those cold stones hidden in Mattu's boxes. And Victor will do whatever it takes to get his blood diamonds back.

### Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Americans often think of themselves as friendly, generous, and intelligent, but rarely see themselves as outsiders do. What are some not-so-nice characteristics of the Finch family that this story reveals? What are some things that astonish the Africans, that the Americans take for granted?
- Alake refuses to speak or communicate to other people, cutting herself off because of the terrible crime she's committed. Does this seem fair to you? Would you feel differently if you were related to someone she had killed?
- If you had to share your family space with refugees you'd never met, how would you feel about it? Are there things you learned from reading this book that would help you prepare for the experience?

### Related websites:

#### **Caroline B. Cooney**

<http://www.randomhouse.com/author/results.pperl?authorid=5635>

Read up on the author.

#### **Blood Diamonds/Conflict Diamonds**

<http://www.un.org/peace/africa/Diamond.html>

How do diamonds make the conflicts in Africa all the more deadly?

#### **Refugee International**

<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/>

Refugee assistance...who helps people who need to leave their homes?

#### **Sierra Leones Refugees Allstars**

<http://www.sierraleonesrefugeeallstars.com/>

Discover how music helped these refugees.

#### **Random House Teacher's Guide for this book:**

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780385732611&view=tg>

Many more questions, ideas, links about this book are available here.

### **Applegate, Katherine. Home of the Brave. Feiwel and Friends, 2007.**

[y APPLGATE]

**Genre:** Realistic fiction/poetry

**Major themes:** Immigration, Africa, refugees, Minnesota

**Summary:** Kek, an African refugee, is confronted by many strange things at the Minneapolis home of his aunt and cousin, as well as in his fifth grade classroom, and longs for his missing mother, but finds comfort in the company of a cow and her owner.

### **Mysteries/puzzles**

### **Dowd, Siobhan. The London Eye Mystery. David Fickling Books, 2007. [j DOWD]**

**Genre:** Mystery

**Major themes:** Puzzles, independence, brothers and sisters, Asperger's syndrome

**Summary:** When Ted and Kat's cousin Salim disappears from the London Eye Ferris wheel, the two siblings must work together – Ted with his brain that is “wired differently” and impatient Kat – to try to solve the mystery of what happened.

**Booktalk:** Ted lives in South London with his mum, his dad and big sister Kat. He counts his Shreddies (think Frosted mini-wheats, although Ted probably doesn't like them frosted) as he eats them every morning, as he likes to eat between 35 and 40. One morning, Ted had only gotten through Shreddie number 6 when his parents sent him down to the mailbox. Ted hurries because he hates leaving his Shreddies to turn to mush. He gets back and his mum opens the mail. As Ted is putting Shreddie number 18 into his mouth, his mum explodes. Sister Kat has skipped school and been reported. At Shreddie number 20, Ted is shocked to learn that his dad had skipped school when he was a kid *and* smoked cigarettes. And at Shreddie number 37, Ted learns that his mum's sister, otherwise known as Hurricane Gloria, is coming for a visit. Aunt Gloria is bringing her son Salim with her.

Ted feels a little anxious about this visit, because change makes him feel uncomfortable. When Ted feels uncomfortable he starts shaking his hand, and when he starts shaking his hand, his family feels uncomfortable and so they tell him to stop. Which, of course, only makes Ted want to shake his hand even more. Anyway, when Ted meets Salim it seems like it's going to be OK. And it gets even better the next day when everyone sets out for Ted's favorite place in London: The London Eye. Here are some pictures of the Eye [good reproducible photos can be found here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_eye#Photo\\_gallery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_eye#Photo_gallery)].

There is nothing Ted likes better than "flying the Eye."

When they get to the Eye, though, the line is long. While Ted, Kat and Salim wait, someone comes up to them and offers them a ticket. Everyone's tired of waiting, and so Ted and Kat urge Salim to take the ticket and go up alone. Salim leaves at 11:32, so Ted knows he'll be back down at 12:02. Only when the capsule comes down and the doors open up, Salim isn't there.

Let's let Ted explain it: "Somewhere, somehow, in the thirty minutes of riding the Eye, in his sealed capsule, [Salim] had vanished off the face of the earth. This is how having a funny brain that runs on a different operating system from other people's helped me to figure out what had happened."

So with Ted, get ready to solve *The London Eye Mystery* by Siobhan Dowd.

#### **Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Ted says his brain works on a "different operating system." Can you come up with some ways in the book where we see how his brain works? How does this operating system help Ted to solve the mystery of Salim's disappearance?
- Ted and Kat are typical quarrelling siblings. How do they work together to find Salim? What do they find out about each other?
- Without spoiling the story, Salim's disappearance occurs because he doesn't want to move with his mum to the U.S. How have you coped when you've had to do something you didn't want to? What kind of choices did you have?

#### **Related websites:**

##### **Explore the London Eye**

<http://www.londoneye.com/ExploreTheLondonEye/>

Check out the history and some interesting facts about the Eye, along with an explanation of how it was built.

##### **Asperger's Syndrome, Autism**

<http://www.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/autism/aspergers.html>

An overview of Ted's funny brain's "operating system" from the Yale University Child Study Center.

**The Siobhan Dowd Trust**

<http://www.siobhandowdtrust.org/>

The author of *The London Eye Mystery* died when she was just 47 years old. Her family created this trust to promote a love of reading for children and teens in England and Ireland.

**Balliett, Blue. The Calder Game. Scholastic Press, 2008. [j BALLIETT]**

**Genre:** Mystery

**Major themes:** Puzzles, Alexander Calder, English history (Blenheim Palace), friendship

**Summary:** In the third mystery featuring precocious Chicago middle-schoolers Petra Andalee, Calder Pillay and Tommy Segovia, Petra and Tommy follow Calder to England, after he disappears from a remote English village -- along with an Alexander Calder sculpture to which he has felt strangely drawn. A puzzle to solve appears in the book's illustrations.

**Berlin Eric. The Puzzling World of Winston Breen. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2007. [j BERLIN]**

**Genre:** Mystery

**Major themes:** Puzzles, treasure hunting, inheritance, brothers and sisters

**Summary:** Puzzle-crazy, twelve-year-old Winston and his ten-year-old sister Katie find themselves involved in a dangerous mystery involving a hidden ring. Puzzles for the reader to solve are included throughout the text.

**Peacock, Shane. Eye of the Crow (The Boy Sherlock Holmes/ His First Case). Tundra Books, 2007. [y PEACOCK]**

**Genre:** Mystery

**Major themes:** Sherlock Holmes, murder

**Summary:** A woman is found stabbed to death in London. A young boy is drawn to the scene to investigate the murder and soon becomes a suspect himself. To save himself, young Sherlock Holmes will need to solve the murder.

**Runholt, Susan. The Mystery of the Third Lucretia. Viking, 2008. [y RUNHOLT]**

**Genre:** Mystery

**Major themes:** Art forgeries, museums, European travel, friendship

**Summary:** While traveling in London, Paris, and Amsterdam, fourteen-year-old best friends Kari and Lucas solve an international art forgery mystery.

**Prejudice**

**McMullan, Margaret. When I Crossed No-Bob. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007. [y MCMULLAN]**

**Genre:** Historical fiction

**Major themes:** Reconstruction era, Ku Klux Klan, abandoned children, Choctaw Indians

**Summary:** Ten years after the Civil War's end, twelve-year-old Addy, abandoned by her parents, is taken from the area called No-Bob by schoolteacher Frank Russell and his bride, but when her father returns to claim her she must find another way to leave her O'Donnell past behind.

**Booktalk:** Addy O'Donnell is ... well, she's an O'Donnell. O'Donnells shoot each other (as well as outsiders), they eat dirt, and use their brothers like mules. Addy explains: "O'Donnells is no better than termites. We only do harm and you can't get rid of us." O'Donnells live in No-Bob, and No-Bob is kind of like a roach motel: People go in, but they don't come out. Addy comes out, though, because first her father abandoned his family by setting out for Texas, and now her mother has gone after him. She is all alone. Surprisingly, she is offered a home with the local schoolteacher and his new wife. She goes to school, helps with the household chores, and learns that she might be an O'Donnell, but she doesn't have to act like one.

Ten years after the end of the Civil War, deep in rural Mississippi, dangerous people roam the countryside. The Ku Klux Klan is on the rise – former slaves live in fear of their lives and the Choctaw Indians are being run off their land. Addy witnesses a murder by the Klan ... and she witnesses her long-lost father committing the deed. And now her father appears, wanting to bring her back to No-Bob. Addy's going to need all her O'Donnell strength and determination to get out again. She tells her story in *When I Crossed No-Bob*.

**Discussion questions/extension ideas:**

- The author has provided a comprehensive list of questions at her website: <http://www.margaretmcmullan.com/readinggroups.html>

**Related websites:**

**Margaret McMullan**

<http://www.margaretmcmullan.com/index.html>

The author provides a brief introduction to herself and her books at her website.

**Ku Klux Klan – Extremism in America**

[http://www.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/kkk/default.asp?LEARN\\_Cat=Extremism&LEARN\\_SubCat=Extremism\\_in\\_America&xpicked=4&item=kkk](http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/kkk/default.asp?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=4&item=kkk)

The Anti-Defamation League provides a brief overview of the history and current activities of the Klan.

**Oregon History Project**

[http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical\\_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc\\_ID=419C6376-F5D3-411B-1319F7210FB9FB94](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc_ID=419C6376-F5D3-411B-1319F7210FB9FB94)

This pamphlet from the Oregon Historical Society was written by a Klan supporter in Oregon in the 1920s.

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

<http://www.choctawnation.com/history/>

The official website of the Choctaw Indians includes a history section: 1834-1907: Post-Removal.

**Cheng, Andrea. Where the Steps Were. Wordsong, 2008. [j CHENG]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Schools, prejudice, novels in verse

**Summary:** Verse from the perspectives of five students in Miss D.'s third-grade class details the children's last year together before their inner city school is to be torn down.

**Curtis, Christopher Paul. Elijah of Buxton. Scholastic Press, 2007. [j CURTIS]**

**Genre:** Historical fiction

**Major themes:** Slavery, freedom, humor, adventure

**Summary:** In 1859, eleven-year-old Elijah Freeman, the first free-born child in Buxton, Canada, which is a haven for slaves fleeing the American south, uses his wits and skills to try to bring to justice the lying preacher who has stolen money that was to be used to buy a family's freedom.

**Johnston, Tony. Bone by Bone by Bone. Roaring Book Press, 2007.**

**[y JOHNSTON]**

**Genre:** Historical fiction

**Major themes:** Racism, friendship, fathers and sons, Jim Crow south

**Summary:** In 1950s Tennessee, twelve-year-old David's racist father refuses to let him associate with his best friend Malcolm, an African American boy.

## Religion

**Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. Leap of Faith. Dial, 2007. [j BRADLEY]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Religion, family problems, bullying

**Summary:** Forced to attend a Catholic middle school because of her conduct, Abigail discovers a talent for theater and develops a true religious faith.

**Booktalk:** Do you ever feel like the only time people pay attention to you is when you do something wrong? Like they ignore all the good things about you and only notice when you get in trouble?

That's how Abby feels. She has a problem at school and she's been trying to get her parents and teachers to listen to her for a long time. They are always too busy. So Abby does something bad...really, really bad... to solve her problem. Something so bad that she gets expelled from school.

Now she definitely has her parents' attention. And now they have to find somewhere else for her to finish 6<sup>th</sup> grade. They decide on St. Catherine's Catholic School, even though Abby's family isn't religious at all—in fact, it seems to Abby that her parents dislike Catholics.

But Abby soon makes friends at St. Catherine's and decides she likes the school. When she mentions this to her parents, they seem uncomfortable. Abby wonders what they would do if she said she wanted to be a Catholic. But does Abby really want to be Catholic—or is she just trying to do something get her parents' attention again?

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- Does Abby think she made a mistake in attacking Brett McAvery? What do you think? What were other ways she could have handled his behavior?

- What is Abby's first motivation for becoming a Catholic? Do her feelings change by the end of the story?
- How do Abby's parents change from the beginning to the end of the book?
- Abby finds that she doesn't always agree with the basic beliefs of the Catholic faith. Do you think someone can belong to a religious group even if they don't agree with all their beliefs?

**Related websites:**

**Kimberly Brubaker Bradley**

<http://kimberlybrubakerbradley.com/index.htm>

The author's websites contains her biography and information about some of her other works.

**Catholic Facts and General Knowledge**

<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/beliefs.php>

Find a list of the basic beliefs of the Catholic church here.

**Brande, Robin. Evolution, Me & Other Freaks of Nature. Knopf, 2007. [y BRANDE]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Religion, evolution, friendship,

**Summary:** Following her conscience leads high school freshman Mena to clash with her parents and former friends from their conservative Christian church, but might result in better things when she stands up for a teacher who refuses to include "Intelligent Design" in lessons on evolution.

**Weinheimer, Beckie. Converting Kate. Viking, 2007. [y WEINHEIME]**

**Genre:** Realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Religion, family relationships

**Summary:** After moving from Arizona to Maine, sixteen-year-old Kate tries to recover from her father's death as she resists her mother's dogmatic religious beliefs and attempts to find a new direction to her life.

**School**

**Korman, Gordon. Schooled. Hyperion Books for Children, 2007. [j KORMAN]**

**Genre:** School story/humor

**Major themes:** Middle school, homeschooling, 1960s communes

**Summary:** Homeschooled by his hippie grandmother, Capricorn (Cap) Anderson has never watched television, tasted a pizza, or even heard of a wedge. But when his grandmother lands in the hospital, Cap is forced to move in with a guidance counselor and attend the local middle school. While Cap knows a lot about tie-dyeing and Zen Buddhism, no education could prepare him for the politics of public school.

**Booktalk:** At Claverage Middle School, it is the responsibility of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders to remove the "L" at the beginning of each school year so that everyone attending knows they are going to C\_average Middle School. Another 8<sup>th</sup> grade tradition: The dweebiast of the dweebs always runs – unopposed – for class president. But this year, at

C\_average, things are really not going to be the same as they are every other year. One Capricorn Anderson has enrolled.

The kids at C\_average have never seen anyone like Capricorn. And Capricorn has never seen anything like his 8<sup>th</sup> grade classmates. Capricorn has spent all his life living at Garland Farm, a commune in northern California founded by his grandmother, Rain. And, for most of that time, Cap and Rain have been the only two members of the commune. Cap's parents are long dead, and the others had drifted away over the years. But now Rain has broken her hip and she's got to spend some time convalescing in a nursing home. Cap is taken in by the social worker on his case, and enrolled as an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at C\_average. Cap's never watched TV, doesn't know what an iPod is, has never used a computer, or bought a pair of shoes. He *can* drive a truck, but – of course – he doesn't have a license.

When Cap is dropped into the meat grinder that is middle school, surprising things happen. Of course, he is elected class president, but he also becomes an addict of the afterschool soap opera, *Trigonometry and Tears*, discovers the power of the checkbook to bring about social change, and saves the life of a bus driver. But is Cap schooled in middle school?

**Discussion topics/extension ideas:**

- The author has many different people tell this story. What are the advantages of discovering the plot and characters this way? What are the disadvantages?
- Why does Mrs. Donnelly take Cap into her home? Does she hope to help him out in other ways as well? Is she successful?
- Do you believe that any middle-school-aged person in the 21<sup>st</sup> century could be as innocent as Cap? Why or why not?
- If you were as new to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as Cap, what do you think you'd like the most about it? The least?

**Related websites:**

**Gordon Korman**

<http://gordonkorman.com/>

The author's books and thoughts about writing are on his website, along with an opportunity to ask him questions.

**Hippie Kids**

<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/02.29.96/hippie-9609.html>

A 1996 article from a California weekly newspaper features interviews with adults who were raised on communes in Northern California.

**Homeschool websites**

<http://www.multcolib.org/homesch/links.html> and

<http://www.multcolib.org/homesch/orgs.html>

Multnomah County Library has collected links to a number of homeschooling sites.

**Castellucci, Cecil. The Plain Janes. DC Comics, 2007. [ygn CASTELLUC]**

**Genre:** School story

**Major themes:** Art movements, suburbia, graphic novels

**Summary:** Forced to move to the suburbs after a terrorist attack in Metro City, Jane chooses outsider status at her new school. With three other friends – also

named Jane – she starts an underground movement to site and create art in public spaces. Some in the community label her activities as terrorism.

**Clements, Andrew. No Talking. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2007. [j CLEMENTS]**

**Genre:** School story/realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Elementary school, communication, competition

**Summary:** The noisy fifth-grade boys of Laketon Elementary School challenge the equally loud fifth-grade girls to a "no talking" contest, with surprising results.

**Holm, Jennifer L. Middle School is Worse than Meatloaf: A Year Told Through Stuff. Ginee Seo Books, 2007. [jgn HOLM]**

**Genre:** School story/realistic fiction

**Major themes:** Middle school, graphic novels

**Summary:** The first year of middle school can be filled with pitfalls, just ask Genevieve (Ginny) Davis. She shares her 7<sup>th</sup> grade year through the items and class assignments she picks up along the way.

**Schmidt, Gary D. The Wednesday Wars. Clarion Books, 2007. [y SCHMIDT]**

**Genre:** School story/historical fiction

**Major themes:** Junior high school, teachers, Vietnam War, William Shakespeare

**Summary:** During the 1967 school year, on Wednesday afternoons when all his classmates go to either Catechism or Hebrew school, seventh-grader Holling Hoodhood stays in Mrs. Baker's classroom where they read the plays of William Shakespeare and Holling learns much of value about the world he lives in.