

Novel-Ties: New Fiction for Literature Circles
Presented by the Multnomah County Library School Corps
August 11, 2010
Central Library

Friendship

O'Connor, Barbara. [The small adventure of Popeye and Elvis](#). Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2009. [j OCONNOR 2009]

Genre: Friendship

Major themes: Friendship, adventures

Summary: In Fayette, South Carolina, the highlight of Popeye's summer is learning vocabulary words with his grandmother until a motor home gets stuck nearby and Elvis, the oldest boy living inside, joins Popeye in finding the source of strange boats floating down the creek.

Booktalk: Popeye's so bored he doesn't know if he'll even make it through the summer. Nothing ever happens in Fayette, South Carolina. All he has for company is his grandma Velma and his dog Boo. His grandma teaches him new words every week from the crossword puzzles she does. Like vicissitude. Nomad. Serendipity.

But things perk up when Popeye discovers a huge motor home stuck in the mud near his house, and the Jewell family who own it, including Elvis Jewell and his five brothers and sisters. Elvis can swear like no one Popeye has ever met. Some of his best curses are:

- You skinny-headed ding dong
- You toe-jam tattletale
- None of your beeswax, bug brained bugger-breath

Elvis is also the inventor of the Spit and Swear Club and he has his own hatchet. Popeye's thrilled to have a new friend, and the two of them set out in search of adventures. When they discover little boats made of Yoohoo containers floating down the stream, they're surprised to find each has a mysterious message inside:

- Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee
- 4 and 20 blackbirds
- Dead dogs live here

Who is sending all these secret messages? What do they mean? Their small adventure is about to begin.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Popeye wishes he could be like his new friend Elvis. What are some ways he wants to be like his friend?
- Draw a picture of what Elvis' family's motor home looks like, either on the outside or the inside. Check what the book says for details.
- Popeye is always trying to use new words in his sentences and thoughts. Get a dictionary and look up a new word and its meaning. Then see if you can use your new word correctly in a sentence, before the end of the day. Do your friends notice?

- Starletta makes Yoo-hoo boats with secret messages. You can make paper boats (see websites below) from paper. Write a secret message on your boats too.

Related websites:

Barbara O'Connor

<http://www.barboconnor.com>

Read about the author Barbara O'Connor and the other books she's written.

Sciway South Carolina Picture Project

<http://www.sciway.net/photos/pee-dee-sc/>

Popeye and Elvis live in South Carolina. What's it like there? Look at these pictures and find out!

Make a Paper Boat

http://www.metacafe.com/watch/879140/how_to_make_a_paper_boat/

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RaGyauE7hA>

Here are 2 different video instructions to make a paper boat, just like Starletta does!

DeFelice, Cynthia. [Signal](#). Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2009. [j DEFELICE 2009]

Genre: Friendship

Major themes: Friendship, child abuse

Summary: After moving with his emotionally distant father to the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, twelve-year-old Owen faces a lonely summer until he meets an abused girl who may be a space alien.

Hoberman, Mary Ann. [Strawberry Hill](#). Little Brown, 2009. [j HOBERTMAN 2009]

Genre: Friendship

Major themes: Friendship, moving, historical fiction

Summary: Ten-year-old Allie's family moves from urban New Haven to rural Stamford, Connecticut, in the midst of the Great Depression.

Myracle, Lauren. [Luv ya bunches](#). Amulet, 2009. [j MYRACLE 2009]

Genre: Friendship

Major themes: Friendship, text messaging

Summary: Four friends--each named after a flower--navigate the ups and downs of fifth grade. Told through text messages, blog posts, screenplay, and straight narrative.

Shimko, Bonnie. [The private thoughts of Amelia E. Rye](#). Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010. [j SHIMKO 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, families, historical fiction, racism

Summary: Growing up in a small town during the 1960s, a young girl – unwanted by her mother – searches for love and acceptance.

Adventure

McCaughrean, Geraldine. [The death-defying Pepper Roux](#). Harper, 2010.

[y MCCAUGHRE 2010]

Genre: Adventure, historical fiction

Major themes: Destiny/fate, family, growing up, survival

Summary: Having been raised believing he will die before he reaches the age of fourteen, Pepper Roux runs away on his fourteenth birthday in an attempt to elude his fate, assumes another identity, and continues to try to outrun death, no matter the consequences.

Booktalk: [Read 1st paragraph.]

On the day Pepper was born, his Aunt Mireille said she'd had a dream the night before in which Saint Constance had appeared and said Pepper would be dead by age fourteen. So for his whole life, Pepper has always been waiting for death to appear. He stops going to school after primary school, since his family assumes he won't need an education. His mother feeds him special foods, as if he was sick, and he goes to confession every day.

On the day of his fourteenth birthday, when death still has not come, Pepper decides to go into town. At the docks, he's surprised to see the ship his father was sailing. Why would Captain Roux not come home if his ship is docked in the harbor? And then Pepper remembers...he's supposed to die today, and his father probably would rather stay away. One of the sailors tells him that his father will sail out soon on a different ship, with a new crew.

And that gives Pepper an idea. He finds his father drunk in a bar at the hotel, and Pepper takes his captain's hat and jacket. Then he walks back to his father's new ship and announces that Captain Roux has arrived. "Set sail," he orders.

And posing as a ship's captain is only the first of Pepper's many adventures. Each time his life is threatened, he changes identities. How long can Pepper elude death?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Pepper has a number of adventures in the book. Which adventure was your most favorite? Your least favorite? Why?
- How would you define fate? Do you believe in it? Why or why not?
- While reading the book, keep track on Pepper's journey on a map of France (see website below).
- Create some of your own fictional news stories, as Pepper does when he works for the newspaper.

Related websites:

Chatterpack: The Death Defying Pepper Roux

http://fds.oup.com/www0.oup.com/pepperroux/downloads/Pepper_Roux_Reading_Group_Pack.pdf

From the British publisher of the book, this guide includes a list of further reading suggestions, activity ideas and an interview with the author.

Provence & Beyond

<http://www.beyond.fr/>

Curious about some of the sites Pepper sees on his journeys? Search this site for place names to find maps and pictures.

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. [Emily's fortune](#). Delacorte, 2010. [j NAYLOR 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Friendship, family

Summary: While traveling to her aunt's home in Redbud by train and stagecoach, quiet young Emily and her turtle, Rufus, team up with Jackson, fellow orphan and troublemaker extraordinaire, to outsmart mean Uncle Victor, who is after Emily's inheritance.

Perkins, Lynne Rae. [As easy as falling off the face of the earth](#). Greenwillow Books, 2010. [y PERKINS 2010, downloadable audiobook]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Adventure, fate, travel

Summary: A teenaged boy encounters one comedic calamity after another when his train strands him in the middle of nowhere, and everything comes down to luck.

Sedgwick, Marcus. [Revolver](#). Roaring Brook Press, 2009. [y SEDGWICK 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Survival, good vs. evil, violence

Summary: Finland, 1910: Fifteen-year-old Sig is shocked to see a hole in the frozen lake outside his family's cabin and to find his father's corpse nearby. Why did Einar steer his dog sled across the lake instead of taking the safer land route? Sig's sister and stepmother go for help, leaving Sig alone with Einar's body in the cabin. Soon after, an armed stranger barges in, demanding a share of Einar's stolen gold.

Turner, Megan Whalen. [A conspiracy of kings](#). Greenwillow, 2010. [y TURNER 2010]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Friendship, violence, growing up, duty

Summary: Kidnapped and sold into slavery, Sophos, an unwilling prince, tries to save his country from being destroyed by rebellion and exploited by the conniving Mede empire.

Animal Stories

Bearn, Emily. [Tumtum & Nutmeg: Adventures beyond Nutmouse Hall](#). Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009. [j BEARN 2009]

Genre: Animal stories

Major themes: Adventure, friendship, human-animal relationships, mice.

Summary: Wealthy, married mice Tumtum and Nutmeg find adventure when they secretly try to help two human siblings who live in a tumbledown cottage with their absent-minded inventor father. There are three separate stories: *Tumtum & Nutmeg*, *The great escape*, *The pirates' treasure*.

Booktalk: Arthur and Lucy Mildew live in tumbledown Rose Cottage in the middle of the English countryside. Their father was once very famous for inventing a kitchen gadget that peeled grapes, but that was a long time ago, and the family has fallen on hard times. They've got some rich neighbors, though: The Nutmouses.

Mr. and Mrs. Nutmouse live in the mansion called Nutmouse Hall – 36 rooms in all. Nutmouse Hall is tucked inside the broom closet at Rose Cottage, secure behind a big, heavy dresser that was dragged in front of the door of the broom closet so many years ago that no one remembers exactly when. Generations of Nutmouses – who are, in fact, mice – have lived there contentedly ever since.

Until the arrival of Arthur and Lucy's mean, crazy Aunt Ivy. Aunt Ivy clips her fingernails at the kitchen table and stubs out her cigarettes in the children's boots. Last Christmas, she gave Arthur a Ping-Pong ball and Lucy a packet of plastic clothespins. Aunt Ivy has descended upon the Mildews because she has discovered mice living in her own house in Scotland. She's going to say at Rose Cottage until her own house is thoroughly de-moused. As she explains, I'm here for "as long as it takes ... I've told Pest Persecutors to turn my house upside down until they find those revolting little creatures. If there's one thing I loathe more than anything, it's *mice*."

I'm sure you know that it doesn't take long for the Nutmouses – Tumtum and Nutmeg – to come face to face with Aunt Ivy. And when it does happen ... well, it isn't pretty.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Do you have any relations like Aunt Ivy? What do you think makes her so mean?
- Who is the better military strategist: General Marchmouse or the Nutmouses? Why?
- Arthur and Lucy get an extra long winter vacation, but they have to spend it in drafty, isolated Rose Cottage. Aside from playing on computers, watching TV and DVDs, and reading, what kinds of things would you do around your house if you had an extended winter break?

Related websites:

Tumtum and Nutmeg

<http://www.tumtumandnutmeg.co.uk/>

Find out all about the world of the Nutmouses at their very own website, including a collection of Nutmeg's recipes and some fun games to play. Check out the Nutmouses' blog!

Mus musculus: Information (Animal Diversity Web)

http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Mus_musculus.html

The University of Michigan's Museum of Zoology includes a thorough description of the house mouse, including behavior, food habits and relations with humans. Photos of mice and anatomical images are featured on the site.

Mouse Care (ASPCA)

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/mouse-care.html>

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals offers tips on how to be a responsible owner of a pet mouse.

History of Pogo Sticks

<http://www.pogostickusa.com/history.htm>

The Nutmouses' friend, General Marchmouse, adopts a pogo stick as the Royal Mouse Army's new secret weapon. Read all about its history at this site.

Breathed [*pronounced Breath-ed*], Berkeley. [Flawed dogs: The shocking raid on Westminster](#). Philomel Books/Penguin Young Readers Group, 2009
[j BREATHED 2009]

Genre: Animal stories, humor

Major themes: Friendship, human-pet relationships, living with disabilities, dogs

Summary: After being framed by a jealous poodle, a dachshund is left for dead, but comes back with a group of mutts from the Last Ditch Dog Depository to disrupt the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club dog show and exact revenge on Cassius the poodle.

Cole, Henry. [A nest for Celeste: A story about art, inspiration, and the meaning of home](#). Katherine Tegen Books, 2010. [j COLE 2010]

Genre: Animal stories

Major themes: Art and artists, human-animal relationships, mice

Summary: Celeste, a mouse longing for a real home, becomes a source of inspiration to teenaged Joseph – assistant to the artist and naturalist John James Audubon – at a New Orleans, Louisiana, plantation in 1821.

Philosophy

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. [The dreamer](#). Scholastic, 2010. [j RYAN 2010]

Genre: Philosophy

Major themes: Philosophy, poetry, shyness

Summary: A fictionalized biography of the Nobel Prize-winning Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, who grew up a painfully shy child, ridiculed by his overbearing father, but who became one of the most widely-read poets in the world.

Booktalk: It's not that Neftali hates his father. He just wishes his father weren't so strict and mean. When his father makes fun of him, it only makes Neftali stutter worse, and doubt himself.

But there is one escape...into an inner world of magic, vision and poetry. Maybe it's a place where you escape to, too, when no one seems to understand you. A place you feel safe, where you can write down your thoughts, dreams and poems in your private notebook.

One day, Neftali is playing in the yard when he goes to check a secret hole in the fence that leads to the yard next door. While he's exploring, he suddenly senses the presence of a person on the other side. A child's hands poke through the hole, offering Neftali a toy lamb. Neftali takes the toy, races inside, and returns with his prize pinecone. He pokes that through the hole, where it's eagerly grabbed away by the mysterious person on the other side. Before he can see who it is, Neftali hears footsteps running away and into the house next door.

He waits and waits, watching the house, hoping to see the person who gave him the lamb. Finally he gathers his courage to go knock on the door. But when he peeks

inside, he discovers the house is empty, no one lives there! There are only cobwebs and empty boxes. The giver could have been anyone in the world.

Neftali's a shy boy, but his vision, memory and imagination are sharp, and experiences like these, shaped into poems, are what made him one of Chile's most famous poets. This book is based on the life of the poet Pablo Neruda and includes many of his questioning poems:

What does the wind give?

What does the wind take away?

Where is the storehouse of lost and found? [p.39]

Do you think the answers might also be a poem?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Read the first page of the biography of Pablo Neruda (below). What parts of *The Dreamer* seem true to his life story? What parts might be made up?
- Neftali's father did not like him to write, and didn't want him to become a poet. Who were some other people that helped him achieve his dream of becoming a writer?
- The picture on page 120 shows a pinecone, and many other objects. What are these things, and why were they important to Neftali?
- On page 22 and 23 are some words that seemed special to Neftali, both because of what they meant and how they looked and sounded. Create your own secret list of words you like, and write them with colored pencils, markers or crayons so they look how they sound.
- Try writing some of your own poems, based on questions, especially things you wonder about questions that might not have clear answers.

Related websites:

Pam Munoz Ryan

<http://www.pammunozryan.com>

Read about the author's life and her other books here.

Peter Sis

<http://www.petersis.com/index2.html>

Learn more about the illustrator, his books, and play a few games from his website!

Pablo Neruda-Biography

<http://www.biography.com/articles/Pablo-Neruda-9421737>

Read the life story of this famous Chilean poet, who is also the subject of *The Dreamer*.

Block, Francesca Lia. [House of dolls](#). Harper Collins, 2010. [j BLOCK 2010]

Genre: Philosophy

Major themes: Dolls, Family

Summary: Madison Blackberry's dolls – Wildflower, Rockstar, and Miss Selene – have lives that she envies, with their beautiful clothes and warm, cozy house, while she's lonely most of the time.

Teller, Janne. [Nothing](#). Atheneum, 2010. [y TELLER 2010]

Genre: Philosophy

Major themes: Philosophy, meaning, interpersonal relationships

Summary: When thirteen-year-old Pierre Anthon leaves school to sit in a plum tree and train for becoming part of nothing, his seventh grade classmates set out on a desperate quest for the meaning of life.

Booktalk: When Pierre Anthon climbs into the plum tree and says there's no meaning to life, his 7th grade class don't know what to think. "From the moment you are born, you start to die," he says with a laugh. His classmates are deeply upset. If nothing matters, why are they studying so hard? What's the point of going to college, getting a job, or working hard for anything?

They know there must be some meaning to life, and they want to prove it. They decide to create a pile of meaning in the abandoned saw mill where they hang out. Everyone must put the thing that is most meaningful to them into the pile. Dennis contributes his D & D books, most of them. But when Otto tells him he has to put in ALL of them, Dennis gets mad. So he tells Sebastian to contribute his prized fishing pole to the pile. It's not easy being told what to do. And so when Gerda makes Agnes add her brand new green sandals, Agnes thinks, "I looked down at my bare feet and decided Gerda was going to pay."

Gerda has to add her pet hamster to the pile. Of course it hurts. It wouldn't have meaning if it didn't. Henrik has to add the snake in the jar of formaldehyde. Henrik makes Otto contribute his boxing gloves. Otto takes his time to think up what he'll make Elise contribute. Finally he says, "Your baby brother" Her brother died when he was two years old. That means she'll have to go to the churchyard at night and dig him up.

WARNING: this is not an easy book; this book can be scary. This book is like Lord of the Flies and The Lottery, about what happens when control spins out of control. WARNING: This book will make you think about what is meaningful *to you*. Your favorite pet? Your virginity? Your religion? One of your fingers? What would you give up? What might your friends make you give up?

When the kids tell Piers Anthon about the pile of meaning, he just laughs. "If you were willing to give it up, then how can it have meaning?" And so the kids decide, they have to make him contribute as well.

Stoffels, Karlijn. [Heartsinger](#). Arthur A. Levine, 2009. [y STOFFELS 2009]

Genre: Philosophy

Major themes: Love

Summary: In this meditation on various kinds of love, Mee travels across the country to the court of the Princess Esperanza, singing the life stories of some of the people he meets.

Magical Creatures

Harrison, Michelle. [13 treasures](#). Little, Brown, 2010. [j HARRISON 2010]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Friendship, family, secrets

Summary: Bedeviled by evil fairies that only she can see, thirteen-year-old Tanya is sent to stay with her cold and distant grandmother at Elvesden Manor, where she and the caretaker's son solve a disturbing mystery that leads them to the discovery that Tanya's life is in danger.

Booktalk: [Read p. 1 from beginning to top of p. 3 “...the full weight of them.”]

Tanya’s tormentors are fairies, three of them. She’s been able to see them for as long as she can remember, though no one else can. Why me? she wonders. Do others see the fairies, too? But Tanya doesn’t dare ask anyone about them, for as she says, “Talk of fairies did not wash well with adults once you were past a certain age.” But explaining away what the fairies do is becoming increasingly difficult. Tonight, when the fairies leave, they drop her from where she is floating, and Tanya reaches out to grab the only thing nearby to prevent herself from falling—the light fixture in the ceiling, which comes crashing down around her. Although she tries to tell her mother it was because she was having a nightmare, her mother says this time it’s the last straw—she can’t cope with Tanya’s “attention-seeking” behavior anymore.

So Tanya is sent to her grandmother’s Florence’s house, Elvesden Manor, an enormous, crumbling mansion far away from the city. Tanya has always hated visiting her grandmother, who treats her coldly and seems to wish she weren’t there. The only other people living there are the secretive groundskeeper and his annoying son, Fabian. And lots and lots of fairies. But as much as Tanya hates Elvesden Manor, it is the one place where she can discover the answers to her questions about the fairies, and where she will learn that her life is in danger.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- What kind of person is Tanya’s grandmother? How does what we know about her change as the story progresses?
- Describe why Red steals the changeling babies. Do you think she is doing the right thing? Why or why not?
- Were any of your questions unanswered at the end of the story? What were they? (The author is writing sequels—what do you think they will cover?)

Related websites:

13 Treasures

<http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/features/13treasures/index.html>

At this website from the publisher, you can read more about Michelle Harrison, watch a video of her talking about the book, and even play a game to see if you can find the 13 treasures!

Michelle Harrison

<http://www.michelleharrisonbooks.com/index.php>

At the author’s website, you can read her biography, learn about her other books (including sequels to 13 Treasures) or send her a message.

Langrish, Katherine. [The shadow hunt.](#) Harper, 2010. [y LANGRISH 2010]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Duty, role of women, grief/loss, friendship, family

Summary: Wolf, on the run from the oppressive monastery where he was raised, rescues a strange child on Devil’s Edge, home of ghosts and demons. He takes her to a grand castle hoping to win the favor of its ruler and strikes up an unlikely friendship with a girl named Nest, thinking he’s finally found a place to call home. But dark forces are conspiring against Wolf and Nest, and a sinister enemy is looming closer than they could ever realize.

Schlitz, Laura Amy. [The night fairy](#). Candlewick, 2010. [j SCHLITZ 2010]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Adventure, friendship

Summary: When Flory the night fairy's wings are accidentally broken and she cannot fly, she has to learn to do everything differently.

Fantasy

Binding, Tim. [Sylvie and the songman](#). David Fickling Books, 2009.

[j BINDING 2009]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Friendship, adventure, human-animal communication, father-daughter relationships

Summary: Sylvie Bartram's beloved dog, Mr. Jackson, has lost his bark. The birds have stopped singing. And then, her dad disappears. Determined to find him, Sylvie and her best friend George are drawn into the nightmare world of the Songman, a world of utter and complete silence.

Booktalk: "The Woodpecker Man stared up at their window, took off his hat, brushed it with his arm and bowed." Read from here to "He knows it's here. Quick, George, the trapdoor, before they find their way up." [pp. 84-85]

This scene [which I didn't read all of, by the way] had me on the edge of my seat! But how did we get here? Who are Sylvie and George? Who's the Woodpecker Man? What is the buzzing wand? Why doesn't Mr. Jackson (the dog) bark?

First of all, Mr. Jackson appears to have lost his bark. He just came back from a walk one day without it. Then Sylvie notices an odd silence in her small village – none of the birds are singing either. Sylvie's dad is a musician – a musician who plays funny instruments like the Shinglechord and the Clattercloud, a musician who wants to hear the notes found in between the usual ones. One day he gets all those odd instruments to play together in such a way that the world first goes silent and then explodes with a single, devastating note. The next day, Sylvie's dad disappears. All he leaves is that mysterious wand and a cryptic message drawn in toothpaste on the bathroom mirror. Then, the Woodpecker Man appears. He comes in a hot-air balloon, drawn by swans and surrounded by dozens of malicious woodpeckers. And once the Woodpecker Man gets inside Sylvie's house – where she's holding the wand ... well, I don't want to spoil it for you.

Sylvie and George – her best friend – and Mr. Jackson flee the house just ahead of the Woodpecker Man. They embark on a journey that will take them along a place called the Allamanda, into a fox's underground burrow, high atop an abandoned lighthouse, to the zoo to free a tiger, and up to London on that tiger's back to a showdown with the Songman. The Songman, who wants Sylvie's dad's formula for that one note. Because if he can recreate that note, it will silence *all* voices, putting everyone and everything on the planet under the evil Songman's control.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- When the fox bites Sylvie she can understand what animals are saying. What has the author done to make that language understandable to us? If you look up the meanings of some of the words, does this help you understand?

- How does taking people's (or animals') voices make it easy for the Songman to control them? Why is Sylvie so entranced by "her" Song?
- How do Sylvie and George each use their talents to defeat the Songman?
- Sylvie's dad says "How many times have you heard the wind blowing through the trees or a branch rubbing against a windowpane and thought, That's a note I've never heard?" [p. 15] Can you think of a "note" from nature that you'd never heard before? Or a note that you'd like to hear?

Related websites:

Nature: A Conversation with Koko

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/koko/>

When Sylvie learns to speak with animals, she speaks their language. Koko the gorilla learned to communicate with humans using sign language. This episode of the program, Nature, features Koko and the work of the Gorilla Foundation.

Who Belongs in the Zoo? (Time magazine)

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1202920-1,00.html>

This article describes how some zoos are eliminating certain species from their exhibits, as they realize they aren't providing an optimum environment for some wild animals.

The Right and Wrong Ways to Zoo It - Opinion

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/the-right-and-wrong-ways-to-zoo-it/2007/06/19/1182019112162.html>

The former head of the Woodland Park Zoo, featured in the Time magazine article, wrote an essay on zoos in the Sidney (Australia) Morning Herald.

Musical Instruments

<http://www.oddmusic.com/gallery/>

Explore a gallery of odd musical instruments with sound and video clips of them in action. None of Dad's inventions are there yet!

"I'm going to sit right down and write myself a letter" (sung by Fats Waller)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZZRAU3DeOo>

"I'm going to sit right down and write myself a letter" (sung by Nat King Cole)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYRz5_rnSo0&feature=related

"I'm going to sit right down and write myself a letter" (lyrics)

<http://wikilyrics.net/song/107095/Im-Gonna-Sit-Right-Down-And-Write-Myself-A-Letter-Lyrics>

Listen to Dad's and Mr. Jackson's favorite song, and read all the lyrics.

Dowell, Frances O'Roark. Falling in. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2010. [j DOWELL 2010, CD Children DOWELL]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Witches, grandmothers, friendship, healing

Summary: Middle-schooler Isabelle Bean follows a mouse's squeak into a closet and falls into a parallel universe where the children believe she is the witch they have feared for years, finally come to devour them.

Farmer, Nancy. The Islands of the Blessed. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2009. [j FARMER 2009, CD Children FARMER]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Norse mythology, friendship, adventure, apprenticeships

Summary: In the third volume of the trilogy featuring Jack the apprentice bard – following [The Sea of Trolls](#) and [The Land of the Silver Apples](#), Jack and his Viking friend Thorgil confront the malevolent spirit of a vengeful mermaid and begin a quest that casts them among the fin folk of Notland.

Gee, Maurice. [Salt \(The salt trilogy, Volume 1\)](#). Orca Book Publishers, 2009.
[y GEE 2009]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Dystopia, friendship, slavery, weapons

Summary: Hari – one of the enslaved people from Blood Burrow – and Pearl – a member of the ruling families known as Company – forge an unusual alliance and become reluctant traveling companions as they undertake a desperate pilgrimage to save the world from a terror beyond their greatest imaginings.

Hardinge, Frances. [The Lost conspiracy](#). Harper, 2009.
[y HARDINGE 2009]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Sisters, adventure, genocide, non-verbal communication

Summary: In the midst of ancient tensions and new calamity, two sisters are caught in a deadly web of deceptions. Arilou is proclaimed a beautiful prophetess – a Lost; her sister Hathin is her interpreter and attendant. Unknowingly, the sisters are drawn into a sinister conspiracy and Hathin must journey beyond all she has ever known in a desperate attempt to save them both.

Jones, Diana Wynne. [Enchanted glass](#). Greenwillow Books, 2010.
[j JONES 2010]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Magic, fairies, village life, friendship

Summary: After his grandfather dies, Andrew Hope inherits a house and surrounding land in an English village, but things become very complicated when young orphan Aidan shows up and suddenly a host of variously magical townsfolk and interlopers start intruding on their lives.

War

Keller, Julia. [Back home](#). Egmont, 2009. [y KELLER 2009]

Genre: War

Major themes: War, disability, dysfunctional families

Summary: Thirteen-year-old Rachel Browning understands that her father will be different after being injured in the Iraq War, but no one is prepared for the impact that his traumatic brain injury and other wounds have on the entire family.

Booktalk: When Rachel's dad comes back from the Iraq War, he's completely changed. He lost both an arm and a leg, when the truck he was riding in exploded. But worse than that, his brain was damaged. Rachel, her mom, her brother and sister don't

know what to expect as they wait for him to come home from the vet's hospital in Washington DC.

When he does return, he doesn't even seem like their dad. Instead of talking or doing things, he just sits in his wheelchair. Sometimes, he wears his pajamas all day long, even when Rachel's mom yells at him. The doctors say he can walk, but he doesn't even try. He's nothing like the dad that helped her build her fort, before he went to Iraq, or the dad who used to play basketball with her sister.

His injury turns their family life upside down. Counselors, social workers, physical therapists and doctors are all there to help, but sometimes they cause more problems than they fix. Rachel feels angry, but she feels guilty being angry at an injury that's not her dad's fault, or being angry at her dad for not acting like before, when his brain isn't working the way it should. But what if he doesn't get better? Should they continue to try to care for him at home? Will their family ever recover ?

This is a book about a war injury, but it's also a book about how one person's injury scars an entire family. Gradually Rachel's life does change for the better, as she and her family learn it's possible for them to recover, even if their dad doesn't.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Why does Rachel tear down the fort she built with her dad?
- When Rachel's dad comes home, she feels angry at him for his injury, even though she knows it's not his fault. What things help Rachel feel less angry?
- When Rachel's dad returns, it changes the way she interacts with her friends. Why do her old friendships not work? Why is it easier for Rachel to be friends with Mason?

Related websites:

Julia Keller

<http://www.juliakeller.net>

Visit the author's website to listen to her talk about Back Home and read her biography.

Veterans with Brain Injuries still Struggle to Get Help

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/05/23/94635/veterans-with-brain-injuries-still.html>

Nearly 30,000 vets have suffered traumatic brain injuries, yet many feel their injuries have been ignored.

Wounded Warrior Project

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

This organization aims to honor and empower wounded warriors by raising awareness, creating programs that would help, and connecting wounded warriors.

Holmes, Sara Lewis. [Operation Yes](#). Scholastic, 2009. [j HOLMES 2009]

Genre: War.

Major themes: War, schools.

Summary: In her first ever teaching job, Miss Loupe uses improvisational acting exercises with her sixth-grade students at an Air Force base school, and when she experiences a family tragedy, her previously skeptical class members use what they have learned to help her, her brother, and other wounded soldiers.

House, Silas. [Eli the Good](#). Candlewick, 2009. [y HOUSE 2009]

Genre: War

Major themes: War, family, historical fiction.

Summary: In the summer of 1976, ten-year-old Eli Book's excitement over Bicentennial celebrations is tempered by his father's flashbacks to the Vietnam War and other family problems, as well as concern about his tough but troubled best friend, Edie.

Storytelling and the Power of Words

Lawrence, Iain. [The giant-slayer](#). Delacorte, 2009. [j LAWRENCE 2009]

Genre: Adventure, historical fiction

Major themes: Friendship, family, imagination, people with disabilities

Summary: When her eight-year-old neighbor is stricken with polio in 1955, eleven-year-old Laurie discovers that there is power in her imagination as she weaves a story during her visits with him and other patients confined to iron lung machines.

Booktalk: Laurie Valentine didn't make her first real friend until she was 11 years old. Why? Well, Laurie's dad was slightly overprotective. Here were some of the rules she had to follow:

- Never share food with other people
- Never use the drinking fountain
- Don't EVER use public bathrooms
- Don't go to the swimming pool
- Never go to the playground in the summer

What was Laurie's dad so afraid of? Polio.

Laurie grew up in the 1950s when everyone was terrified of this deadly disease, which could lead to paralysis or even death. Like other viruses, polio was easily spread from person to person, often in the summertime. Laurie's dad was a fundraiser for the March of Dimes, raising money to fight polio, so he knew all about how deadly it could be.

By the time she was eleven, Laurie was sick of following all her dad's rules. That spring she met Dickie Espinosa, who had just moved to the neighborhood and became her first real friend. They loved to play all over the neighborhood, making up fantastical stories that they would take turns telling. That is, until one day, Dickie disappeared.

When Laurie went to his house to discover what was wrong, she discovered that Dickie had polio. He was at the hospital in an iron lung, a machine that breathed for him, because he was no longer able to breathe on his own.

More than anything, Laurie wanted to visit Dickie in the hospital, but she knew there was no way her father would allow it. So she went anyway. And when Dickie asked her to tell a story, she started, "Once upon a time, there was a man named Fingal. He kept an inn called the Dragon's Tooth, at the foot of the Great North Road."

Laurie told the story; Dickie and the other polio patients listened and sometimes chimed in, but they soon realized something very strange was happening. Everyone began to feel like they were a part of the story—and like what happened in the story could affect what happened in real life. What kind of a story is this?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Which characters in the story represented each of the polio patients? Who do you think Laurie was in the story?
- Talk about Laurie's father. Why is he so distant? Is he similar to your parents or different?
- This book introduces a lot of new information, both about polio and about the mythical creatures that Laurie includes in the story. Using the websites below, have students do further research to supplement their understanding of the story.
- Have students work on telling a collaborative story, like Laurie and the polio patients do. Some ideas can be found at www.fictionteachers.com/fictionfun/groupstory.html and http://www.bergen.edu/njwa/2008_pres_scribbilz_lesson.pdf.

Related websites:**Whatever Happened to Polio**

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/polio/index.htm>

This fascinating, interactive site from the Smithsonian has pictures and information relating to many of the topics in The Giant Slayer. Learn about the iron lung and other devices, assistive therapy, the fundraising efforts of the March of Dimes, and the polio vaccine.

Encyclopedia Mythica: Bestiary

<http://www.pantheon.org/areas/bestiary/articles.html>

Here you can find descriptions (and some pictures) of the creatures Laurie includes in the story, such as manticores, hydras, gnomes and more.

Lin, Grace. [Where the mountain meets the moon.](#) Little, Brown and Co., 2009.

[j LIN 2009, CD Children LIN, downloadable audiobook]

Genre: Fantasy, fairy tale, adventure

Major themes: Family, duty, poverty, quests

Summary: Minli, an adventurous girl from a poor village, buys a magical goldfish, and then joins a dragon who cannot fly on a quest to find the Old Man of the Moon in hopes of bringing life to Fruitless Mountain and freshness to Jade River.

MacLachlan, Patricia. [Word after word after word.](#) Katherine Tegen Books, 2010.

[j MACLACHLAN 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: School, friendship, illness, healing

Summary: A visiting author teaches five friends about the power of words and writing.

Russell, Ching Yeung. [Tofu quilt.](#) Lee & Low, 2009. [j RUSSELL 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Family, women's roles

Summary: Growing up in 1960s Hong Kong, a young girl dreams of becoming a writer in spite of conventional limits placed on her by society and family.

Historical Fiction

Wiles, Deborah. [Countdown](#). Scholastic Press, 2010. [j WILES 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Families, friendship, anti-Communism, Cuban Missile Crisis

Summary: Eleven-year-old Franny Chapman lives with her family in Washington, DC, and can feel the fear of the nation in the days surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis. Amid the pervading threat of nuclear war, Franny must face the tension between herself and her possibly former best friend, figure out where she fits into her family, and learn to look beyond outward appearances.

Booktalk: Things have just not been going Franny Chapman's way recently. Her fifth-grade teacher is ignoring her, her best friend Margie is acting strangely, her college-aged sister Jo Ellen doesn't live at home anymore, her great uncle Otts freaks out in public (and that nasty Margie makes sure that everyone notices), and she has to live up to the standards of her saintly younger brother Drew. So, she is not having a very good day when the nuclear bomb explodes during recess on a beautiful fall day in October 1962.

Well, it wasn't exactly a nuclear bomb, it was the siren warning that a nuclear bomb was coming, and it was only later that everyone figured out that it was just a drill. No one out on the playground – including the teachers – remembers that they aren't supposed to PANIC!! No one remembers to Duck and Cover as they've watched in that video over and over again. As Franny says, Bert the Turtle (star of the Duck and Cover video) [p. 6-7] "would not give us good marks."

It is just a few days later that Franny learns that a nuclear explosion might come sooner than she thinks. President Kennedy comes on television to explain that the Soviet Union has brought bombs to the island of Cuba and these bombs could easily reach Washington, DC, where Franny lives. Suddenly, everyone is living in a kind of limbo waiting to see what's going to happen. And Franny's problems don't seem very important any more.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Franny's brother Drew – a third grader – is very upset after listening to President Kennedy's address about the nuclear missiles in Cuba. When are you old enough to learn about dangerous things in the world? When do you remember being told about September 11, 2001 and how did that make you feel?
- From the evidence at the only place on Earth where nuclear bombs have been dropped – in Japan – it appears that people who were up to a mile and a half away are killed immediately in the explosion. Yet the information – Duck and Cover – provided to Franny and her family implies that this is all they need to do to survive. Should the government lie in certain circumstances? Why or why not?
- Can you describe what is wrong with Uncle Otts? Do you have any elderly relatives whose behavior sometimes embarrasses you?
- The author calls this book "a documentary novel." Why? Select one of the sections and discuss how it relates to the events of the novel. Did you like the sections that weren't part of Franny's story? Did they add to your appreciation of the novel, or did you just skip over them?

Related websites:

The Cuban Missile Crisis at ThinkQuest

<http://library.thinkquest.org/11046/index.html>

This very thorough website, produced by students, provides a complete history of the events of those two weeks in October, along with biographies of the major players. The author recommends this site in the bibliography at the end of *Countdown*.

Cuban Missile Crisis – John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/JFK+in+History/Cuban+Missile+Crisis.htm>

The Kennedy Library web pages devoted to the Crisis include a slide show and an online exhibition.

Fact Sheet: 89th Airlift Wing

<http://www.andrews.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=4748>

This fact sheet provides some basic information on the modern 89th Airlift Wing – the branch of the Air Force where Franny’s dad works.

Ground Zero

<http://www.carloslabs.com/node/16>

This macabre website allows you to visualize the fallout from a nuclear bomb. Type “Andrews Air Force Base” into the Search box at the top, and select a weapon from the drop-down menu at the bottom to see the fate of Franny’s neighborhood if the crisis had not been averted.

Memorandum: on the SNCC Mississippi Summer Project

<http://anna.lib.usm.edu/~spscol/crda/ellin/ellin062.html>

[*Spoiler!*] Franny’s older sister Jo Ellen is preparing to go to Mississippi during the summer to register African Americans to vote. This website features the memorandum the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) used to recruit students for a summer of activism. Check out Item #3 under How You Can Participate: Volunteers needed to be prepared that they might go to jail!

Deborah Wiles

<http://deborahwiles.com/site/>

At the author’s website, scroll down to “About the Sixties” for her playlist of all the songs mentioned in the book, as well as a chance to watch the Duck and Cover video that Franny watches at school.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. [One Crazy Summer](#). HarperCollins, 2010.

[j WILLIAMSG 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Sisters, mother-daughter relationships, civil rights movement

Summary: In the summer of 1968 – after traveling from Brooklyn to Oakland, California, to spend a month with the mother they barely know – eleven-year-old Delphine and her two younger sisters arrive to a cold welcome as they discover that their mother – a dedicated poet and printer – is resentful of the intrusion of their visit and wants them to attend a nearby Black Panther summer camp.

Booktalk: Delphine, Vonetta and Fern are taking their first plane ride ever. It’s a little bumpy, and Delphine’s trying to keep her younger sisters calm by telling them that the

clouds are just fighting. None of the girls want to be on the plane – which is taking them clear across the country from Brooklyn, New York to Oakland, California to spend the summer with their mother, Cecile. Cecile abandoned her daughters a few weeks after Fern’s birth seven years ago in 1961 and they haven’t seen her since.

The sisters are waiting at the airport with the stewardess when Delphine spots the woman she thinks is her mother: “Tall, dark brown woman in man’s pants whose face was half hidden by a scarf, hat, and big dark shades. She was like a colored movie star. Tall, mysterious and on the run.” Cecile hustles them out of the airport and onto a bus that takes them to her house. Then she sends them down the street – a street they’ve never been on before – to pick up some fast Chinese food. Then she drops the bombshell: There’ll be no Disneyland, no visits to the ocean, no mother-daughter bonding. Cecile expects them to head out of the house in the morning and not come back until dinner. “Go down to the People’s Center if you want breakfast and something to do all day.”

The People’s Center is run by an organization called the Black Panthers: “Black folks, in black clothes, rapping revolution.” Delphine can’t believe it! “Our crazy mother was sending us outside to find militant strangers if we wanted to eat.” Seeing her mother again, for the first time since she was four years old is going to be as bad as she anticipated. It is, indeed, going to be One Crazy Summer.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Delphine tells us that Cecile and Big Ma have differing ideas about how African Americans should speak and behave in public. Provide some examples. What does Delphine do with this conflicting advice?
- Is Cecile a bad mother? Why or why not? How does knowing her change Delphine and her sisters? How does knowing them change Cecile?
- Why do you think the Black Panthers help children as part of their political activism? Should adults use children to promote their goals? Why or why not?
- The sisters recite Nzila’s (Cecile’s) poem on pages 196-197 at the rally. What is Nzila trying to say in this poem?

Related websites:

Social Activism Sound Recording Project: Black Panthers

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificapanthers.html>

The University of California at Berkeley has gathered sound and video recordings of Black Panther Party activities and linked to them at this website. Scroll down for a chronological history of the movement. Pay close attention to the summer of 1968!

1968: The Year That Rocked Our World

http://www.aarpmagazine.org/people/1968_feature_article.html/page=4

Kathleen Neal Cleaver – a member of the Black Panther Party – speaks briefly about why she got involved in the movement and what happened in that critical year of 1968.

How to print with letterpress

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2010/apr/03/print-with-letterpress>

The Guardian newspaper published a brief article about letterpress printing (the way that Cecile prints her poems and flyers). Check out this video (from a letterpress printing company) to see printing in action: <http://www.starshaped.com/>.

Rita Williams-Garcia

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

The author's website includes a biography and frequently asked questions. Rita Williams-Garcia sponsors a short-story competition for young writers each year. Click on the link Writing Contest for more information.

Ketchum, Liza. [Newsgirl](#). Viking, 2009. [j KETCHUM 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: California Gold Rush, gender roles, prejudice

Summary: In the spring of 1851 San Francisco is booming. Twelve-year-old Amelia Forrester has just arrived with her family and they are eager to make a new life in Phoenix City. But the mostly male town is not that hospitable to females and Amelia decides she will earn more money as a boy. Cutting her hair and donning a cap, she joins a gang of newsboys, selling Eastern newspapers for a fortune.

Latham, Irene. [Leaving Gee's Bend](#). G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2010. [j LATHAM 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Great Depression, racism, quilting, family

Summary: Ludelphia Bennett – a determined, ten-year-old African American girl in 1932 Gee's Bend, Alabama – leaves home in an effort to find medical help for her sick mother, and she recounts her ensuing adventures in a quilt she is making.

McMullan, Margaret. [Sources of light](#). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. [y MCMULLAN 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Civil rights movement, photography, grief

Summary: Fourteen-year-old Samantha and her mother move to Jackson, Mississippi, in 1962 after her father is killed in Vietnam. During the year they spend there, Sam encounters both love and hate as she learns about photography from a new friend of her mother's and witnesses the prejudice and violence of the segregationists of the South.

Peck, Richard. [A season of gifts](#). New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2009. [j PECK 2009]

Genre: Humor, historical fiction

Major themes: 1950s, small-town life, neighbors

Summary: Many are the surprising gifts bestowed on twelve-year-old Bob Barnhart and his family, who have recently moved to a small Illinois town in 1958, by their larger-than-life neighbor, Mrs. Dowdel.

Phelan, Matt. [The storm in the barn](#). Candlewick Press, 2009. [jgn PHELAN 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction, graphic novel

Major themes: Dust Bowl, families, supernatural elements

Summary: In Kansas in the year 1937, eleven-year-old Jack Clark faces his share of ordinary challenges: local bullies, his father's failed expectations, a little sister

with an eye for trouble. But he also has to deal with the effects of the Dust Bowl, including rising tensions in his small town and the spread of a shadowy illness.

Richards, Jame. [Three rivers rising: A novel of the Johnstown flood.](#) Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. [y RICHARDS 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction, novel in verse

Major themes: Social class, natural disasters, romance

Summary: In 1889, 16-year-old Celestia is a wealthy member of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, where she meets and falls in love with Peter, a hired hand who lives in the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Watts, Irene N. [No moon.](#) Tundra Books, 2010. [y WATTS 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Social class, families, manmade disasters, fear of drowning

Summary: Louisa Gardener, the 14-year-old nursemaid to the young daughters of a wealthy, titled family living in London, England in 1912, overcomes her fear of the ocean and sails with her charges to New York aboard the Titanic.

World War II

Kim Susan. [City of spies.](#) FirstSecond, 2010. [ygn KIM 2010]

Genre: World War II

Major themes: World War II, spies

Summary: In this graphic novel, Evelyn, a neglected rich girl, pairs up with Tony, who lives in her building, to rid New York City of Nazi spies in 1942.

Booktalk: Evelyn's mom is dead and her rich dad has better things to do than take care of his daughter for the summer. He decides to dump her with her bohemian aunt in New York City. Lonely and unwanted, Evelyn spends most of her time drawing her own superhero comics, about Zirconium Man and Scooter (who look suspiciously like Evelyn and her dad [page 71]).

When Evelyn meets Tony, the superintendent's kid, the two of them decide to hunt down Nazi spies. It's 1942, during World War II, and as propaganda posters warn them "The enemy is listening" – any German immigrant might be a Nazi spy.

After a couple of false leads that get them into trouble, the two encounter a real case of espionage, when a stranger accidentally thrusts a book filled with secret code into Tony's hands. When the two kids crack the code, they know they're on to something big. *Really big.* But while tracking down the spies, they end up captured by the spies themselves. It's up to Evelyn's Aunt Lia and a handsome policeman to save the kids. Packed with all the twists and turns of a great spy thriller, this graphic novel turns one girl's lonely summer into an exciting adventure of spies, comics, love and friendship.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- When Evelyn and Tony set off to search for spies, there are posters all over New York City that say "The enemy is listening" (page 43). Why were these warnings posted? Why do all the German shops have names like "Uncle Sam Donut Shop?" (page 31).

- Evelyn's comic is called Zirconium Man and Scooter. Look at how the characters are drawn on pages 1-5, compared with pages 24-25. Why do they look different?
- You need a spy partner for this. Using old magazines, see if you can write coded messages for each other, like the spies do in this book (see page 85), underlining letters, and folding over the corners of pages. Trade magazines, and uncode your secret message!
- Try making a comic where you get to hang out with a superhero you make up.

Related websites:

Interview with the Creators of City of Spies

<http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=2600>

This interview explains where the idea for this comic came from, and how the creators came to work on it.

Nazi Spies come Ashore

<http://www.americainwwii.com/stories/nazispiescomeashore.html>

There really were Nazi spies in New York City, but their story is much different than the comic.

Top Spy Secrets

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

Want to learn some spy techniques for your own investigations? Check out this website!

Chapman, Fern Schumer. [Is it night or day?](#) Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2010.

[y CHAPMAN 2010]

Genre: World War II

Major themes: World War II, Holocaust, refugees

Summary: In 1938, Edith Westerfeld, a young German Jew, is sent by her parents to Chicago, Illinois, where she lives with an aunt and uncle and tries to assimilate into American culture, while worrying about her parents and mourning the loss of everything she has ever known. Based on the author's mother's experience, includes an afterword about a little-known program that brought 1,200 Jewish children to safety during World War II.

Gleitzman, Morris. [Once.](#) Henry Holt, 2010. [y GLEITZMAN 2010]

Genre: World War II

Major themes: World War II, Poland, Holocaust

Summary: After living in a Catholic orphanage for nearly four years, a naïve Jewish boy runs away and embarks on a journey across Nazi-occupied Poland to find his parents.

Lasky, Kathryn. [Ashes.](#) Viking, 2010. [y LASKY 2010]

Genre: World War II

Major themes: World War II, Germany

Summary: In 1932 Berlin, thirteen-year-old Gaby Schramm witnesses the beginning of Hitler's rise to power, as soldiers become ubiquitous, her beloved literature teacher starts wearing a jeweled swastika pin, and the family's dear friend, Albert

Einstein, leaves the country while Gaby's parents secretly bury his books and papers in their small yard.

LeZotte, Ann Clare. [T4: A novel in verse](#). Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008. [y LEZOTTE 2008]

Genre: World War II

Major themes: World War II, Germany, deafness, Holocaust, eugenics

Summary: When the Nazi party takes control of Germany, thirteen-year-old Paula, who is deaf, finds her world-as-she-knows-it turned upside down, as she is taken into hiding to protect her from the new law nicknamed T4. Novel is written as poetry.

Thor, Annika. [A faraway island](#). Delacorte, 2009. [j THOR 2009]

Genre: World War II

Major themes: World War II, sisters, Sweden

Summary: In 1939 Sweden, two Jewish sisters wait for their parents to join them in fleeing the Nazis in Austria, but while eight-year-old Nellie settles in quickly, twelve-year-old Stephie feels stranded at the end of the world, with a foster mother who is as cold and unforgiving as the island on which they live.

Growing Up

López, Diana. [Confetti girl](#). Little, Brown, 2009. [j LOPEZ 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Families, grief/loss, friendship, romance, school story

Summary: After the death of her mother, Texas sixth-grader Lina's grades and mood drop as she watches her father lose himself more and more in books, while her best friend uses Lina as an excuse to secretly meet her boyfriend.

Booktalk: Lina Flores has an unusual collection: socks. She even keeps her socks organized in special drawers in her dresser:

Daily socks: the ones she puts on when getting dressed each day

Lonely socks: the ones that have lost their partners

Holey socks: the socks with holes that she doesn't wear anymore, but turns into art projects instead. Did you know you can make earmuffs, coasters, bookmarks or wallets out of socks?

Sock heaven: Even when she outgrows her socks, Lina still doesn't get rid of them! Instead, she puts them in this drawer.

Lina is aware that she's a bit obsessive about her socks, but she has to find things to do to keep herself busy since her dad won't get a TV. Mr. Flores is an English teacher, and he'd much rather read than watch TV. Lina doesn't agree.

Mr. Flores has been spending even more time reading lately, ever since Lina's mom died unexpectedly last year. Lina thinks he's trying to immerse himself in stories to avoid his sadness.

Luckily Lina has a best friend, Vanessa, who understands completely. Vanessa's parents recently divorced, and ever since, her mom has been acting strangely, too. In Texas, where Lina & Vanessa live, people often make *cascarones*, or confetti-filled

eggs for Easter. Vanessa's mom, however, has started making *cascarones* all year long, along with watching soap operas all day on TV.

In spite of the strangeness of the grown-ups in her life, Lina feels like she's managing things pretty well. But when Vanessa suddenly starts avoiding her to spend time with a new boyfriend, and she gets kicked off the volleyball team for bad grades, Lina realizes maybe she's as screwed up as her dad. Her mom always used to tell her, "Despues de la lluvia sale el sol" (or, After the rain, the sun shines). So when is the rain going to end?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Lina and her dad have very different personalities as well as different styles of grieving . How do they each grieve for Lina's mom? Do you and your parents have similar or different personalities?
- Although Lina & Vanessa are best friends, they don't always agree on everything. What are some of their major differences of opinion? Do you always agree with your best friend? Why or why not?
- Make *cascarones*! Follow the directions before chapter 1 or see the website below.
- Each chapter begins with a *dicho* (Spanish proverb). Have students collect proverbs from other cultures and make a collection.

Related websites:

Teacher Resource

http://www.dianalopezbooks.com/Teacher_Resource.php

At the author's website, find a guide with discussion questions and activities.

Cascarones

<http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/do/cascarones.html>

Find pictures and instructions on how to make *cascarones* here.

Dichos

<http://www.nebraskafolklife.org/handouts/nxh-dichos-1.6.pdf>

Find more *dichos* at this site.

Bredsdorff, Bodil. [Eidi](#). Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009. [j BREDSORF 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Families, secrets, friendship

Summary: Eidi leaves her mother and stepfather in Crow Cove to live in a nearby village, where she meets the much younger Tink and rescues him from the abusive man he has been living with.

Giff, Patricia Reilly. [Wild girl](#). Wendy Lamb Books, 2009.

[j GIFF 2009, downloadable audiobook]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Immigration, family, animals

Summary: When twelve-year-old Lidie leaves Brazil to join her father and brother on a horse ranch in New York, she has a hard time adjusting to her changed circumstances, as does a new horse that has come to the ranch.

Lowry, Lois. [The birthday ball](#). Houghton Mifflin, 2010. [j LOWRY 2010]

Genre: Fantasy

Major themes: Social roles, humor, friendship

Summary: When a bored Princess Patricia Priscilla makes her chambermaid switch identities with her so she can attend the village school, her attitude changes and she plans a new way to celebrate her sixteenth birthday.

**McKinnon, Hannah Roberts. [Franny Parker](#). Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009.
[j MCKINNON 2009]**

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Family, friendship, animals, secrets, abuse

Summary: Through a hot, dry Oklahoma summer, twelve-year-old Franny tends wild animals brought by her neighbors, hears gossip during a weekly quilting bee, befriends a new neighbor who has some big secrets, and learns to hope.

**Tracy, Kristen. [Camille McPhee fell under the bus](#). Delacorte, 2009.
[j TRACY 2009]**

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Family problems, friendship, school

Summary: Ten-year-old Camille McPhee relates the ups and downs of her fourth-grade year at her Idaho elementary school as she tries to adjust to the absence of her best friend, maintain control of her low-blood sugar, cope with the intensifying conflict between her parents, and understand the importance of honesty and fairness.

Families/Orphans

Carmichael, Clay. [Wild things](#). Front Street, 2009. [j CARMICHAEL 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Families, human-animal relationships, art

Summary: Stubborn, self-reliant, eleven-year-old Zoë, recently orphaned, moves to the country to live with her prickly half-uncle – a famous doctor and sculptor – and together they learn about trust and the strength of family.

Booktalk: Zoë Royster has been alone pretty much all of her 11 years. I mean, her mom was around – if you can call it being around when she spends all her time locked in her bedroom going quietly crazy. Zoë paid the rent, did the shopping and cooking, kept the house clean and did the laundry. She never went to school, but hung out at the library a lot. But now her mom's died (she committed suicide) and Zoë finds herself adopted by an uncle she never knew she had: Her father's older half-brother Henry.

They say that Uncle Henry's a little crazy too – he used to be a famous heart surgeon but now he makes huge sculptures out of scrap metal -- but at least he appears to be able to take on *some* adult responsibilities. Still, Zoë doesn't trust him. The night she moves in, he tells her that he's "got to see to a few things tomorrow," so she's fully prepared for the "ditch-the-kid countdown:"

Stage "Three: The lame excuse announcing the all-day or all-night errand. Two: The weeklong trip to help a needy friend or tend a dying relative. One: The job out of state that would take as long as it took. Then blastoff."

Zoë keeps her suitcase packed; 'cause if anyone's leaving, it's gonna be her.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Zoë considers herself pretty self-sufficient because she's been looking after herself (and her mentally ill mother) for years. But there are things she needs adults for. Can you name some of these things, and describe how Zoë figures out she needs help?
- Did you like the portions of the book from Mr. C'mere's perspective? What did you learn from them that you couldn't learn from Zoë's first-person narrative?
- Were you surprised to learn who Wil is? What do you think will happen to Zoë and Wil?
- Uncle Henry creates a metal sculpture of Zoë that eventually ends up in the front yard of his house. Create a sculpture of someone you love out of found objects.

Related websites:

Alley Cat Allies

<http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=434>

This website has links to lots of information on feral cats. Be sure to scroll down on this page to watch the video.

Clay Carmichael

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

Scroll down on the author's website to read about her and see pictures of her artwork (click on Art, Cards & Archival Prints).

Mike Roig – Sculptor in Metals and Motion

<http://mikeroig.com/>

The author credits her husband, Mike Roig, as her inspiration for the works of Zoë's Uncle Henry. See some of Mike's sculptures at his website.

Appelt, Kathi. [Keeper](#). Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2010.

[j APPELT 2010].

Genre: Magical realism

Major themes: Parent-child relationships, small communities, mythology

Summary: On the night of the blue moon when mermaids are said to gather on a sandbar in the Gulf of Mexico, 10-year-old Keeper sets out in a small boat, with her dog BD and a seagull named Captain, determined to find her mother – a mermaid, as Keeper as always believed – who left long ago to return to the sea.

DiCamillo, Kate. [The magician's elephant](#). Candlewick Press, 2009.

[j DICAMILLO 2009]

Genre: Magical realism, adventure

Major themes: Magic, orphans

Summary: When ten-year-old Peter Augustus Duchene encounters a fortune teller in the marketplace one day and she tells him that his sister – who is presumed dead – is in fact alive, he embarks on a remarkable series of adventures as he desperately tries to find her.

Dutton, Sandra. [Mary Mae and the gospel truth](#). Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2010. [j DUTTON 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Families, homeschooling, evolution and creationism

Summary: Ten-year-old Mary Mae, living with her parents in fossil-rich southern Ohio, tries to reconcile – despite her mother’s strong disapproval – her family’s Creationist beliefs with the prehistoric fossils she studies in school.

Holm, Jennifer L. [Turtle in paradise](#). Random House, 2010. [j HOLM 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Families, friendship, the Great Depression

Summary: In 1935, when her mother gets a job housekeeping for a woman who does not like children, eleven-year-old Turtle is sent to stay with relatives she has never met in far-away Key West, Florida.

Marsden, Carolyn. [Take me with you](#). Candlewick Press, 2010. [j MARSDEN 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Orphans, friendship, racially mixed people, parent-child relationships

Summary: Raised in an Italian orphanage in the years following World War II, a biracial girl named Susanna and her best friend Pina want to be adopted but fear being separated.

Mysteries

Stead , Rebecca. [When you reach me](#). Wendy Lamb Books, 2009. [j STEAD 2009, CD Children STEAD, downloadable audiobook]

Genre: Mystery

Major themes: Mystery, Friendship, Fantasy, Time Travel

Summary: As her mother prepares to be a contestant on the 1980s television game show, "The \$20,000 Pyramid," a twelve-year-old New York City girl tries to make sense of a series of mysterious notes received from an anonymous source that seems to defy the laws of time and space.

Booktalk: It’s the late 70s in New York City, and Miranda and her best friend, Sal, have stopped hanging out together. Sal got punched in the face by another kid, and after that, he suddenly stops talking to Miranda. Losing Sal means that Miranda has to walk home alone past the crazy guy on the corner – the guy who shakes his fist at the sky and laughs these loud, crazy laughs and sleeps with his head under the mailbox. She finds new friends – a boy who likes to ride skateboards and a girl who has also broken up with her best friend.

But while all this is happening, some really strange things are going on too. Like the book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, that Miranda is obsessed with and reads over and over – and how the plot almost seems to become a part of her real life. And then she starts receiving these mysterious notes, letters that are always kind of strange and left in unexpected places. They say things like, “You will want proof. 3 p.m. today: Colin’s knapsack.” And that message predicts exactly what ends up happening that day – the proof *is* found in Colin’s knapsack, at three on the dot. Miranda has no idea who is writing the notes or where they’re coming from – but whoever it is seems to know personal things about Miranda that no one could know, and even things that happen in the future.

This amazing story is part mystery, part fantasy, and even part historical fiction. This is the kind of book you'll think about for days after you finish it, and you'll probably end up reading it all over again. And be sure to look closely at the cover – therein lie the clues.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- When Miranda's best friend Sal stops talking to her, Miranda is forced to find new friends. What determines if someone is your best friend? If you have a lot of friends, is one always the 'best' friend?
- Why do Miranda and her friends like working at the sandwich shop, even though they aren't getting paid?
- How soon did you figure out who was sending Miranda the mysterious notes? What was the clue that tipped you off?
- Imagine you could time travel to the future or the past, and talk to your younger or older self. Which direction would you go, and what messages would you give yourself?

Related websites:

Interview with author Rebecca Stead

<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6666680.html>Annotation of site #1

Find out more about what inspired the author to write this award-winning book.

Rebecca Stead Discusses When You Reach Me

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZTzzR4SToc>

Here's a video interview with the book's author, talking about her book and how she writes.

A Wrinkle in Time Soon to become a Movie and a Graphic Novel

<http://riskybusiness.hollywoodreporter.com/2010/03/19/jeff-stockwell-madeleine-lengle-cary-granat-wrinkle-in-time-bedrock-studios/>

<http://www.comicsalliance.com/2010/04/19/hope-larson-to-adapt-a-wrinkle-in-time/>

You might want to read *A Wrinkle in Time*, Miranda's favorite book, so you'll know the story when the film comes out.

Kreig, Jim. [Griff Carver, hallway patrol.](#) Razorbill, 2010. [j KRIEG 2010]

Genre: Mystery

Major themes: Mystery, school story

Summary: Legendary Griff Carver joins the Rampart Middle School Hallway Patrol and with the help of his new friends, Griff solves the case of counterfeit hall passes.

Leck, James. [The adventures of Jack Lime.](#) KCP Fiction, 2010. [y LECK 2010]

Genre: Mystery

Major themes: Mystery

Summary: Jack Lime solves problems for his fellow Iona High students. Sometimes he falls for the dames who hire him, sometimes he falls in the river and sometimes he falls asleep (he's narcoleptic). But rest assured that whether he's tracking down a missing banana-seat bike or a kidnapped hamster, Lime will follow every lead.

Shiga, Jason. [Meanwhile](#). Amulet Books, 2010. [jgn SHIGA 2010]

Genre: Mystery

Major themes: Mystery, puzzles, choose-your-own adventure

Summary: In this choose-your-own adventure graphic novel, a boy stumbles on the laboratory of a mad scientist who asks him to choose between testing a mind-reading device, a time machine, and a doomsday machine.

Stratton, Allan. [Borderline](#). HarperTeen, 2010. [y STRATTON 2010]

Genre: Mystery

Major themes: Mystery, terrorism, father-son relationships

Summary: Despite the strained relationship between them, teenaged Sami Sabiri risks his life to uncover the truth when his father is implicated in a terrorist plot.

Tough Times: Illness and Disabilities

Draper, Sharon. [Out of my mind](#). Atheneum, 2010. [j DRAPER 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, school story, inclusion

Summary: Considered by many to be mentally retarded, a brilliant, impatient fifth-grader with cerebral palsy discovers a technological device that will allow her to speak for the first time.

Booktalk: [Read chapter 1.]

Not only can Melody not talk, she also can't walk, feed herself, or go to the bathroom on her own. She has a condition called cerebral palsy, which affects the way her brain controls her body.

If you look at Melody, you see a girl with short, dark, curly hair strapped into a wheelchair. She's small for her age, and sometimes her body kicks or jerks unexpectedly.

But here's what you can't see about Melody: she loves music, has a great sense of humor, and is "ridiculously smart." Melody has a photographic memory and can remember all the facts she's heard at school and on TV. She knows the phone numbers from every infomercial, which actors and actresses are on each show, all the state capitals, and the names for the different types of clouds. But nobody knows this side of Melody.

That all changes the year Melody starts fifth grade. That year her school starts "inclusion" classes, so Melody gets to attend class with all the other kids. She also gets a special device called a Medi-Talker—when she hits a button, a voice talks for her. Finally, Melody can speak for herself.

Not too long after that, one of Melody's teachers announces that the school will be choosing students for the Whiz Kids quiz team. Students who can answer the most questions correctly can compete on the team, and the school that wins gets to take a trip to Washington, DC for the national finals. Melody knows she's smart enough to be on the team—but can she convince her teachers and the other students?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Mrs. V ask Melody if she would rather be able to walk or talk. If you were in Melody's situation, which one would you want to do more?

- What does being on the quiz team teach Melody about friendship? Have you ever had friends treat you in a similar way?
- What do you think the title of the book means?
- Discuss the teachers Melody has had over the years. Which were the best? Which were the worst? Why?

Related websites:

Out of My Mind

<http://sharondraper.com/bookdetail.asp?id=35>

Sharon Draper's website includes an interview about Out of My Mind, as well as a lengthy study guide with questions and classroom activities.

Cerebral Palsy

http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/brain/cerebral_palsy.html

Find more information about Melody's medical condition here. Learn about what causes it, how it is treated and more.

Assistive Technology Devices: Communication

<http://techaccess.edb.utexas.edu/communication.html>

Curious about what Melody's Medi-Talker looks like? You can view pictures of many different kinds of assistive technology for communication at this site.

Cushman, Karen. Alchemy and Meggy Swann. Clarion, 2010. [j CUSHMAN 2010]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Friendship, family, prejudice, ethics, Elizabethan England

Summary: In 1573, the crippled, scorned, and destitute Meggy Swann goes to London, where she meets her father, an impoverished alchemist, and eventually discovers that although her legs are bent and weak, she has many other strengths.

Edwardson, Debby Dahl. Blessing's bead. Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2009.

[y EDWARDSON 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction, realistic fiction

Major themes: Families, grief/loss, Native Alaskans

Summary: In 1917, Aaluk leaves for Siberia while her sister Nutaaq remains in their Alaskan village and becomes one of the few survivors of an influenza epidemic; then in 1986, Nutaaq's great-granddaughter leaves her mother due to a different kind of sickness and returns to the village where they were born.

Moss, Jenny. Winnie's war. Walker, 2009. [j MOSS 2009]

Genre: Historical fiction

Major themes: Family, poverty, grief/loss

Summary: Living in the shadow of a Texas cemetery, twelve-year-old Winnie Grace struggles to keep the Spanish influenza of 1918 from touching her family--her coffin-building father, her troubled mother, and her two baby sisters.

Sonnenblick, Jordan. After ever after. Scholastic, 2010. [y SONNENBLI 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, grief/loss, romance, family

Summary: Although Jeff and Tad, encouraged by a new friend, Lindsey, make a deal to help one another overcome aftereffects of their cancer treatments in preparation for eighth-grade graduation, Jeff still craves advice from his older brother Stephen, who is studying drums in Africa.

Steampunk/Science Fiction

Westerfeld, Scott. [Leviathan](#). Simon Pulse, 2009.

[y WESTERFEL 2009, CD YA WESTERFEL, downloadable audiobook]

Genre: Steampunk, adventure

Major themes: War, friendship, genetic engineering

Summary: In an alternate 1914 Europe, fifteen-year-old Austrian Prince Alek – on the run from the Clanker Powers who are attempting to take over the globe using mechanical machinery – forms an uneasy alliance with Deryn who – disguised as a boy to join the British Air Service – is learning to fly genetically engineered beasts.

Booktalk: They awoke Prince Aleksander in the middle of the night and spirited him out of the castle. They made their escape in a Cyklop Stormwalker (p. 9), seeking sanctuary high in the Swiss Alps. His parents – heirs to the throne – have been assassinated and his retainers believe that Alek is in mortal danger.

Deryn Sharp must pass one test to qualify as a Midshipman in the British Air Service. She – disguised as a he – just needs to take a brief ride on a Huxley ascender (p. 32), made from the DNA of medusas, jellyfish and other poisonous sea creatures. The test was going very well, when the thunderstorm moved in and sent her on a collision course with the Leviathan (p. 70).

Aleksander's and Deryn's countries are at war: Austria-Hungary and Great Britain. But this isn't the World War I you might be familiar with. It's the Darwinists vs. the Clankers. Darwinists build their war materials out of the DNA of living creatures – creating flying warships like the Leviathan out of whales and elephants. Clankers are devoted to machinery, heavy metal behemoths like the Stormwalker or airships known as Zeppelins.

Stranded on a glacier in the Swiss Alps, Deryn and Alek are fated to meet. The Clankers chasing Alek encounter the Leviathan making a top-secret journey to Constantinople and shoot it down. Only by working as allies will Alek and Deryn survive on that glacier and raise the Leviathan to fight another day.

[Leviathan](#) is an exciting adventure story in the steampunk tradition that will be continued this fall in [Behemoth](#).

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Research the actual events that led up to the beginning of World War II (an overview of which is in the author's Afterword). How has the author changed these events? Why did he change them?
- Write a brief paragraph supporting either the Clanker or the Darwinist cause.
- What do you think is in Nora Barlow's eggs and why is she so keen to get them to Constantinople?

Related websites:

BBC – History – World Wars: The Origins of World War One

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/origins_01.shtml

The BBC examines World War I in depth.

Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, 1914

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/duke.htm>

The site, EyeWitness to History offers edited primary sources – documents written at the time of historical events. Two witnesses to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand are recorded here.

westerblog

<http://scottwesterfeld.com/blog/>

The author's website is more than just his blog. Be sure to check out the Leviathan book trailer!

Keith Thompson Art

<http://keiththompsonart.com/leviathanbook.html>

The illustrator of Leviathan features much of the art he drew for the book. Click on the thumbnails for the full-size images. Visit this page (<http://keiththompsonart.com/pages/grandmap.html>) for the full map used in the endpapers, along with an explanation of what each image means.

Milford, Kate. [The boneshaker](#). Clarion Books, 2010. [y MILFORD 2010]

Genre: Fantasy, historical fiction

Major themes: Pacts with the devil, families, mechanical toys, storytelling

Summary: When Jake Limberleg brings his traveling medicine show to a small Missouri town in 1913, 13-year-old Natalie senses that something is wrong, and – after investigating – learns that her love of automata and other machines make her the only one who can set things right.

Reeve, Philip. [Fever Crumb](#). Scholastic Press, 2010. [y REEVE 2010]

Genre: Steampunk

Major themes: Dystopia, identity, adventure

Summary: Foundling Fever Crumb has been raised as an engineer although females in a future London, England, are not believed capable of rational thought. At age fourteen, she leaves her sheltered world and begins to learn startling truths about her past while facing danger in the present.

Teague, Mark. [The doom machine](#). Blue Sky Press, 2009. [j TEAGUE 2009]

Genre: Science fiction

Major themes: Space travel, extraterrestrials, friendship, humor

Summary: When a spaceship lands in the small town of Vern Hollow in 1956, juvenile delinquent Jack Creedle and prim, studious Isadora Shumway form an unexpected alliance as they try to keep a group of extraterrestrials from stealing Uncle Bud's space travel machine.

Cross-Cultural

Clements, Andrew. [Extra credit](#). Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2009.
[j CLEMENTS 2009, downloadable audiobook]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Cross-cultural friendship, pen pals

Summary: As letters flow back and forth--between the prairies of Illinois and the mountains of Afghanistan, across cultural and religious divides--sixth-grader Abby, ten-year-old Amira, and eleven-year-old Sadeed begin to speak and listen to each other.

Booktalk: Arrrgh! It's not that Abby couldn't do her homework, it's just, there were so many other things she'd rather be doing. Like tramping in the woods, or doing anything outdoors related to rock climbing (even though Illinois was flat as a board). But now her ignored homework and bad grades have caught up with her. She was failing sixth grade! The *only* way she could pass was by doing all her work plus an extra credit assignment to write to a pen pal in another country and do a bulletin board display based on the letters she received.

When Sadeed gets Abby's letter in Afghanistan, he's not sure what to think. The stickers and brightly colored stationery look childish, and he's barely talked to girls, let alone write them letters. Since it's not proper for a boy to write to a girl, the village elders decide that his younger sister Amira will dictate and sign the letter – but Sadeed, with his superior English skills, must write it. Amira's message is bland and short. Sadeed can't help but add some of his own thoughts to the letter.

But when Abby replies to Amira, Sadeed gets envious. Abby's letter should be to him, she's responding to the things that came from him, not his sister. He decides he must secretly send her a letter from himself.

As their letter writing continues, Abby and Sadeed begin to overcome both the distance and the differences that separate them. A traded pinch of soil and piece of rock from their homelands, become symbolic gifts for what they've really given each other--the gift of friendship.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Addy and Sadeed send each other some gifts that represent the place where they live. Talk about what they do with these gifts, and why they have special meaning to both students.
- When Abby writes to her pen pal in Afghanistan, she expects there will be differences in how they dress, where they live, and what they eat. But as she and Sadeed begin to exchange messages, other cultural differences affect their communication. For example, Sadeed doesn't think girls are too smart, and Addy can't understand why if you lived in a mountainous place, you wouldn't be into mountain climbing. Talk about how their letter writing changes their views.
- With your teacher's help, explore pen pals websites (see below) as a class and come up with your own pen pal exchange.

Related websites:

A letter from the Author to readers of Extra Credit

<http://www.andrewclements.com/other-letter-extra.html>Annotation of site #1

Andrew Clements writes to you about the importance of letter writing in his books.

Author Andrew Clements' Website

<http://www.andrewclements.com/index.html>Annotation of Site #2

Explore other books by this author and learn more about the author.

PENPALS: The websites below are internet sites for connecting with pen pals. Teachers should read through the safety warnings and follow precautions recommended by these sites.

Penpal Party

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

Click on "Teachers" to find out about other classes looking for penpals.

Student Letter Exchange

<http://www.pen-pal.com/index.php>

This is one of the oldest pen pal sites around. Students ages 8-23 can sign up for free and be connected with a pen pal with similar interests.

Almond, David. [Raven summer](#). Delacorte, 2009. [y ALMOND 2009]

Genre: Cross-cultural

Major themes: Cross-cultural, foster children

Summary: Led to an abandoned baby by a raven, fourteen-year-old Liam seems fated to meet two foster children who have experienced the world's violence in very different ways as he struggles to understand war, family problems, and friends who grow apart.

Carter, Anne Laurel. [The shepherd's granddaughter](#). Groundwood Books, 2008. [y CARTER 2008]

Genre: Cross-cultural

Major themes: Cross-cultural, Israeli-Palestine conflict

Summary: Amani longs to be a shepherd like her grandfather, Seedo. Like many Palestinians, her family has grazed sheep above the olive groves of the family homestead for generations, and she has been steeped in Seedo's stories, especially one about a secret meadow called the Firdoos--and the wolf that once showed him the path there.

Perkins, Mitali. [Bamboo people](#). Charlesbridge, 2010. [j PERKINS 2010]

Genre: Cross-cultural

Major themes: Cross-cultural, friendship, Burma, war

Summary: Two Burmese boys, one a Karenni refugee and the other the son of an imprisoned Burmese doctor, meet in the jungle and in order to survive they must learn to trust each other.

Resau, Laura. [Star in the forest](#). Delacorte, 2010. [j RESAU 2010]

Genre: Cross-cultural

Major themes: Cross-cultural, friendship

Summary: After eleven-year-old Zitlally's father is deported to Mexico, she takes refuge in her trailer park's forest of rusted car parts, where she befriends a spunky neighbor and finds a stray dog that she nurses back to health and believes she must keep safe so that her father will return.

School Stories

Gephart, Donna. [How to survive middle school.](#) Delacorte, 2010.

[j GEPHART 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, bullying (including online), family

Summary: When thirteen-year-old David Greenberg's best friend makes the start of middle school even worse than he feared it could be, David becomes friends with Sophie, who shares his love of television shows and posts one of their skits on YouTube, making them wildly popular--online, at least.

Booktalk: Someday, David Greenberg is going to be a famous talk show host, just like his idol, Jon Stewart. He's even created his own show, TalkTime, and he posts the episodes of it on YouTube. But before starting his career, David has a bigger challenge: surviving middle school.

The start of 6th grade at Harman Middle School (also known as Hormone Middle School) hasn't been going too well for David, and since David is a big fan of lists, especially lists of six and ½ items, I'll list the reasons that way:

1. David really misses his mom, who moved out of his house two years and moved in with a beet farmer in Maine. She has no telephone or email, so the only way David can talk to her is by writing letters.
2. Even though David's videos are really funny, only the same four people ever watch them on YouTube.
3. There is a dress code at Harman Middle School—and David breaks it on the first day.
4. David homeroom teacher, Mrs. Lovely, is anything but lovely. Not only does she make his grandmother look young, she also humiliates him in front of the class on the first day of school.
5. David's cousin tells him about a nasty Harman Middle School tradition: "On your birthday, eighth graders drag you into the bathroom, then shove your head into the toilet and flush while making you sing 'Happy Birthday.'"
6. After David had to go to the mall with his best friend Elliott 24 times during the summer (to look for the girl Elliott liked), they got in an argument—and now David no longer has a best friend.
- 6 ½. Elliott's new best friend is Tommy Murphy, the biggest, meanest kid in the school, who loves nothing more than bullying David.

In spite of all the bad stuff, one good thing does happen to David. He meets Sophie Meyers, the new girl in his math class. Sophie loves David's videos and sends the link to a group of her old friends—and almost overnight, David's videos are getting thousands of views and hundreds of comments. But will his newfound fame make up for his lousy start in middle school?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- At the beginning of the book, David and Elliott are growing apart, discovering they have different interests. Has this ever happened with one of your friends? How did you handle it?

- David and other characters post video online that embarrasses others. Work together to create a code of online etiquette to avoid these situations at your school.
- Create your own videos with “Top Six and Half” lists.
- Bake Bubbe’s Jewish Apple Cake (pp. 244-245).

Related websites:

How to Survive Middle School

<http://www.donnagephart.com/how-to-survive-middle-school.html>

At the author’s website, you can view the “Hammy Time” video or read about how some of her real life friends and family appear in the book.

Cyberbullying

<http://www.ncpc.org/topics/cyberbullying>

From the National Crime Prevention Council, this site has a wealth of information on cyberbullying and how to prevent it.

Stop Cyberbullying

<http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html>

This site has sections for students ages 7-10, 11-13 and 14-17. It includes a quiz so students can see if they are cyberbullies, along with tips for online etiquette.

Jones, Marcia Thornton. [Ratfink](#). Dutton, 2010. [j JONES 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Family, bullying, friendship

Summary: Creative, impulsive Logan vows to turn over a new leaf in fifth grade so his parents will let him have a pet, but when a competitive new girl arrives at school and his forgetful and embarrassing grandfather takes over the basement of Logan’s house, doing the right thing becomes harder than it has ever been.

Preller, James. [Bystander](#). Feiwel and Friends, 2009. [j PRELLER 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Bullying, friendship, individuality, family

Summary: Thirteen-year-old Eric discovers there are consequences to not standing by and watching as the bully at his new school hurts people, but although school officials are aware of the problem, Eric may be the one with a solution.

Zucker, Naomi Flink. [Callie’s rules](#). Egmont, 2009. [j ZUCKER 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Friendship, individuality, community engagement

Summary: Eleven-year-old Callie Jones tries to keep track of all the rules for fitting in that other middle schoolers seem to know, but when the town decides to replace Halloween with an Autumn Festival, Callie leads her large family in an unusual protest.

Grief/Loss

Erskine, Kathryn. [Mockingbird](#). Philomel Press, 2010. [j ERSKINE 2010]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Grief and loss, parent-child relationships, school shootings, autism spectrum disorder

Summary: Ten-year-old Caitlin, who has Asperger's Syndrome, struggles to understand emotions, show empathy, and make friends at school, while at home she seeks closure by working on a project with her father.

Booktalk: Caitlin Ann Smith is looking for Closure. Not too long ago was what her father calls The Day Our Life Fell Apart: Her older brother Devon was killed at his middle school when two students went on a shooting rampage. Caitlin's life has indeed fallen apart: It was Devon who always helped her navigate the world of emotions that are so unfamiliar to her and she simply doesn't know how to deal with either her own grief or that of her father. Caitlin has Asperger Syndrome, which means that she sees the world in a very concrete way – things are black and white. And when she hears on the TV news that her small town is experiencing closure following the tragedy, she knows that everything will return to normal when she gets it as well. In her black-and-white world, all Caitlin has to do is find out what it is.

The first place she looks for Closure is in the Dictionary. It says: "the state of experiencing an emotional conclusion to a difficult life event such as the death of a loved one [p. 67]." But Caitlin discovers that having a definition isn't enough. So, she turns to her counselor, Mrs. Brook, and to her father. She even asks her new friend Michael (whose mother was killed at the school as well) for help. We know what Caitlin has to find out: Only she can identify what will bring her Closure. And when she does figure this out, her search for Closure involves stretching her comfort zone to the limit; and she no longer has Devon to turn to for advice and relief.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- The publisher of [Mockingbird](#) has created a discussion guide:
http://us.penguin.com/static/images/yr/pdf/Mockingbird_DG.pdf.

Related websites:

Virginia Tech / We Remember

<http://www.remembrance.vt.edu/2007/>

The author of [Mockingbird](#) was inspired in part to write her novel by the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007. The university has created a website commemorating those who were killed that day.

Kids' Health – Topics – Asperger Syndrome

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=287&id=2339>

This website offers a child-friendly explanation of Asperger Syndrome and how kids with the disorder might act or think differently. It includes tips on how to make friends with people with Asperger's.

The Big Read / To Kill a Mockingbird

<http://www.neabigread.org/books/mockingbird/>

The National Endowment for the Arts selected Harper Lee's classic novel as one of its Big Reads – "inspiring people across the country to pick up a good book."

This website's Reader's Guide is chock full of information about the novel, the author and the movie (click on Other Works/Adaptations).

Kathryn Erskine, Author

http://www.kathyerskine.com/Kathryn_Erskine/Welcome.html

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

Forrester, Sandra. [Leo and the lesser lion](#). Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

[j FORRESTER 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction, historical fiction

Major themes: Grief, brothers and sisters, foster children, nuns, Great Depression

Summary: In Depression-era Alabama, twelve-year-old Mary Bayliss Pettigrew struggles to understand why her beloved older brother, Leo, died and whether she – miraculously – survived for some special purpose.

LaFleur, Suzanne M. [Love, Aubrey](#). Wendy Lamb Books, 2009.

[j LAFLEUR 2009, CD Children LAFLEUR]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Grief, abandonment, friendship

Summary: While living with her Gram in Vermont, eleven-year-old Aubrey writes letters as a way of dealing with losing her father and sister in a car accident, and then being abandoned by her grief-stricken mother.

Potter, Ellen. [Slob](#). Philomel Books, 2009. [j POTTER 2009]

Genre: Realistic fiction

Major themes: Grief, bullying, brothers and sisters

Summary: Picked on, overweight genius Owen tries to invent a television that can see the past to find out what happened the day his parents were killed.

Raised By Animals

Igarashi, Daisuki. [Children of the sea. Vol.1](#) Viz, 2009. [GN IGARASHI 2009]

Genre: Raised by animals

Major themes: Raised by animals, oceanography, graphic novel.

Summary: When Ruka was younger, she saw a ghost in the water at the aquarium where her dad works. Now she feels drawn toward the aquarium and the two mysterious boys she meets there, Umi and Sora. They were raised by dugongs and hear the same strange calls from the sea that she does. Ruka's dad and the other adults who work at the aquarium are only distantly aware of what the children are experiencing as they get caught up in the mystery of the worldwide disappearance of the ocean's fish.

Booktalk: When Ruka gets kicked off her soccer team for playing too rough, she has to come up with another plan for how to spend her summer. She decides to hang out with her dad at the aquarium where he works. There, she meets Umi and Sora, two boys that claim they were raised in the ocean by dugongs (manatee-like creatures). The mysterious boys seem more at home in the ocean than on land. They avoid sunlight

and need to keep their skin moist so it won't dry out. Ruka also discovers her new friends hear the same strange noises from the sea that she does.

Mysterious occurrences bring the three friends together. Speckled fish are disappearing all over the world, both from the ocean and from aquariums. Weird deep-sea creatures suddenly wash up on beaches. Ruka notices a strange light glowing from both the two boys and from fish. What do her new friends have to do with all these strange events? Could these things be linked to the fish Ruka saw vanish in a bright flash of light when she was small?

This manga is the first of a series that is as much about the ocean as it is about its characters. Gulls cry, the air tastes of salt, waves splash ultramarine – and suddenly you won't be able to resist, you'll have to dive in too, and read about Children of the Sea.

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- Even though this story is just told with black and white pictures, it makes you feel like you're outdoors. Talk about how the art work makes you aware of what the ocean and the sky are like.
- Ruka's new friends Umi and Sora say they were raised by dugongs in the ocean. What makes them seem different from human children?
- Try drawing a comic strip that tells a story but also shows something you like about being outside or about nature.

Related websites:

Viz/Ikki/Children of the Sea

<http://www.sigikki.com/series/cots/index.shtml>

Read more about Children of the Sea online, at Viz Ikki website.

Welcome to Life in the Ocean

<http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/eviau/edit557/oceans/norma/ocean.htm>

Do you love the ocean? Wish you could be there all the time? This website explores the different niches and crannies of life around the sea.

Feral Children

<http://www.feralchildren.com/en/index.php>

This website talks about feral children found throughout time, around that world. The Russian boy Ivan is the boy the book *Dog Boy* (below) was based on.

Feral Children Documentary

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRRLvsg9cXA>

This is part 1 (of 5 parts) of a documentary about real children raised in the wild by animals.

Hornung, Eve. Dog boy. Viking, 2010. [FICTION HORNUNG 2010]

Genre: Raised by animals

Major themes: Raised by animals, Russia, abandoned children.

Summary: Four-year-old boy named Romochka is abandoned by his mother and uncle and left to fend for himself on the streets of Moscow, with uncounted millions of homeless children and adults. He follows a stray dog to its home in a deserted church cellar. There he joins Mamochka, the mother of the pack, and six other dogs and slowly he forgets his human attributes to survive two fiercely cold winters. Romochka attracts the attention of local police, street urchins, and finally, scientists.

Wood, Maryrose. [The incorrigible children of Ashton Place: The mysterious howling](#). Balzer and Bray, HarperCollins, 2010. [j WOOD 2010]

Genre: Raised by animals, Gothic novels

Major themes: Raised by animals, humor, Victorian

Summary: Fifteen-year-old Miss Penelope Lumley, a recent graduate of the Swanburne Academy for Poor Bright Females, is hired as governess to three young children who have been raised by wolves and must teach them to behave in a civilized manner quickly, in preparation for a Christmas ball.

Special Abilities

Cottrell Boyce, Frank. [Cosmic](#). Walden Pond Press, 2010. [j COTTRELLB 2010]

Genre: Adventure, humor

Major themes: Fathers and children, space travel, identity

Summary: Twelve-year-old Liam looks like he's 30, and people who don't know him mistake him for an adult. Feeling like he's stuck between two worlds, Liam cons his way into being the adult chaperone on the first space ship to take civilians into space. But when the ship is stuck 230,000 miles from home, being mistaken for an adult is not good.

Booktalk: Liam Digby is in more trouble than he has ever been in his entire life. All twelve years of it. Part of the problem might stem from the fact that he's convinced everyone around him that he's 30. He's really tall for his age, and he's got a bit of a beard growing in. His parents obviously don't buy that he's 30, but he's convinced *them* that he's on a school trip to the Lake District (that's a place in England).

Anyway, it all started with a contest to find the Greatest Dad in the World. Well, it actually started before that, when Liam and his friend Florida pretend to be father and daughter so Liam can test-drive a Porsche. Fortunately, they hadn't got very far when Liam's dad appeared and put a stop to that. But, for Liam, it planted a seed. See, the Greatest Dad in the World will win a trip to a new theme park in China and a chance to ride one what is promised to be the greatest ride in the universe: The Rocket. Liam loves a good thrill ride, and he's passed for an adult before ... and once he convinces Florida to come with him, well, before you know it, he finds himself in the middle of Gobi Desert in China competing with three other dads.

To make a good story short, Liam wins the contest and he climbs aboard The Rocket with the four kids – “daughter” Florida and three boys. Only this Rocket isn't a thrill ride, it's the real thing. And very soon after blast-off, the five kids find themselves headed off course and into deep space, with no radio contact and no way of getting back to Earth. And Florida and three boys want Liam to act all dadly and get them home.

See what I mean about being in trouble ... ?

Discussion topics/extension ideas:

- The publisher of [Cosmic](#) has created an extensive reading group guide and an educator's guide here: <http://www.walden.com/guide/cosmic/>.

Related websites:

Scholastic Book Talk: Cosmic

<http://images.scholastic.co.uk/assets/a/3a/a5/book-talk-cosmic-325702.pdf>

A brief guide to using the book in the classroom.

Astronaut bio: Alan Bean

<http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/bean-al.html>

In his acknowledgments, Frank Cottrell Boyce thanks Alan Bean for allowing him to portray him in Cosmic. Learn more about the fourth man to walk on the moon here.

The Waterloo Partnership: Two Waterloos, One Hope

<http://www.waterloopartnership.co.uk/Waterloo/>

Liam Digby lives in Waterloo in England, and he meets Samson Two from Waterloo in Sierra Leone in Africa. Frank Cottrell Boyce was inspired by the people who created The Waterloo Partnership, working together for change and to improve the quality of life for many.

A writer's life: Frank Cottrell Boyce

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3644906/A-writers-life-Frank-Cottrell-Boyce.html>

An interview with Frank Cottrell Boyce after he won the Carnegie Medal for his book Millions.

Jonell, Lynne. The secret of zoom. Henry Holt, 2009. [j JONELL 2009]

Genre: Fantasy, adventure

Major themes: Friendship, orphans, alternative energy, math and music

Summary: Ten-year-old Christina lives a sheltered life until she discovers a secret tunnel, an evil plot to enslave orphans, and a mysterious source of energy known as zoom.

Orlev, Uri. The song of the whales. Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2010. [j ORLEV 2010]

Genre: Magical realism

Major themes: Dreaming, grandfathers, old age

Summary: At age eight, Mikha'el knows he is different from other boys, but over the course of three years as he helps his parents care for his elderly grandfather in Jerusalem, Grandpa teaches Mikha'el to use the gift they share of making other people's dreams sweeter.

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