

Novel-Ties: New Fiction for Literature Circles
Presented by the Multnomah County Library School Corps
August 12, 2009
North Portland Library

Animal Stories

Lisle, Janet Taylor. [Highway Cats](#). Philomel Books, 2008. [j LISLE 2008]

Genre: Animals

Major themes: Animals, friendship, cats, environment

Summary: A hard-bitten group of mangy highway cats is changed forever after the mysterious arrival of three kittens.

Booktalk: When Khalia Koo and Shredder, two feral cats who live in Potter's Woods, discover three kittens, tossed from a truck and huddled by the highway, they don't expect them to survive the night. Few abandoned cats do. Those that make it in the wild have to forage a life out of eating garbage, evading coyotes and dodging humans. A life that makes them tough and bitter, a life Khalia and Shredder know too well.

But there's something different about these kits. Somehow, they managed to cross all lanes of the highway unharmed. And while they survive and thrive at Khalia's rat farm, they never seem to learn the skills of cat-hood or communication with other cats.

The mayor of Potterberg has plans to build an access road through Potter's Woods. When the bulldozers arrive, the wild animals of the woods flee in terror. But the feral cats aren't so quick to leave. Something about those miraculous kittens makes the cats bond together, and defend their land against the humans with a vengeance. Maybe it's the kittens mysterious blue glow. Maybe it's that those kits are so darn cute. Even a tough cat like Jolly Roger, even a reader like you, can't help but be affected by their teeny tiny "Mew!"

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- The parts in the book with humans are written differently from the parts with cats. Why do you think the author wrote them that way? (For the answer, click on the second link listed below for her website, to the interview with her about this book).
- Maybe the kittens are real, maybe they're something a bit more extraordinary than real. What are some of their traits that tell you they're something out of the ordinary?
- How do the kits affect the behavior of older cats Shredder, Khalia, Jolly Roger and Murray? Do the older cats change, and is it for better or for worse?
- In this story of humans against nature, who do you think wins? Why?

Related websites:

Janet Taylor Lisle's website

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

Find out about the author. This link has an interview with her about this book:

<http://www.janettaylorlisle.com/author/HCinterview.html>

Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon

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

What happens to feral cats in our state? Is there a way humans can help?

Alley Cat Allies

<http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=376>

A national organization dedicated to protecting feral cats.

Appelt, Kathi. [The Underneath](#). Atheneum, 2008. [j APPELT]

Genre: Animals

Major themes: Animals, friendship, folktale

Summary: An old hound that has been chained up at his hateful owner's run-down shack, and two kittens born underneath the house, endure separation, danger, and many other tribulations in their quest to be reunited and free.

Seidler, Tor. [Gully's Travels](#). Michael di Cupua Books, Scholastic, 2008. [j SEIDLER]

Genre: Animals

Major themes: Animals, friendship, family

Summary: Gulliver leads a life of luxury with his master. But when his master falls in love with a woman who is allergic to dogs, Gulliver is sent to a new home. He finds himself with a family of raucous human beings and three mutts. But just as Gulliver begins to make a grudging peace with his new reality, he gets swept up in a harrowing new adventure.

Bullying

Roy, James. [Max Quigley: Technically Not a Bully](#). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. [j ROY 2009]

Genre: Graphic novel

Major themes: School stories, friendship

Summary: After playing a prank on one of his "geeky" classmates, sixth-grader Max Quigley's punishment is to be tutored by him.

Booktalk: Max Quigley is sure he's not a bully. Bullies steal things and beat people up, and Max never does that. Well, maybe he has a couple of times, but he had a good reason. Max *always* has excuses for his behavior – the other kid deserved it, the teacher wasn't paying attention, etc.

Then Max gets in real trouble. When his classroom tours a cheesecake factory, not only does Max get sick after eating too many samples, he also plays a trick on one of the kids in his class. Triffin Nordstrom, whom Max calls Nerdstrom, is one of his frequent targets. At the factory, Max and his friend Jared push Triffin through a door with a sign that reads, "This door locks from the inside. Emergency exit only." Triffin gets stuck inside the factory, and when he's still missing when it's time to take the bus home, Max and Jared tell their teacher that Triffin's mom picked him up.

Luckily Triffin doesn't suffer any harm from being locked in with the cheesecakes, but Max's parents are furious. They give him a plethora of punishments: he's grounded, has to do the dishes ever night, and loses his allowance as well as his TV, computer, PlayStation and telephone privileges. Just when Max thinks it can't get any worse, his parents come up with a new punishment: Max needs a math tutor, and his tutor will be

none other than Triffin Nordstrom. Not only that, but Max's parents and Triffin's parents have arranged for them to spend some time together on the weekends. Can it get any worse? Maybe, if Max's friends find out...

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Why does Max think he's not a bully?
- What does Triffin's mom want Triffin to learn from Max? Do you think Triffin does that by the end of the book?
- Max describes some punishments as effective and some as stupid. What kinds of punishments do you think are fair (or unfair) for a bully?

Related websites:

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

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

Glossary of Aussie Slang

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/australia/glossary.html>

Need some help figuring out Max's Australian vocabulary? Check this site!

Emerson, Kevin. [Carlos Is Gonna Get It](#). Arthur A. Levine Books, 2008.

[j EMERSON 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, growing up, people with disabilities, school stories

Summary: Recounts the events that occur at the end of seventh grade, when a group of friends plan to trick Carlos, an annoying "problem" student who says he is visited by aliens, while they are on a field trip in the mountains of New Hampshire.

Hicks, Faith Erin. [The War at Ellsmere](#). SLG Publishing, 2008. [GN HICKS 2008]

Genre: Graphic novel

Major themes: School stories, friendship, growing up

Summary: Jun is the newest scholarship student at the prestigious Ellsmere girls' boarding school – but to a lot of the privileged rich girls, "scholarship student" is just a code for "charity case." Fortunately, Jun has an ally in the quirky Cassie, who swears the stories about the man-eating unicorn that lives in the forest outside of the school are true.

Death/Grief/Healing

Kuhlman, Evan. [The Last Invisible Boy](#), illustrated by J.P. Coovert.

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2008. [j KUHLMAN 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Grief and loss, healing, autobiography, illustrated novels

Summary: In the wake of his father's sudden death, 12-year-old Finn feels he is becoming invisible as his hair and skin become whiter by the day. So he writes and illustrates a book to try to understand what is happening and to hold on to himself and his father.

Booktalk: This is the story of Finn Garrett, age 12. And he has thoughtfully provided a booktalk sprinkled throughout the first few pages of the book he is writing: *The Last Invisible Boy*. I'm going to quote a few passages:

"Once upon a time, in a magical kingdom, far, far away, I was a normal kid. I had shiny black hair that I wore kind of shaggy, and my skin came in one of the standard colors: fleshy pink. I was highly visible. I was just like everybody else. Went to school, played soccer, hung out with my friends and family. ... But that was in the past, before I began to disappear. Before that summer day when a giant eraser fell from the sky and flattened me.

"The eraser quickly went to work. Attacked my hair, my skin, my smile. It's been erasing me from the world ever since. [p. 2] ...

"I began disappearing this past June, right after what I call The Terrible Day That Changed Everything ...

"That morning, I looked in the bathroom mirror and saw that one strand of my black hair had turned milky white – its blackness had been erased – and that my skin was missing a small amount of pinkness, one of the proofs that I was a living kid. I had lost a little bit of myself." [p. 4]

Here's Finn – before and after [p. 2].

Finn gives you a heads up about his story: "There will ... be some silliness, lots of my sucky drawings, a pop quiz and fun homework assignments, three or four family photos, and a few of my favorite memories. Caution: Sometimes the story will get a little sad. But it won't always be sad.

"This book. It's like I'm driving a school bus but my legs are too short to reach the brake. It's a runaway bus so anything can happen." [p. 1]

So, you've been warned. But I'll just tell you that you'll be glad you got on board.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Finn gets many explanations from a lot of people about why he is slowly fading into whiteness. He sums these up in Chapter 75 (pp. 197-98). Why do *you* think he's becoming invisible? And what helps him to recover?
- Talk about the pictures in the book. Are they "sucky?" Do they help you understand Finn and the story he is telling? Is there anything you find out from the pictures that you didn't learn from the words?
- Why does Finn give the meaning of every proper name in the story?
- Why do you think that Finn calls the diary entries of his book – the chapters where he tells us about the events of a particular day – "The Log of the Starship Finn Garrett?"

Related websites:

Evan Kuhlman's website

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

The author's website includes a book trailer for *The Last Invisible Boy*.

J.P. Coover's website

<http://jpcoover.com/>

At the illustrator's website, click on each image to see a variety of his comics. Check out "extras" for some Harry Potter portraits.

Children and Grief

<http://www.athealth.com/consumer/disorders/childgrief.html>

This article discusses the psychological tasks grieving children must accomplish, and includes a brief reading list.

Hair Casts or Pseudonits Acquired Following Psychological Trauma

<http://www.bernsteinmedical.com/resources/Hair-Casts.php>

Skip through the dense medical language of the first few paragraphs, and read in the "Case Report" of a girl whose hair changed color, perhaps in response to her father's death. (I interpret a hair cast to be something whitish that grows around the shaft of hair.)

Can your hair turn white as a result of shock?

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/09/29/the_odd_body_shock_hair/

An anthropologist at a university in Australia offers a much less scientific discussion of Finn's situation.

**Nicholls, Sally. [Ways to Live Forever](#). Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007
[j NICHOLLS 2008]**

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Death and dying, family, friendship, memoir

Summary: Eleven-year-old Sam McQueen, who has leukemia, writes a book during the last three months of his life, in which he tells about what he would like to accomplish, how he feels, and things that have happened to him.

Nuzum, K.A. [The Leanin' Dog](#). Joanna Cotler Books, 2008. [j NUZUM 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Grief and loss, healing, dogs, family, survival

Summary: In wintry Colorado during the 1930s, 11-year-old Dessa Dean mourns the death of her beloved mother, but the arrival of an injured dog and the friendship they form is just what they each need to change their lives forever.

Schmidt, Gary. [Trouble](#). Clarion Books, 2008. [y SCHMIDT]

Genre: Realistic fiction, Historical fiction

Major themes: Death, healing, family, race relations

Summary: Fourteen-year-old Henry, wishing to honor his brother Franklin's dying wish, sets out to hike Maine's Mount Katahdin with his best friend and dog. But fate adds another companion to their journey: The Cambodian refugee accused of fatally injuring Franklin in a hit-and-run accident.

Dystopia

Ness, Patrick. [The Knife of Never Letting Go](#). Candlewick Press, 2008.

[y NESS 2008]

Genre: Science fiction

Major themes: Germ warfare, space exploration and colonization, friendship, male/female relationships, resistance movements

Summary: Todd Hewitt is the only boy in a town of men. Ever since the settlers were infected with the Noise germ, Todd can hear everything the men think, and they hear everything he thinks. Todd is just a month away from becoming a man, but in the midst of the cacophony, he knows that the town is hiding something from him — something so awful Todd is forced to flee with only his dog, whose simple, loyal voice he hears too.

Booktalk: “Here’s what every minute of every day of my stupid, stinking life in this stupid, stinking town is like.” This is Noise [p. 21].

This is what has been inside Todd Hewitt’s head every day of his almost 13 years in the community of Prentisstown on the New World. The ability to hear the thoughts of every single living thing on the planet resulted from germ warfare unleashed on the pioneers and settlers of the New World around the time that Todd was born. Oh, and this germ warfare killed all the women; the last to die was Todd’s mother. Since then, Todd’s been raised by neighbors, Ben and Cillian, who have taught him how to deal with all those voices inside his head. And, now that Todd’s about to turn 13 – the last boy in Prentisstown will be initiated into the ways of men. Todd can’t wait.

He’s out exploring the swampy area around Prentisstown with his loyal dog Manchee – whose thoughts Todd can also hear. (In the first few pages of this book, Manchee’s Noise is all about “poo,” so just because we can understand them doesn’t mean they aren’t still dogs.) When both boy and dog hear it. Or rather, they don’t hear it. [Long pause.] Silence.

This silence really freaks them out. Not only Todd and Manchee, but the men of Prentisstown. Todd’s knowledge of the silence forces him out of Prentisstown and into the New World – on a dangerous journey of discovery that not all is right with the men of Prentisstown and the condition known as the Noise.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Does the visual image that the author provides give you a good idea of Noise? How do you think you would cope if you could hear the thoughts of everyone around you?
- How do Todd’s feelings about girls and women change along his journey to Haven?
- Why do the men of Prentisstown hate women? Why did they create the fiction that they are the only people on the planet? Why do you think boys have to be age 13 before they are initiated into Prentisstown’s secrets?
- A teacher in the United Kingdom has created a “lesson sequence” for this book: <http://www.booktrust.org.uk/show/feature/WIR-Ness-lesson-sequence>.

Related websites:

Patrick Ness’ website

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

The author’s website includes his ongoing blog (he calls it a diary), a brief biography, and a number of comments from readers who loved his novel. The

sequel, The Ask and the Answer (but, alas, just the *second* book of the Chaos Walking trilogy), is due in September in the U.S.

Booktrust – New World

<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/show/feature/New-World-1>

The author is the online writer-in-residence at this website devoted to books and reading. He's posted a short story prequel to The Knife of Never Letting Go, providing a little more backstory about Viola.

If whales can communicate by telepathy, why can't humans?

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/02/10/the_odd_body_whales_telepathy/

An anthropologist at a university in Australia answers a reader's question about telepathy (or the ability to communicate thoughts without speaking). He includes some informative history and background on the subject.

What are Human Rights?

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx>

In 1948, the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which identified fundamental human rights to be universally protected. These are rights inherent to all human beings – including women. This website, from the U.N.'s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, describes human rights and provides a number of links for more information.

Booraem, Ellen. The Unnameables. Harcourt, 2008. [y BOORAEM 2008]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Utopia, art and artists, conformity, friendship

Summary: On an island in whose strict society only useful objects are named and the unnamed are ignored or forbidden, 13-year-old Medford encounters an unusual and powerful creature – half-man, half-goat. The Goatman's arrival sets in play a series of events that question the Island's history and change it forever.

**Collins, Suzanne. The Hunger Games. Scholastic Press, 2008. [y COLLINS 2008]
Catching Fire. Scholastic Press, 2009 [y COLLINS 2009]**

Genre: Science fiction

Major themes: Survival, televised entertainment, totalitarian government, romance, friendship

Summary (The Hunger Games): In a future North America, where the rulers of Panem maintain control through an annual televised survival competition pitting young people from each of the twelve districts against one another, 16-year-old Katniss's skills are put to the test when she voluntarily takes her younger sister's place.

Summary (Catching Fire): Against all odds, Katniss Everdeen has won the annual Hunger Games with fellow Twelfth District tribute Peeta Mellark. But it was a victory won by defiance of the Capitol and its harsh rules. Katniss and Peeta have just won for themselves and their families a life of safety and plenty. But there are rumors of rebellion among the subjects, and Katniss and Peeta – to their horror – are the faces of that rebellion. The Capitol is angry. The Capitol wants revenge.

Goodman, Allegra. [The Other Side of the Island](#). Razorbill, 2008. [y GOODMAN 2008]

Genre: Science fiction

Major themes: Conformity, dystopia, climate change, adventure

Summary: Born in the eighth year of Enclosure, 10-year-old Honor lives in a highly regulated colony with her defiant parents, but when they have an illegal second child and are taken away, it is up to Honor and her friend Helix – another Unpredictable – to uncover a terrible secret about their island and the Corporation that runs everything.

Singer, Nicky. [GemX](#). Holiday House, 2008. [y SINGER]

Genre: Science fiction

Major themes: Genetic engineering, authoritarian government, family, friendship

Summary: Sixteen-year-old Maxo Evangele Strang, the most perfect human ever made, suddenly discovers a “crack” in his face. This discovery leads him to expose his community’s dark underworld of secret scientific research and the city’s corrupt supreme leader.

Ethics/Choices

Korman, Gordon. [The Juvie Three](#). Hyperion, 2008. [y KORMAN]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Ethics

Summary: Gecko, Arjay, and Terence, all in trouble with the law, must find a way to keep their halfway house open in order to stay out of juvenile detention.

Booktalk: Gecko drove the getaway car without a license, the one his brother Reuben stole to escape from the electronic game store he just robbed. Arjay’s a 260-pound fifteen-year-old kid, stuck in the Rensenville Correctional Facility for killing another student. And Terence, a Chicago kid, was bored to death by nature, seagulls and sunlight, at Lion’s Head, one of the top alternative detention centers in the country.

When Mr. Healy shows up and offers them the chance to try out his alternative halfway house in New York City, they all agree to go. Things start out good, but then the guys start to bicker, and Mr. Healy gets knocked out in the scuffle. They drop him off at the hospital, but when he comes to, he’s lost his memory of his identity, of them, and of the halfway house. The boys are afraid if they come forward with what they know, they’ll get thrown back into the jaws of the juvenile justice system they were trying to escape. So they decide they have to do everything just as if Mr. Healy were still there; in other words, go to school, see their therapists, do community service and not do anything that would call attention to the fact they were still living on their own.

But then Arjay becomes a rock star. Gecko hooks up with Roxanne, daughter of a wealthy businessman. And Terence gets itchy for his old way of life....

Will their second chance be their last?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Pretend Mr. Healy didn't get injured. Do you think Mr. Healy's solution would have worked better than reform school or jail? Why do you think he only picked a few special boys to try his new program?
- When Mr. Healy suffers amnesia the boys don't come forward with his identity. Do you think what they did is wrong or right?

Related websites:

Gordon Korman's Website

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

Learn more about the author, his books and his most recent writing.

Amnesia – the Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/amnesia/DS01041>

Read about amnesia, and see if you think it was correctly represented in the book.

Ten Alternatives to Prison

http://www.forbes.com/2006/04/15/prison-justice-alternatives_cx_rd_06slate_0418alter.html

As prison becomes more and more expensive, law enforcement agencies are looking for alternatives. Watch this slide show, and see what you think about these ten options for criminals. Do you think they'd help?

Marsden, Carolyn and Thay Phap Niem. [The Buddha's Diamonds](#). Candlewick Press, 2008. [j MARDSDEN]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Ethics, responsibility, Vietnam

Summary: As a storm sweeps in, Tinh's father tells him to tie up their fishing boat but the storm scares him and he runs away, but when the damage to the boat is discovered, Tinh realizes what he must do.

Fairy tales/mythology

Levine, Gail Carson. [Ever](#). HarperCollinsPublishers, 2008. [y LEVINE]

Genre: Mythology

Major themes: Gods, immortality, fate, romance

Summary: Kezi is devastated when her mother falls gravely ill. When her father prays to his god, Admat, in order to save his ailing wife, he offers to sacrifice the first person who congratulates him if she recovers. He's horrified when it is Kezi. She is granted a few days to live, and on the first of those days meets handsome Olus, the god of the winds. They fall in love and together try to change her fate.

Booktalk: Kezi's family believes in the god Admat. So, when her mother falls desperately ill, her father begs: "Admat, god of oaths. Hear my vow. Save my wife, and I will sacrifice to you whoever first congratulates me on her recovery."

When Kezi's mother survives, her beloved aunt rushes to rejoice with the family. But Kezi knows the price of her congratulations and intervenes to offer them herself.

Her parents are horrified, but too fearful of their god to betray their promise. Kezi has 30 days before she will die from a knife wielded by a high priest of Admat.

But Kezi may have a savior. The young wind god, Olus, has watched her for many days and has fallen in love with her. He begs his parents to grant Kezi immortality. They agree, but with one condition: Olus and Kezi must each perform a trial. Kezi will travel to the underworld, and Olus is transformed into an ordinary mortal. If he follows her to the underworld, she will never leave it and he will never return to immortality. But Olus doesn't know that.

Can true love triumph over death?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- The publisher of Ever has created a teacher's guide:
http://www.harperchildrens.com/webcontent/teachers_guides/pdf/0061229636.pdf

Related websites:

Gail Carson Levine's website

<http://www.gailcarsonlevinebooks.com>

The author's website, through her publisher, includes a brief biography and interview.

Babylonian and Assyrian myths – The descent of Ishtar into hell

http://www.loqoi.com/notes/descent_of_ishtar.html

Levine's epigraph includes two quotations. Ishtar was the goddess of love and fertility in ancient Babylon (Iraq) who descended into the underworld in search of her deceased human lover. This website includes an excerpt from an 1875 article describing the myth.

Daughter of Jephthah: Bible – Jewish Women's Archive

<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/daughter-of-jephthah-bible>

Levine's other epigraph is a Biblical quotation from the Old Testament Book of Judges. The vow of Kezi's father is loosely based on the story of Jephthah, who vowed to sacrifice whoever first walked out of his house to greet him if he was victorious in an important battle. Jephthah's daughter is the first to emerge.

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. [Palace of Mirrors](#).

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008. [j HADDIX 2008]

Genre: Fairy tale

Major themes: Identity, friendship, leadership, romance (gentle)

Summary: Cecilia knows that she is not just another peasant girl; she is actually the true princess, in hiding until the evil forces that killed her parents are vanquished. A commoner named Desmia is on the throne as a decoy. As she gets older, Cecilia knows that it is time to take charge. Along with her best friend, Harper, she flees to the capital city, determined to reclaim her throne and face the danger head on. A companion novel to [Just Ella](#).

Stroud, Jonathan. [Heroes of the Valley](#). New York: Disney/Hyperion Books, 2009. [y STROUD 2009]

Genre: Adventure

Major themes: Mythology, heroism, friendship, coming of age.

Summary: When young Halli Sveinsson – who has grown up hearing of the exploits of his ancestor, the great Svein Sveinsson – plays a trick on Ragnor of the House of Hakonsson, he sets in motion a chain of events that will forever alter his destiny. Halli must leave home and go on a hero's quest, where he encounters highway robbers, terrifying monsters, and a girl who may finally be his match.

Families

Bodeen, S.A. [The Compound](#). Feiwel and Friends, 2008. [y BODEEN]

Genre: Science fiction, thriller

Major themes: Survival, family relationships, isolationism

Summary: After his parents, two sisters and he have spent six years in a vast underground compound built by his wealthy father to protect them from nuclear holocaust, 16-year-old Eli – whose twin brother and grandmother were left behind – discovers that his father has perpetrated a monstrous hoax on all of them.

Booktalk: “I still have one of you.”

That's what Eli Yanakakis' father says when the family discovers that only Eli – and not his twin brother – made it into the Compound when the nuclear bomb went off. Rex Yanakakis made his billions in computers and spent a bunch of it building a three-story house completely underground for his wife and four kids. He stockpiled it with enough food and supplies to last them fifteen years – which is how long he figures he needs before the planet is remotely habitable again. And six years ago, when he was nine years old, the event that Rex feared came to pass: Nuclear war. Eli got hustled into the Compound. Unfortunately, his brother Eddy and their grandmother didn't get inside before the door was locked and secured. Eli's been beating himself up ever since.

But now that Eli's 15, things in the Compound aren't going so great. The food isn't really lasting the way it should, and other supplies are dwindling fast as well. Of course, it doesn't help that there are three more mouths to feed, but Eli keeps well away from the Supplements. He doesn't want to get attached to the little guys – children his father has told him will become part of the food supply if it becomes necessary. His mom's pregnant again, but his father has just told him that soon he and his adopted sister, Lexie, may have to begin producing Supplements as well. It is very difficult to defy Rex Yanakakis.

One day Eli walks into the bedroom that would have been Eddy's and in there he finds a laptop. Eli had one just like it when he was nine years old, but soon his dad replaced it with a better one. Unlike his own computer, this one still has the Internet icon on it. He casually clicks on it, just to see what would happen: *Wireless Network Now Connected*. “Holy crap,” Eli thinks, could there be some active networks above ground? Then Eli's instant messaging icon pops up: *Welcome TwinYan2!* The following buddies are online: *TwinYan1*.

Eli types: Eddy? R U There?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Eli describes himself as the “evil twin.” What are the things that he does that support that description? Has his time in the Compound changed him? For the worse or the better?
- Why does Eli’s dad go to such lengths to isolate his family? Does he love them?
- If you had to live separately in a compound, aside from food and water, what kinds of things would be absolutely essential to your survival?

Related websites:

S.A. Bodeen’s website

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

S.A. Bodeen lives in Burns, Oregon. Check out her website for more information about The Compound.

Biosphere 2 – Where science lives

<http://www.b2science.org/>

Visit Biosphere 2 – a kind of above-ground closed-system “compound” where eight people lived for two years without any external interference.

Book Trailer: The Compound

http://www.rivieraisd.esc2.net/compound_1.wmv

Watch a trailer created by a middle school teacher in Texas.

Congressional Bunker Tour

<http://www.cmu.edu/coldwar/bunker.htm>

In the 1950s, Congress built a bunker underneath a hotel in West Virginia, where the U.S. government would relocate in the event of nuclear war. The bunker was maintained until the 1990s. A group of college students toured the bunker and posted pictures at this website.

Fitzmaurice, Kathryn. [The Year the Swallows Came Early.](#)

Bowen Press/HarperCollins, 2009. [j FITZMAURI 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Parent-child relationships, cooking, friendship, growing up

Summary: Eleanor "Groovy" Robinson loves cooking and plans to go to culinary school just as soon as she's old enough. But even Groovy's thoughtfully planned menus won't fix the things that start to go wrong the year she turns eleven: Suddenly, her father is in jail, her best friend's long-absent mother reappears, and the swallows that make their annual migration to her hometown arrive surprisingly early.

Kelsey, Marybeth. [Tracking Daddy Down.](#) **Greenwillow Books, 2008.**

[j KELSEY 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Parent-child relationships, independence, crime and punishment

Summary: Billie's daddy is on the run, but she's sure he didn't mean to rob that bank. If Billie finds him before the cops do, she can help him put everything right. But Mama keeps asking what she's up to, and Billie's new stepfather, Daddy Joe, is always around, poking his nose in her business. With her family at stake, Billie's

determined to track Daddy down at all costs – but will anything turn out the way she expects?

Philbrick, W.R. (W. Rodman). [The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg.](#) New York: Blue Sky Press, 2009. [j PHILBRICK 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction, adventure

Major themes: Brothers, storytelling, Civil War, growing up.

Summary: Twelve-year-old Homer – a poor but clever orphan – has extraordinary adventures after running away from his evil uncle to rescue his brother, who has been illegally sold into service in the Civil War.

Pearsall, Shelley. [All Shook Up.](#) Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. [j PEARSALL 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: School stories, friendship

Summary: When 13-year-old Josh goes to stay with his father in Chicago for a few months, he discovers – to his horror – that his dad has become an Elvis impersonator.

Booktalk: Do your parents do things that embarrass you?

Josh Greenwood's dad is definitely embarrassing. In fact, Josh has a whole list of humiliating things his dad does. [Read list on p. 13.]

But nothing is as embarrassing as what his dad does the summer Josh is 13. That summer, Josh's grandma breaks her hip and his mom has to go stay with her for a while. Instead of just making a short visit to his dad's house like he usually does each summer, Josh has to spend four whole months there, including starting the school year at a new school.

When he arrives at the airport, Josh knows something is wrong. Instead of his usual light brown hair, Josh's dad now sports extra-shiny, jet black hair, with long sideburns down each cheek! He's wearing a Hawaiian shirt with orange parrots, tight jeans, and sneakers without socks. Josh can't quite figure it out until he sees two women pointing at his dad and saying, "That guy looks just Elvis."

You see, Josh's dad has decided to do something extraordinarily embarrassing this time—after losing his job, he's started a new career as an Elvis impersonator. That's right, Josh's dad is now going to be one of those guys wearing rhinestone jumpsuits, swiveling his hips, and performing at the local shopping mall. How could anything be more humiliating? At first Josh hopes he can keep his dad a secret from his new friends, but when Dad is invited to perform at a special 1950s concert at Josh's new school, Josh is forced to take drastic measures. Read all about one of the most embarrassing parents ever in [All Shook Up](#).

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Do your parents do something that embarrasses you? What is it?
- Josh struggles to find his place in his new school. Have you ever been the new kid? How did it feel?
- Josh is friendly with Ivory outside of school, but at lunch, he continues to sit at the "vending machine table" with his popular friends. Does that seem realistic? Does it seem like the right thing to do?

Related websites:

Elvis Presley Biography

http://www.elvis.com/elvisology/bio/elvis_overview.asp

This site has a brief biography of Elvis, accompanied by an extensive timeline of his life.

The 2009 Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest

<http://www.elvis.com/ultimatecontest/2009/default.asp>

Find out about this contest for Elvis impersonators (tribute artists). You can even watch videos of last year's contest!

Schumacher, Julie. [Blackbox](#). Delacorte Press, 2008. [y SCHUMACHE 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Depression

Summary: When her sixteen-year-old sister is hospitalized for depression and her parents want to keep it a secret, fourteen-year-old Elena tries to cope with her own anxiety and feelings of guilt that she is determined to conceal from outsiders.

White, Ruth. [Little Audrey](#). Farrar Straus Giroux, 2008. [j WHITE 2008]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Alcoholism, poverty, death/grief

Summary: In 1948, eleven-year-old Audrey lives with her father, mother, and three younger sisters in Jewell Valley, a coal mining camp in Southwest Virginia, where her mother still mourns the death of a baby, her father goes on drinking binges on paydays, and Audrey tries to recover from the scarlet fever that has left her skinny and needing to wear glasses.

Woodson, Jacqueline . [Peace, Locomotion](#). G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2009.

[y WOODSON 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Foster children/families, war

Summary: Through letters to his little sister, who is living in a different foster home, sixth-grader Lonnie, also known as "Locomotion," keeps a record of their lives while they are apart, describing his own foster family, including his foster brother who returns home after losing a leg in the Iraq War.

Friendship

Nielsen-Ferlund, Susin. [Word Nerd](#). Tundra Books, 2008. [j NIELSENFE 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, rehabilitation, parent-child relationships, homeschooling, Scrabble

Summary: When the school bullies slip a peanut into Ambrose Bukowski's sandwich – just to find out if he's *really* allergic – his overprotective mother decides to homeschool him. Frequently home alone, Ambrose makes friends with Cosmo -- son of his upstairs landlords – when he discovers the two of them share a mutual

love for Scrabble. But Ambrose has got to keep this a secret from his mom, since Cosmo has just been released from prison.

Booktalk: Ambrose Bukowski has been lying to his mother. Since they made their most recent move to Vancouver, Ambrose has convinced his mother that he's making friends at school. The only problem is that Ambrose's friends just tried to kill him. They snuck a peanut into his sandwich, and the next thing Ambrose knew, he was waking up in the hospital.

Ambrose's mom is so outraged that even though she realizes that Ambrose has been lying to her, she pulls him out of school. See, Ambrose's mom is really protective, even overprotective. Ambrose knows that this is because his father died before he was born, and that his mom feels guilty that she couldn't save him. So, she works really hard at saving Ambrose instead. And, well, Ambrose is almost 13, and he's kind of sick of it.

Ambrose is home alone a lot of the time now, and he's pretty bored. He meets the son of their upstairs neighbor and landlord, Cosmo, and discovers that they both play the word game Scrabble. Soon he convinces Cosmo that they should join the West Side Scrabble Club; they begin attending meetings and Ambrose is turning into a pretty good player. Life is good.

But it all has to stay a secret from Mom. See, Cosmo is an ex-con, ex-junkie – just out of prison for breaking and entering. And Ambrose is absolutely sure that if Mom knew that he was spending time with Cosmo, being stuck alone in a basement apartment with nothing to do all day would be the least of his problems. He's got no choice: Ambrose Bukowski continues to lie to his mother.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Can Ambrose help being a nerd? Name all of Ambrose's nerdy qualities. Are these all "inborn?"
- Why do the members of the Scrabble Club not like Ambrose at first? Would you like Ambrose?
- In the beginning, Cosmo doesn't like Ambrose much either. What do Cosmo and Ambrose do for each other that helps them become friends?
- Organize a Scrabble tournament.

Related websites:

Author Lunch: Susin Nielsen

<http://tundrabooks.wordpress.com/2009/04/21/author-lunch-susin-nielsen/>

The publisher of Word Nerd hosted a themed lunch for the author. There's a link to a PDF of the Most Promising Newcomer, so you can make one for yourself!

Granville Island

<http://www.granvilleisland.com/en>

Read about the place where Ambrose goes when he runs away from home.

Nut and Peanut Allergy

http://kidshealth.org/kid/nutrition/diets/nut_allergy.html

The Kids Health website on nut allergies describes what happened to Ambrose when he accidentally ate that peanut.

Scrabble Game

http://www.hasbro.com/scrabble/en_US/

The company that makes Scrabble has lots of information about the game here. Check out About Scrabble for the history of the game.

Ten Questions with Susin Nielsen

http://www.openbooktoronto.com/news/ten_questions_with_susin_nielsen

The author is interviewed at this website, and she describes her writing process.

George, Madeleine. [Looks](#). Viking, 2008. [y GEORGE 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: School, poetry, body image, friendship

Summary: Two high school freshmen – Aimee, an anorexic poet and Meghan, an obese loner – form an unlikely partnership when Aimee’s work is plagiarized by a student who rejected Meghan’s friendship years earlier.

Mass, Wendy. [11 Birthdays](#). Scholastic Press, 2009. [j MASS 2009]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Friendship, feuding, small town life, déjà vu

Summary: After celebrating their first nine same-day birthdays together, Amanda and Leo – having fallen out on their tenth and not speaking to each other for the last year – prepare to celebrate their 11th birthdays separately. But the day after her extremely unsuccessful birthday party, Amanda wakes up to discover that she will have to live the day over again.

Mass, Wendy. [Every Soul a Star](#). Little, Brown & Co., 2008. [y MASS 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, family relationships, coming of age, astronomy

Summary: Ally, Bree and Jack meet at Moon Shadow Campground – the one place in the U.S. where the Great Eclipse will be seen in totality, each carrying the burden of different personal problems. Told from their three perspectives, they become friends and begin to deal with the changes in their lives while discovering their places in the universe.

Growing Up

Parry, Rosanne. [Heart of a Shepherd](#). Random House, 2009. [j PARRY 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Family life, Iraq War, growing up, religious faith

Summary: Ignatius, “Brother,” Alderman, nearly twelve, promises to help his grandparents keep the family’s Oregon ranch the same while his brothers are away and his father is deployed to Iraq; but as he comes to accept the inevitability of change, he also sees the man he is meant to be.

Booktalk: Ignatius Alderman is the youngest of five brothers and the only one of them who still lives full time on the family’s sheep ranch in remote Malheur County, Oregon.

Ignatius, who goes by Brother, attends his one-room schoolhouse and does more chores than it's likely you've ever done.

Brother, who shares his father's deep Catholic faith, but loves and respects his Quaker grandfather more than anyone.

Brother, who will be the only one left to help his grandfather run the ranch once his father's National Guard unit deploys to Iraq.

Brother, who's scrawny and only twelve, and doesn't really think he's cut out for ranching. But he's determined to do right by the ranch and his father and his brothers for the next 14 months. On some days, it's only that determination that gets him through; but on others, he revels in the land, the sheep, his friends and family. He might even get an inkling of what he's really destined to do.

This beautiful story shows you ranch life – and unless you really, really like hard work you'll probably just want to read about it – and introduces you to a really amazing boy. Brother's story will warm your heart.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- The author has included a discussion guide at her website:
<http://www.rosanneparry.com/resources/resources-for-teachers/teacher-discussion-guide-heart-of-a-shepherd>

Related websites:

Rosanne Parry's website:

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

Rosanne Parry provides a brief biography at her website, as well as some simple ideas that teachers and kids can do to support students whose parents are deployed overseas. There's also a recipe for Brother's Killer hot chocolate.

Malheur County Portraits

<http://www.ohs.org/education/folklife/Malheur-County-Portraits.cfm>

Through a program sponsored by the Oregon Historical Society, read the oral history of three residents of Malheur County, researched and recorded by members of the 4-H club.

OMK – Operation Military Kids

<http://www.operationmilitarykids.org/public/home.aspx>

Operation Military Kids helps support the children of military personnel through a variety of programs and activities. Check out the State Information to see how Oregon is serving these kids.

The Seattle Times: Court battle over shepherders' plight highlights fading vocation

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/business/technology/2002283891_shepherd22.html

This article is about a legal battle between a ranch owner and two of his hired shepherds; scroll down a little to the link: *Photo gallery: Shepherding is an age-old tradition* for pictures of modern shepherds on the job.

Baskin, Nora Raleigh. [Anything But Typical](#). Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2009. [j BASKIN 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Autism, creative writing, growing up, parent-child relationships

Summary: Jason, a 12-year-old boy diagnosed with autism, reveals the depth of his feelings through the creative writing he does on the story-sharing website, Storyboard. He has the opportunity to attend a Storyboard conference, he realizes that he will meet, in person, the girl with whom he has made friends online.

Freitas, Donna. [The Possibilities of Sainthood](#). Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.
[y FREITAS 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Family, religion, romance (gentle), growing up

Summary: While regularly petitioning the Vatican to make her the first living saint, 15-year-old Antonia Labella prays to assorted patron saints for everything from help with preparing the family's fig trees for a Rhode Island winter to getting her first kiss from the right boy.

Horvath, Polly. [My One Hundred Adventures](#). Schwartz & Wade Books, 2008.
[j HORVATH 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Family, self-realization, growing up

Summary: Twelve-year-old Jane, who lives at the beach in a run-down old house with her mother, two brothers and sister, has an eventful summer accompanying her pastor on bible deliveries, meeting former boyfriends of her mother's, and being coerced into babysitting for a family of ill-mannered children.

Kelly, Jacqueline. [The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate](#). Henry Holt and Co., 2009.
[j KELLY 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction.

Major themes: Family, growing up, naturalists, evolution

Summary: In central Texas in 1899, 11-year-old Callie Vee Tate is instructed to be a lady by her mother, learns about love from the older three of her six brothers, and studies the natural world with her grandfather – making important discoveries in all three areas.

Humor

Basye, Dale. [Heck: Where the Bad Kids Go](#). Random House, 2008.
[j BASYE 2008]

Genre: Humor

Major themes: Humor, adventure, school story

Summary: When timid Milton and his older, scofflaw sister Marlo die in a marshmallow bear explosion at Grizzly Mall, they are sent to Heck, an otherworldly reform school from which they are determined to escape.

Booktalk: Everybody screws up a little, right? I mean, no one gets through life without doing a few bad things. I bet even you have a couple of evil secrets. I mean, how bad is it really, to take something that isn't yours, or to tell a few lies, if no one ever finds out?

Especially if you're a kid, there's no way doing something bad is going to send you to h-e-double-hockey stick.

That's what Marlo and Milton Fauster think, until they're both accidentally killed at the Mall of Generica, when a marshmallow bear explodes, smothering the shoplifting Marlo and her innocent brother in sticky white goo. That's when they discover that being underage might save you from fire and brimstone, but it doesn't rescue you from Heck, the place where bad kids go –the worst kind of detention you can ever imagine.

What's Heck like? Like your school gone bad, REALLY bad. Imagine a warehouse with grey carpet that smelled like cat pee and instant soup mix. Unfriendly wall posters scare instead of inspire you, showing a man walking to the gallows, with the caption, "Today is the last day of the rest of your life." Maybe you'll pass through the Cafeterium, where you may dream of pizza but all you get to eat is moldy liver and slimy brussel sprouts. You'll have to stop by the Disorientation Assignment counter, and wait, and wait and wait...only to find out you're in Richard Nixon's Ethics class.

If like Marlo and Milton, you can't stand being in Heck for one more minute, much less all eternity, you better have a strong stomach. Escape is almost as bad – swimming through the sewers of the underworld, with Bea "Elsa" Bubb, the Principal of Darkness and her fierce dog Anubis nipping at your heels.

Everybody screws up a little, right? But would you still screw up if you knew you'd end up in Heck?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Why do you think the author used school as a parallel for the underworld? Give some examples of school functions were incorporated as part of Heck.
- Do some research in encyclopedias and on the Internet about Dante's Divine Comedy. How did the author use Dante's idea for his children's book?
- Make a diagram of your own version of H-E-double hockey sticks. Are there layers of punishment? What determines who ends up in your underworld? Is there a way for residents to escape or to improve their situations?

Related websites:

Powells Books interviews Dale E. Basye

<http://www.powells.com/kidsqa/dalebasye.html>

The author lives in Portland, OR and here he answers lots of questions, like why he writes books for kids, who his favorite character in history is, and what he likes to eat for breakfast.

Dale E Basye on Random House

<http://www.randomhouse.com/author/results.pperl?authorid=78009>

Find out about his next book here!

Dante's Divine Comedy

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/literature/dante.htm>

http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/th/The_Divine_Comedy

Dante wrote the Divine Comedy, which Heck is based on. Here's a short biography of his life, and a description of his book.

Pinkwater, Daniel. [The Yggyssey: How Iggy wondered what happened to all the ghosts, found out where they went, and went there](#). Houghton Mifflin, 2009.
[j PINKWATER]

Genre: Humor

Major themes: Humor, ghosts, American history

Summary: In the mid-1950s, Yggdrasil Birnbaum and her friends, Seamus and Neddie, journey to Old New Hackensack, which is on another plane, to try to learn why ghosts are disappearing from the Birnbaum's hotel and other Hollywood, California, locations.

Shusterman, Neal. [Antsy Does Time](#). Dutton, 2008. [y SHUSTERMA]

Genre: Humor

Major themes: Humor, friendship, self-perception

Summary: Fourteen-year-old Anthony "Antsy" Bonano learns about life, death, and a lot more when he tries to help a friend with a terminal illness feel hopeful about the future.

Immigration

Alvarez, Julia. [Return to Sender](#). Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. [j ALVAREZ 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, families

Summary: After his family hires migrant Mexican workers to help save their Vermont farm from foreclosure, eleven-year-old Tyler befriends the oldest daughter, but when he discovers they may not be in the country legally, he realizes that real friendship knows no borders.

Booktalk: Tyler has started calling his family's home the Bad Luck Farm. The bad luck started when his grandfather died of a heart attack. Then, only a few weeks later, his dad was almost killed when the tractor rolled over on top of him. With hired help difficult to find, Tyler's parents are thinking they may need to sell their dairy farm. They can't see how they can keep it running with only the remaining members of their family to do the work.

When Tyler returns from visiting some relatives, he's shocked to see strangers coming out the trailer where the hired help live. And he's even more shocked to find out three little girls are living there, too. His parents explain that they've hired three Mexican brothers as workers, and the girls are the daughters of one of them. One of the girls, Mari, is even the same age as Tyler.

It seems like a great solution, one that will allow the family to keep their farm. And Tyler and Mari soon become good friends. But it also seems to Tyler that something strange is going on. Why do his parents want him to keep the workers a secret? Why does Mari get so upset when her little sisters mention that she was born in Mexico? And most mysterious of all, where is Mari's mother, who is supposedly on a trip, but hasn't returned in months?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Review President Obama's immigration reform site at www.whitehouse.gov/issues/immigration/. What do you think of his proposals? Would they help Mari and her family?

- Check out other activities in the publisher's teacher's guide at http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers_guides/9780375858383.pdf

Related websites:

Booknotes Educators Guide: *Return to Sender*

http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers_guides/9780375858383.pdf

The publisher's site has thematic connections, writing prompts, and curriculum ideas.

The Secret Lives of Foreign Workers

<http://www.wcax.com/global/story.asp?s=9373424>

Read three stories from a Vermont television station about Mexican workers on Vermont's dairy farms.

Medina, Meg. [Milagros: Girl from Away](#). Henry Holt & Co., 2008. [j MEDINA 2008]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Family, friendship, magic

Summary: Twelve-year-old Milagros barely survives an invasion of her tiny, Caribbean island home, escapes with the help of mysterious sea creatures, reunites briefly with her pirate-father, and learns about a mother's love when cast ashore on another island.

Mysteries/Puzzles

Broach, Elise. [Masterpiece](#). Henry Holt & Co., 2008. [j BROACH 2008]

Genre: Mystery

Major themes: Friendship, family, art and artists

Summary: After Marvin, a beetle, makes a miniature drawing as an 11th birthday gift for James, a human with whom he shares an apartment, the two friends work together to help recover a Dürer drawing stolen from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Booktalk: Marvin lives with his overprotective parents, along with some aunts and uncles and cousins, in a big apartment in Manhattan, New York City. He's interested in making friends with the neighbor boy, James, but James seems really shy. Marvin thinks that James's shyness might have something to do with his divorced parents: a mother who worries more about her real-estate clients than her family, and an artist dad who can't seem to find much time to spend with him.

Marvin attends James's 11th birthday party, but he can tell that James didn't have a very good time. What James did like, though, was the present from his dad: A drawing pen and some artist's ink. Marvin – who really couldn't come up with a good gift for James – gets an idea. He sneaks into James's room that night and – using the ink and his front legs – draws James a picture.

Wait. Using his front legs? [p. 29] Yes, Marvin is a beetle, living behind the kitchen cupboard in James's apartment. Marvin's picture – mistaken for James's – draws both boy and beetle into an exciting adventure involving a stolen masterpiece. Even more importantly, though, that drawing signifies the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- The publisher of Masterpiece has developed a discussion guide:
<http://media.us.macmillan.com/discussionguides/9780805082708DG.pdf>.

Related websites:

Elise Broach's website:

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

Elise Broach includes information on her novels and picture books, answers questions about being an author, and has a whole page devoted to her favorite things.

Albrecht Dürer – The Complete Works

<http://www.albrecht-durer.org/>

A virtual gallery of Dürer's work includes a biography and some links to museums that own his paintings and etchings.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Cardinal virtues

<http://www.catholicdoors.com/faq/qu35.htm>

This website, from an evangelistic Catholic organization in Canada, offers a simple explanation of the four cardinal virtues that were the (imagined) subject of Dürer's stolen etchings.

The Getty

<http://www.getty.edu/>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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

Explore the websites of the two museums featured in Masterpiece. Each has pages for young readers and artists: The Getty

[http://www.getty.edu/education/for_kids/] and The Metropolitan

[http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/museumkids.htm?HomePageLink=museumkids_c]

Ferraiolo, Jack D. [The Big Splash](#). Amulet Books, 2008 [j FERRAILOLO 2008]

Genre: Mystery, humor

Major themes: Middle school, friendship, bullying, noir

Summary: Matt Stevens, an average middle schooler with a glib tongue and a knack for solving crimes, uncovers a mystery while working with “the organization,” a mafia-like syndicate run by seventh grader Vincent “Mr. Biggs” Biggio, specializing in forged hall passes, test-copying rings, black market candy selling, and taking out hits with water pistols.

Hiaasen, Carl. [Scat](#). Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. [j HIAASEN 2009]

Genre: Mystery

Major themes: Environmental conservation, endangered species, friendship, Iraq War

Summary: 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.

Novels in Verse

Frost, Helen. [Diamond Willow](#). Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008. [j FROST]

Genre: Realistic fiction/folklore

Major themes: Families, friendship, growing up, animals, secrets

Summary: In a remote area of Alaska, twelve-year-old Willow helps her father with their sled dogs when she is not at school, wishing she were more popular, all the while unaware that the animals surrounding her carry the spirits of dead ancestors and friends who care for her.

Booktalk: [Read poem on p. 4]

Although it might seem odd, Willow is glad she is named after a stick. The kind of willow she is named for, diamond willow, is found in Alaska where she lives. The sticks have rough, gray bark, but once the bark is removed, the wood has small brown diamond-shaped areas.

Willow feels like her name fits her: she's skinny, average, brown-haired. She'd rather blend in with a crowd than stand out and is more comfortable hanging out with her sled dogs than she is with the other kids at middle school.

What Willow really wishes for is more independence. She'd love it if her parents would let her travel alone with her dogs to her grandparents' house twelve miles away. She's gone lots of times with her parents and older brother, and she knows how to stay out of the way of moose and bears. She knows to take a sleeping bag and blanket in case she gets lost, along with matches, a headlamp and a hatchet.

Willow is shocked when her parents actually agree to her plan—she'll be allowed to take the dogs and dog sled to her grandparents' house for the weekend. They trust her to make the trip on her own. But when Willow makes a mistake and disaster happens, her parents' trust doesn't matter. Can Willow deal with the consequences of her actions?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Why is it so important to Willow to be able to make the trip to her grandparents' house alone? Are there things you'd like to do on your own that your parents won't allow?
- What do you think about Willow's decision to take Roxy to her grandparents' house? Did she make the right choice? What other alternatives did she have?
- Practice writing your own diamond-shaped poems with hidden messages.

Related websites:

Carving Diamond Willow

<http://www.sticksite.com/carvings/index.html>

At this site you can view photos of diamond willow carved into various forms: walking sticks, furniture, etc.

Sled Dogs: An Alaskan Epic

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/sled-dogs-an-alaskan-epic/introduction/3146/>

At this website, which accompanies a PBS *Nature* episode, you can learn more about sled dogs and the Iditarod.

Burg, Ann E. [All the Broken Pieces: A novel in verse](#). Scholastic, 2009.

[y BURG 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Families, Vietnam War, prejudice, adoption, healing

Summary: Two years after being airlifted out of Vietnam in 1975, Matt Pin is haunted by the terrible secret he left behind and, now, in a loving adoptive home in the United States, a series of profound events forces him to confront his past.

Creech, Sharon. [Hate That Cat](#). Joanna Cotler Books, 2008. [j CREECH 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: School stories, growing up, animals

Summary: Jack is studying poetry again in school, and he continues to write poems reflecting his understanding of famous poems and how they relate to his life. Sequel to [Love That Dog](#).

Smith, Hope Anita. [Keeping the Night Watch](#). Henry Holt, 2008.

[j 811.6 S649k 2008]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Families, forgiveness, anger

Summary: A thirteen-year-old African American boy chronicles what happens to his family when his father, who temporarily left, returns home and they all must deal with their feelings of anger, hope, abandonment, and fear. Sequel to [The Way a Door Closes](#).

Prejudice

Venkatraman, Padma. [Climbing the Stairs](#). G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2008.

[y VENKATRAM]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Families, growing up, friendship, peace/nonviolence

Summary: In India, in 1941, when her father becomes brain-damaged in a non-violent protest march, fifteen-year-old Vidya and her family are forced to move in with her father's extended family and become accustomed to a totally different way of life.

Booktalk: Vidya knows that her father is keeping a secret from her. Several times a week, he leaves his job as a doctor at the medical clinic in Bombay and disappears, sometimes not returning until after she goes to bed. He says he's doing volunteer work, but he won't tell her exactly what he's doing. Vidya's brother says he doesn't know either, but Vidya's not convinced he's telling the truth. But one day, when her father comes home with blood on his clothes, Vidya is determined to get him to tell the truth.

It turns out that appa, Vidya's father, is helping India's freedom fighters, led by Mahatma Gandhi. In the 1940s, India was still a British colony trying to seek independence. When the Indian protestors are attacked by the British, Vidya's father provides medical treatment.

But being at a protest can be a dangerous place to be, as Vidya soon discovers. When her father tries to help a woman attacked by the British, he is seriously injured and can no longer work to support their family. Suddenly Vidya has to move to her uncle's house far away, and live alongside her father's very traditional family. Life is completely different there—the servants are treated terribly, the men and women must live separately, and it's a girl's job to find a good husband, not the college education that Vidya wishes for. How can she survive there, without the help of her beloved father?

Read [Climbing the Stairs](#) to see how Vidya finds new allies and tailors her dreams to fit her new situation.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Vidya feels responsible for her father's brain injury. Is she?
- What did you feel about Kitta's decision to join the army?
- Check out other discussion topics in the publisher's teacher's guide at http://www.climbingthestairsbook.com/ClimbingtheStairs_PenguinDiscussionGuide.pdf and the author's website at <http://www.climbingthestairsbook.com/bookclubs.html>.

Related websites:

Climbing the Stairs

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

The author's website includes discussion questions and lists of resources about different subjects covered in the novel.

Climbing the Stairs Discussion Guide

http://www.climbingthestairsbook.com/ClimbingtheStairs_PenguinDiscussionGuide.pdf

The publisher's book discussion guide contains comprehension questions and research/writing suggestions.

The Caste System

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/living/caste.shtml>

A description of the Indian caste system

Mohandas Gandhi

http://www.time.com/time/time100/poc/gandhi_photo/gandhi1.html

A photo essay of Gandhi's life, from *Time* magazine

Anderson, Laurie Halse. [Chains: Seeds of America](#). Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008. [j ANDERSON 2008]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Slavery/freedom, friendship, ethics

Summary: After being sold to a cruel couple in New York City, a slave named Isabel spies for the rebels during the Revolutionary War.

Craig, Colleen. [Afrika](#). Tundra Books, 2008. [y CRAIG 2008]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Apartheid, families, secrets, friendship, identity

Summary: Helped by the young son of a long-time family servant, whose own father was a casualty of apartheid history, Kim eventually unlocks the mystery of her birth and brings her mother and herself to their own truth and reconciliation.

Magoon, Kekla. [The Rock and the River](#). Aladdin, 2009. [y NAIDOO 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Civil Rights, violence vs. nonviolence, families

Summary: In 1968 Chicago, fourteen-year-old Sam Childs is caught in a conflict between his father's nonviolent approach to seeking civil rights for African Americans and his older brother, who has joined the Black Panther Party.

Naidoo, Beverley. [Burn My Heart](#). Amistad, 2009. [y NAIDOO 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Friendship, freedom

Summary: Two boys--one white, one black--share an uneasy friendship in Kenya in the 1950s, a country shaken by a rebellion of Africans against white landowners, but suspicions and accusations are escalating, and an act of betrayal could change everything.

Special Abilities

Law, Ingrid. [Savvy](#). Dial Books for Young Readers, 2008. [j LAW]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Special abilities, families, friendship, growing up

Summary: Recounts the adventures of Mibs Beaumont, whose thirteenth birthday has revealed her "savvy"--a magical power unique to each member of her family--just as her father is injured in a terrible accident.

Booktalk: Well, turning 13 – becoming a real teenager – is a big change for anyone. But for the Beaumont family, a 13th birthday means getting your Savvy. Mississippi Beaumont's brother Fish can create hurricanes, brother Rocket can control electricity, and the family pantry is stocked with old songs collected in canning jars by her Grandma.

Mississippi (Mibs for short), dreams about getting her Savvy – maybe she will grow invisible wings, receive x-ray vision, or be able to breathe underwater! But just as her birthday approaches, something terrible happens:

“I pushed the food around my plate, ignoring my sister and daydreaming about what it would be like when I got my own savvy, when the telephone rang right in the middle of pot roast, mashed potatoes and might unpopular green beans. As Momma rose to answer, us kids, and Grandpa Bomba too, seized the chance to plop our mashers on top of our beans while Momma's back was turned.

We were all smiling to each other around the kitchen table at the smart way we'd taken care of those beans when Momma dropped the phone with a rattling clatter and a single sob – perfectly devastated.” (excerpts, p. 8 – 9)

Poppa was in a car accident – “his car crashed-up bad” and he was lying in a bed at Salina Hope Hospital, not able to wake up.

Now, Mibs has only one dream – that *her* Savvy will be waking up Poppa. But to do that she needs to get to the hospital in Salina. So Mibs stows away with a hapless salesman on a rickety old pink school bus – along with box after box of pink bibles and, as it turns out, more than a few friends.

But will they make it to Salina in time to help Poppa? And what if Mibs' Savvy doesn't come?

Read *Savvy* by Ingrid Law. Maybe you'll even discover your own savvy.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- If you could have a Savvy of your own, what would it be?
- Check out other activities in the publisher's teacher's guide at <http://us.penguinroup.com/static/packages/us/yreaders/savvy/Savvy.pdf>

Related websites:

Savvy by Ingrid Law

<http://us.penguinroup.com/static/packages/us/yreaders/savvy/index.html>

The publisher's site has a Q & A with the author, an excerpt (including audio), a teacher's guide, and even wallpaper for your computer!

Ingrid Law

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

Ingrid Law's website contains a biography, FAQ, games to play, and a link to her blog.

Forester, Victoria. The Girl Who Could Fly. Feiwel and Friends, 2008.

[j FORESTER]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Special abilities, school stories, identity, self-acceptance

Summary: When homeschooled farm girl Piper McCloud reveals her ability to fly, she is quickly taken to a secret government facility to be trained with other exceptional children, but she soon realizes that something is very wrong and begins working with brilliant and wealthy Conrad to escape.

Sports

Mackel, Kathy. Boost. Dial, 2008. [y MACKEL 2008]

Genre: Sports

Major themes: Basketball, steroids, ethics

Summary: Thirteen-year-old Savvy's dreams of starting for her elite basketball team are in danger when she is accused of taking steroids.

Booktalk: It's tough when Savvy's family has to relocate from the Southwest to her aunt's ranch in Rhode Island. But tough has never stopped Savvy. She's going out for Fire, the elite senior basketball team. Even though she's only thirteen, she's six foot two, with a killer three-point shot.

But this year is tough with a capital "T". Emergency medical problems send Savvy's aunt to the hospital. Coyotes kill the ranches' sheep, and then the sheepdog that protects them. Savvy's sister Callie lacks Savvy's spunk, and so it's up to Savvy to step in and do the chores her aunt can no longer handle.

Then someone finds a bag of pills in Savvy's gym bag. Steroids. She's taking Prednisone for a severe case of poison ivy, but she's no juicer. While Savvy waits for the medical test results that will prove what she already knows, that she's innocent, she also begins to wonder why some of the people closest to her, like her dad and her friend

Gonzo don't seem to believe her. Who could have set her up? Was it one of the players from a competing team? Could it be a jealous teammate, trying to make her look bad? Was it her own coach, who it turns out had offered speed to another player? Or was it someone even closer to her....someone else who needed a boost....

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Savvy's parents treat her differently from how they treat her sister Callie. Do you think they're fair?
- When Savvy's accused of doing steroids, her family and friends all react differently. Some believe she's innocent, some secretly seem to think she might be guilty. Discuss their reactions. When her dad and Gonzo don't seem to quite believe her, do you think they are justified? Why or why not?
- The decision for adult athletes to use performance enhancing drugs like steroids should be personal, not regulated by the government. Doug Bandow, a libertarian, said, "Some athletes drink. Some smoke. Some drive fast cars. Should the federal government ban all of these activities lest some young person somewhere foolishly follow their example?" What do you think? Talk about the pros and cons of this issue.

Related websites:

Girls and Steroids

http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2005-04-25-girls-steroids_x.htm

People know about boys using steroids, but less people are familiar with their effect on girls.

Video promoting Boost

http://www.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=103013&title=BOOST_by_Kathy_Mackel&vpkey=

Does the video make you want to read the book?

Biography of the Author

<http://biography.jrank.org/pages/1733/Mackel-Kathryn-1950-Kathy-Mackel.html>

Mackel also writes screenplays and adult mysteries.

Cochrane, Mick. [The Girl who Threw Butterflies](#). Knopf, 2009. [j COCHRANE 2009]

Genre: Sports

Major themes: Baseball, mothers and daughters, friendship

Summary: Eighth-grader Molly's ability to throw a knuckleball earns her a spot on the baseball team, which not only helps her feel connected to her recently deceased father, who loved baseball, it helps in other aspects of her life, as well.

Lupica, Mike. [The Big Field](#). Philomel, 2008. [j LUPICA]

Genre: Sports

Major themes: Baseball, fathers and sons

Summary: When fourteen-year-old baseball player Hutch feels threatened by the arrival of a new teammate named Darryl, he tries to work through his insecurities about both Darryl and his remote and silent father, who was once a great ballplayer too.

Supernatural

Avi. [The Seer of Shadows](#). HarperCollins, 2008. [j AVI]

Genre: Supernatural

Major themes: Supernatural, photography, ghosts, history

Summary: In New York City in 1872, fourteen-year-old Horace, a photographer's apprentice, becomes entangled in a plot to create fraudulent spirit photographs, but when Horace accidentally frees the real ghost of a dead girl bent on revenge, his life takes a frightening turn.

Booktalk: When Horace goes to work as an apprentice to photographer Enoch Middleditch, in 1872, he expects to learn about portrait photography – but of people, not ghosts. Middleditch is excited when his first customer, Mrs. Von Macht, arrives for her portrait. But when Middleditch learns the Von Macht's daughter has recently died, he concocts a scheme to keep them coming back for more photos. He makes Horace take pictures of paintings of the dead daughter Eleanora, so they can use trick photography to merge her image with that of her mother's – making it appear that they've captured her ghost on film. Middleditch is sure that the sad parents will be thrilled to see their daughter's image brought back from the dead.

But they aren't sad – they're terrified, because they have an evil secret. But not as terrified as Horace, when he discovers he is a "seer of shadows" – one of the few people who can photograph and see ghosts.

"Before me was a girl, barefoot, very thin, arms almost twiglike, so that her dress hung limply.

It was Eleanora Von Macht.

She reached the stairway and began to climb. Halfway up the steps she stopped, and to my horror set the candlestick against the wall. She was going to set the house on fire!" [p145]

Horace knows his photography had brought Eleanora back from the dead. But can photography somehow send her back, and stop her before she gets her revenge by killing her parents?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- If you saw an actual ghost, how would you prove to the world, without a doubt, that ghosts exist?
- When photography was new, people didn't realize how trick photography worked, and it was easy to fool people into thinking photos of ghosts and fairies were real. Can you think of some tricks like this that have happened today, with newer technologies? Use databases or search engines to see if you can discover some recent stories of swindlers who used today's technologies.
- In this book Horace discovers he has a hidden talent – he is a "seer of shadows." If you had this talent, what would you use it for? Are there ghosts of some people, that like Horace, you'd prefer not to see?

Related websites:

Avi – the Author's Website

<http://www.avi-writer.com/>

Find out about all the author's books here.

Seer of Shadows

<http://www.harpercollins.com/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=11751&isbn13=9780060000158&displayType=bookessay>

An essay by Avi about his book.

Best Ghost Photos Ever

<http://paranormal.about.com/od/ghostphotos/ig/Best-Ghost-Photos/>

Some of the best photos of ghosts are collected in this gallery. Do you believe they're real?

How to make Fake Photo Ghosts

<http://www.ghoststudy.com/main/fakepage.html>

All of these ghosts are not real...but would they trick you into believing in them?

Oregon Ghosts

<http://www.ghostsandcritters.com/oregonghosts.html>

Maybe there's some hauntings right in your own neighborhood. Bring a camera, and maybe you can capture them in a snapshot.

Real Ghost Hunters

<http://www.katherinekrohn.com/haunted.html>

Matina and Todd Baker are ghostbusters who live in Oregon! Read about them here....and here's a link to their website:

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

Hardinge, Frances. [Well Witched](#). HarperCollins, 2009. [j HARDINGE]

Genre: Supernatural

Major themes: Supernatural, witches, friendship

Summary: Three friends fall prey to the demands of the Well Witch when they trespass in her wishing well and steal some coins.

Hurlye, Tonya. [Ghostgirl](#). Little Brown, 2008. [y HURLEY 2008]

Genre: Supernatural

Major themes: Supernatural, friendship, popularity

Summary: After dying, high school senior Charlotte Usher is as invisible to nearly everyone as she always felt, but despite what she learns in a sort of alternative high school for dead teens, she clings to life while seeking a way to go to the Fall Ball with the boy of her dreams.

Velde, Vivian Vande. [Stolen](#). Marshall Cavendish, 2008. [y VANDEVELD]

Genre: Supernatural

Major themes: Supernatural, witches, amnesia, families

Summary: A girl finds herself running through the forest at the edge of a village with no memory of anything, even her own name, and later learns that she might be twelve-year-old Isabelle, believed to be stolen by a witch six years before.

Survival

Volponi, Paul. [Hurricane Song: A novel of New Orleans](#). Viking, 2008.

[y VOLPONE 2008]

Genre: Survival

Major themes: Survival, families, music, New Orleans (Hurricane Katrina), jazz

Summary: High school sophomore Miles Shaw goes to live with his father, a jazz musician, in New Orleans, and together they survive the horrors of Hurricane Katrina in the Superdome, learning about each other and growing closer through their painful experiences.

Booktalk: *Every Adult and Child Should Bring Enough Food and Water to Last Three (3) Days. All City and State Laws Will Be Strictly Enforced.*

The sign posted just inside the Superdome, and the National Guards armed with machine guns make it seem like Miles had just crossed over a border to another country, instead of seeking shelter with his dad and uncle from Hurricane Katrina. They're afraid of the storm, and Miles wishes his dad would give him more attention, but there's lots more to be afraid of inside the Superdome. How come all the people seeking refuge are black, and the people in charge are white? Can they trust the National Guardsman? What about all the people packed inside –who are virtual strangers?

"Don't matter what you see or who needs what – they're not family. It's the three of us and nobody else." Mile's dad warns. Getting food, water or going to the bathroom means waiting in line at least an hour or more, and someone has to watch their stuff the whole time.

And then the storms starts blowing, so strong it pops the rivets out of the beams of the Superdome and rips a section of the roof off. The bathrooms back up, people start fighting and stealing, and then Miles hears shots. They might survive the storm, but will they get out of the Superdome alive?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- At the beginning of the story, Miles doesn't like jazz, but by the end of the book, he starts to respect his dad's music. What makes him change his attitude?
- Imagine you have to leave your home because of an approaching hurricane. You have twenty minutes to pack, and can only fill what you can carry in one plastic garbage bag. What would you take?
- Singer Kanye West spoke out about what was happening to survivors of Hurricane Katrina, and shocked newscasters by saying on air "George Bush doesn't care about black people." Watch his video tape on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pVTrnxCZaQ>

Give some examples from the book *Hurricane Song* that might make someone like West feel this way.

Related websites:

Paul Volponi

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

The author's website. Check here for the author's notes about this book.

Time for Kids/Hurricane Katrina

<http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/katrina>

Read kids' accounts of the storm, as well as articles about how kids helped hurricane victims.

NOVA Storm That Drowned A City

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

This PBS website explains how the city was flooded, and helps you track the path of the storm.

Herlong, M. H. [The Great Wide Sea](#). Viking, 2008. [j HERLONG 2008]

Genre: Survival

Major themes: Survival, sailing, grief, family

Summary: Still mourning the death of their mother, three brothers go with their father on an extended sailing trip off the Florida Keys and have a harrowing adventure at sea.