2017 Conference

Literature Review Committee
Top 65 Titles of 2016
Grades K-12

Blog Link:
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Literature Review
Committee Members
2016-2017

Anne Bozievich, Southern York County School District

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Vicki Schwoebel, Friends’ Central

Melissa Scott, Shenango Area School District

Nancy Summers Abington School District

Emily Woodward, The Baldwin School
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K-6 Top Titles
Barnett, Mac, and Adam Rex.  

*How this Book Was Made: Based on a True Story.*  

**BOOK REVIEW** | I have tried many times to explain the process of how a book is made and which roles it takes to get published. This book makes those conversations irrelevant and unnecessary. Mac and Adam are a quirky, hilarious team (see their work in *Guess Again* or *Chloe and the Lion*) who bring truthiness and humor to the writing process. Hear Mac explain his editing process, then wait for that pesky illustrator, and finally get through the printing and publishing; all so he can show us How This Book Was Made! The journey is more than just point A to point B, as tigers, pirates, astronauts, fish and more help to affect the story, and ultimately the most important character to the book may be… YOU (the reader)! Enjoy and discuss and try explaining what’s truth from fiction in this unusual adventure.

**THOUGHTS** | This would also make a great book to study book design and the relationship between text and pictures. The tiger skin on the inside cover and the red map marks are two interesting examples. There is much to look at for multiple readings, though some are more relevant to adults than kids. I like this genre of books about books, and Mac & Adam meet the meta at just the right moment.

**BOOK TALK** | I have tried many times to explain the process of how a book is made and which roles it takes to get published. This book makes those conversations irrelevant and unnecessary. Mac and Adam are a quirky, hilarious team (see their work in *Guess Again* or *Chloe and the Lion*) who bring truthiness and humor to the writing process. Hear Mac explain his editing process, then wait for that pesky illustrator, and finally get through the printing and publishing - all so he can show us How This Book Was Made! The journey is more than just point A to point B, as tigers, pirates, astronauts, fish and more help to affect the story, and ultimately the most important character to the book may be… YOU (the reader)! Enjoy and discuss and try explaining what’s truth from fiction in this unusual adventure.

*By Dustin Brackbill*  
*State College Area School District*
BOOK REVIEW | The Terrible Two, Miles and Niles, are back at work in Yawnee Valley, pranking any and all...especially their favorite “goat,” Principal Barry Barkin. Unfortunately for the Terrible Two, their favorite target is unexpectedly taken away. Principal Barkin is removed from his job for his inability to control all the pranking, and is replaced by his father, former Principal Bertrand Barkin. Miles and Niles are excited to begin a new era of pranking the Barkins, but the elder Barkin turns out to be quite a formidable opponent. He refuses to acknowledge their pranks, so the boys become ineffective and down in the dumps. They decide that they must resort to desperate measures and recruit a temporary member to their team...Barry Barkin. In typical Terrible Two fashion, they come up with a winning plan that might go down in Yawnee Valley history as the best prank of all time. Barnett and John are their own terrific twosome, writing another hysterical story about Miles and Niles and their friendship. Kevin Cornell’s illustrations are fantastic, adding quirky and fun details to the story.

THOUGHTS | Give this winner to your kids who like mixed text and illustration series (think slightly more sophisticated Diary of a Wimpy Kid) who like to laugh. It would make a fantastic read-aloud.

BOOK TALK | The Terrible Two is back for another great school year, filled with perfectly planned pranks at Yawnee Valley School. They're off to a great start...but things go just a tad too far, and their old nemesis Principal Barkin is fired for being unable to control his students. Sounds great, right? No more Barkin! Unfortunately, the new principal is even tougher, even meaner, even smarter...it's Principal Barkin's father, Principal Barkin! The new principal rules the school with an iron fist and is even able to outsmart the Terrible Two. School is no fun any more and the Miles and Niles are out of ideas...until they decide to enlist the help of a new alley. He's the only person who might be able to reveal the new principal's weak spots...Former Principal Barkin. He dishes the dirt on his dad and helps the Terrible Two pull off the best prank in the history of Yawnee Valley!

By Lindsey Long
Nye and Conewago Elementary School
Beck, H.W.

Glow: Animals with their Own Night-Lights.


BOOK REVIEW | This book is a must for any elementary library! With vivid, detailed photographs of animals and some plants, Glow explains to children what bioluminescence is. Discussing some land creatures, but mostly focusing on aquatic life, this book gives scientific information, but explains it in such a way that children will not find it overwhelming. It also gives reasons why these animals might use bioluminescence. The main story is told in larger font for younger children, and if the students want more in-depth information smaller lettering on each page gives specific animal names and details. At the end of the book there is additional information, including the actual size of these life forms (many of which are tiny) and where they live. A bibliography gives more information for those children left wanting to learn more.

THOUGHTS | As someone always looking for eye-catching non-fiction books, I loved this book! It’s a perfect read-aloud for grades K-4 and also provides a great introduction for science curricula. A few of the pictures might be intimidating to some younger, more squeamish children, but 1st grade and up are fine.

BOOK TALK | Doesn’t this animal look cool? This whole book is full of awesome glow in the dark animals and plants! How do they do that? Read this book to find out!

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School
**Broach, Elise. *The Wolf Keepers.***

**BOOK REVIEW** | Lizzie lives in a zoo—literally. Her father is a zookeeper at the John Muir Wildlife Park in Lodisto, CA, and Lizzie lives with him in a house on the zoo grounds. Lizzie loves observing and drawing the animals, particularly the wolves. During the summer before 7th grade, Lizzie spends time observing the wolves, specifically the pack leader Lobo, for a homework assignment in which she must journal in the style of John Muir. One day she encounters Tyler, a runaway from a foster home who has been hiding out at the zoo. Tyler tells Lizzie about mysterious happenings going on at the zoo at night in the wolf exhibit. Could someone be behind a mysterious illness the wolves (including Lobo) are beginning to exhibit? Lizzie and Tyler are determined to get to the bottom of this mystery, which ultimately leads them to stowaway on a late night ride to nearby Yosemite National Park where they must spend two days on their own in a remote part of the park, where the stumble across the remains of a cabin that may have belonged to John Muir.

**THOUGHTS** | This book is ideal for fans of animal stories or mysteries. The characters realistically cope with with issues such as loss, friendship and the meaning of family. The ethics of keeping animals in zoos is well integrated into the story and gives readers much to think about. The text is enhanced by pencil drawings and an author’s note that discusses the history of Yosemite.

**BOOK TALK** | Something is wrong with the wolves—they’re getting sick. Lizzie Durango knows something isn’t right. She has been observing the wolves at the zoo where her father works for a summer homework assignment. Together with her new friend Tyler, Lizzie learns that vehicles are moving through the zoo at night and someone is entering the wolf exhibit. There must be a connection between these occurrences and the wolf illness. Why would someone want to make the wolves sick? Can Lizzie and Tyler find out the truth before Lobo, the leader of the wolfpack is stricken with the mysterious illness? To find out, read *The Wolf Keepers* by Elise Broach.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR USE**

⇒ *The ethics of keeping wild animals in zoos plays an important role in The Wolf Keepers. Debates or pro/con writing assignments are two ways teachers could encourage critical thinking on this topic.*

⇒ *Naturalist John Muir is prominently mentioned throughout the text. Lizzie has to keep a journal in the style of Muir for her summer homework and his “lost cabin” plays a role in the closing chapters. Teachers could assign students a writing assignment similar to Lizzie’s summer Muir nature reflection journal.*

By Elizabeth Henry
*Lampeter-Strasburg HS/MS*
BOOK REVIEW | In simple, straightforward text, Lisa Brown walks young readers through the experience of travelling to an airport and boarding an airplane. A mixed-race family’s journey begins with a taxi ride from their city apartment to a large airport. They wait in lines at the ticket counter, to check their bags, to use the restroom, and to go through security. They maneuver past the bustling airport restaurants and shops until they reach their gate where they wait some more. Eventually, they board the plane, stow their luggage, listen to the safety announcements, buckle their seatbelts, and take off. While the family enjoys the flight from the plane’s main cabin, sharp-eyed readers will want to keep a close eye on the little girl’s sock monkey who takes a parallel journey in a checked suitcase.

THOUGHTS | Readers will enjoy people-watching and following other families through the airport as well, and if they look closely, they’ll spot famous aviators like Amelia Earhart and the Wright Brothers. The India ink and watercolor illustrations are brimming with action and perfectly capture the harried tempo of airport life.

BOOK TALK | “Inside the airport you stand in lines. You stand in lines to get your ticket. You stand in lines to check your bags. There are lines for the restrooms. There are lines to go through security.” Join a family of four as they experience all the hustle and bustle of a busy airport. From x-raying bags and riding moving sidewalks to walking down the jetway and squeezing in your seat, there’s lots to see and do at an airport. There’s lots of people to watch too, so be sure to keep your eyes open as you prepare for take-off!

By Anne Bozievich
Friendship Elementary
BOOK REVIEW | Diana Hopkins was a ten-year-old girl who lived in a very big house... The White House! Her father was chief advisor to President Roosevelt during war-time. Diana had fun being a kid and playing with the Roosevelts’ dog. But, she felt it was important for her to help with the war. She tried several different tactics, all getting her more frowns than smiles. One day, as she was playing with a bear named “Uncle Teddy” on President Roosevelt’s desk she knew something the president said would be the perfect job for her! He suggested that all Americans turn their lawns into gardens to grow food, that way the food in the grocery stores could be sent to soldiers. Diana was so excited! Armed with a pair of overalls and a lot of sun, Diana was ready to change the world.

THOUGHTS | This is a delightful book about how children can be inspirations. It is based on the true story of Diana Hopkins who inspired citizens around the country to grow their own gardens during war-time. Diana has to overcome obstacles in finding the right way to help (including sticking a White House guest in the bottom with a pin!) and even having to start her garden a second time because of rabbits. She preserves and in the end is set forth in the media as an example of patriotism. I love the Author and Illustrator’s Notes at the back with a photograph!

BOOK TALK | How much can a kid really do to help their country? Well this historical fiction picture book is based on a true story! Picture this: the US is at war many years ago, World War II to be exact, and in the White House lives a ten-year-old girl. No matter what she does, Diana can’t figure out how to help her country, until the president suggests turning lawns into gardens. Now here is something that she can do!

Carbon, Elisa.

Diana’s White House Garden.


SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ This book would pair well with non-fiction books on a variety of topics: biographies, strong girls/women, WWII, FDR

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School
BOOK REVIEW | Fifth grader Allie wants to make her mark as all of her family has already done. She works diligently on her volcano project, but it does not erupt at the science fair. The new student, Victor, places his green goo project in her volcano when Allie leaves her table to cheer up her previous best friend, Sara. Since Allie did not win the fair, her family does not go out for tacos. Allie’s great-grandfather, a living legend and hero of WWII, reminds her parents to stay true to their words. As the story progresses, Allie and Victor become good friends, but she is shocked to learn that Victor applied for the same contest as her. Her entry about her great grandfather has advanced in the competition, but should she have included more than his achievements in war time?

THOUGHTS | Many students experience changes in friends, making this book perfect for upper elementary and middle school readers. While readers might not feel the pressure to be first in something like Allie, they probably wish to succeed in a multitude of areas. Allie comes to understand that family and friendship is more important than being first in an award.

BOOK TALK | All of Allie’s family has won first place in something - but not Allie. Now in fifth grade Allie thinks her first place will come at the science fair, but green goo gets in the way. Allie’s interview with her great grandfather might win a prize, but is the essay really showing the true picture?

By Beth McGuire
Wendover Middle School
BOOK REVIEW | In this sweet and unusual book, a boy falls in love with a girl for the first time. She however, only has eyes for the birds. The boy decides instead of passively waiting, to do something that will definitely catch her attention. Whether in class or on the soccer field, he wholeheartedly makes a transformation into a large bird. Will it be enough?

THOUGHTS | I loved the spare simplicity of the illustrations and the writing. The concept of the story paired with the mostly black and white images bring something rich to the reader. A wonderful read aloud for older elementary school/middle school classes.

BOOK TALK | Now this book might be a little different, but I think it’s good to read new and unusual things. Sometimes you really like it! And other times you might not, but you tried and understand what it is like. I really liked this book about a boy who becomes a bird. Do you think it’s a real bird? Find out!

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ This would be a good introduction to an art unit about sketching or charcoal.
⇒ It would also be a twist for Valentine’s Day.

Chabbert, Ingrid & Guridi.
The Day I Became a Bird.

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School
The Baldwin School
Diamond, Jill illustrated by Lesley Vamos.
Lou Lou & Pea and the Mural Mystery.

BOOK REVIEW | Throughout this beautifully illustrated middle grade chapter mystery two best friends need to use their gardening and art skills to bring about justice. A cooking father, smatterings of Spanish (with a lovely glossary in the back), a close-knit neighborhood including beautiful murals, and a Día de los Muertos celebration bring this multicultural story to life. Follow Lou Lou Bombay and Peacock Pearl and enjoy the rich culture, and fun characters.

THOUGHTS | Great for readers who grew out of Ivy & Bean and love a little mystery. I enjoyed the funeral for the plant and the recipe for “Pinky Pan de Muerto” (Day of the Dead bread).

BOOK TALK | Do you like Ivy & Bean? How about Cam Jansen? Do you enjoy graphic novels? How about a good book about 2 friends who live in an awesome place and solve a spooky mystery? This book is for you! Lou Lou and Pea have been friends since they were in 1st Grade. They’re excited about the Dia De Los Muertos celebration coming up when a bunch of bad things start to happen. Lou Lou and Pea seem to be the only ones who notice the clues that are appearing in the murals around town! Will they be able to solve the mystery?

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE
⇒ This would be a fun companion book to a 5th-6th grade beginning Spanish class.
⇒ If read as a class or a book group, there is a recipe for Dia de Los Muertos bread that would be fun to make. If a kitchen is not available set up stations and make flower crowns, murals, and decorate sugar skulls.

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School
BOOK REVIEW | Sasha lives in the grimy coal-town of Caboose, West Virginia, a place she and her older brother Michael can’t wait to leave. But Sasha’s mother ran off when she was five, her father died in a mine accident when she was eight, and Michael just died fighting a fire. It’s too much for one thirteen-year-old to manage, and Sasha struggles with anger and the foster system and this…place. Fortunately for her, foster mom Phyllis stays steady and encouraging through Sasha’s rages and disappearances, and distant relatives she never knew live just next door. She struggles and grows, thanks to careful, caring adults, and thanks to her discovery of poetry. But when another tragedy occurs, will it all be too much?

THOUGHTS | A strong, finely told novel, the poetry and the prose delight and reveal Sasha’s character incredibly well. This is beautiful poetry and a strong award contender. Recommended for middle school readers and up.

BOOK TALK | Sasha hates her town. She hates the grimy coal soot. She hates the worry for miners during cave-ins. She hates poor lost families. She hates losing pieces of family…and she has lost huge pieces of her family. Her mother left when she was five, her father died in a mine accident when she was eight, and it’s just Sasha and her older brother Michael. She and Michael have plans to get out of Caboose, West Virginia, just as soon as they can. Then Michael, too, is gone, a firefighter losing his life saving others. And Sasha is full of confusion and fury. She never belonged here, so where does she go now?

By Melissa Scott
Shenango High School
BOOK REVIEW | On May 4, 2007, a tornado destroyed the entire town of Greensburg, Kansas, in just nine minutes. Everything was flattened: homes, offices, churches, stores, the water tower, and the school were completely gone. The day after the storm, townspeople gathered in a large emergency tent and began asking the big question: What do we want to be now? People started talking about how to build again. They agreed on ideas like designing tornado-proof houses and making sure the homes were energy efficient, but the word “green” popped up again and again as well. The ideas of sustainability and not using more than one needed resonated with the Midwesterners, and they decided to design not just green homes but an entirely green city. Loose watercolor illustrations depict the construction of super-strong, sustainable structures all over town. Sidebars highlight additional information about what sustainability looks like, and a special “Tips for Going Green” section shares ways students can incorporate some of these ideas into their own lives.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ This title makes a great resource for students studying severe weather or energy efficiency.
⇒ It is also an engaging read-aloud for Earth Day, and it lends itself to discussions about simple ways we can “go green” in our own lives.

THOUGHTS | This title is a great resource for students studying severe weather or energy efficiency. It would also make a nice read-aloud for Earth Day, and it lends itself to discussions about ways we can “go green” in our own lives.

BOOK TALK | “I remember the night when a tornado destroyed Greensburg in nine minutes flat. All of my things, our house, everything, was blown thousands of feet into the air. When it was all over and we climbed out of our shelter in the basement, everyone’s past had been swept away. Suddenly the entire town of Greensburg had no future.” After a devastating tornado destroys the entire town of Greensburg, Kansas, the residents start making plans for rebuilding. As they plan, they ask a big question: “What do we want to be now?” The word “green” pops up again and again. People like the idea of sustainability and not using more than you need, and they design a town that is as energy-efficient as possible. Join them as they rebuild the whole town from the ground up and become one of the greenest cities in the entire United States.

By Anne Bozievich
Friendship Elementary
BOOK REVIEW | Nineteen twenties Chicago; a time of mobsters, prohibition, and murder, and ten year old Isabel Feeney is smack dab in the middle of it all. A newsgirl for the Chicago Tribune, Isabel aspires to be a reporter, like the infamous Maude Collier, but for now, she must help her mother with the rent by selling newspapers. One evening, after selling a paper to Miss Giddings, one of her best clients, Isabel hears a gunshot in the alley just past her news corner. When she arrives, she sees Miss Giddings covered in blood, a gun, and mobster, Charles Bessemer, dead on the ground. Isabel knows that Miss Giddings couldn’t have killed Charles Bessemer, her fiance, but Detective Culhane sees things differently. As Isabel sets out to find the true murderer, she befriends her idol, Maude Collier, and the children of Miss Giddings and Charles Bessemer, who help with the investigation, but is also threatened by those who want Miss Giddings to take the blame.

THOUGHTS | This is a fun historical mystery for middle school and upper elementary students. Fantasky does not rely too much on the history of the 1920s, but more on the girl-detective and female independence.

BOOK TALK | 1920s Chicago. A time of mobsters, prohibition, and murder, and one ten year old, newsgirl smack dab in the middle of it. With a beautiful woman awaiting trial for the murder of her mobster fiance, Isabel Feeney is determined that her best client has been set up, and she’s going to prove it. With the help of the infamous, Maude Collier, one of the best female reporters in Chicago (and only one taken seriously), Isabel sets out to find the real killer and clear Miss Giddings before it’s too late, while also keeping the fact that she was at the scene of a murder a secret from her mother. Will she find the real killer in time or will it be too late? And, can she, Isabel Feeney, Star Reporter, keep herself alive and out of trouble in the process? By Beth Fantasky.

By Erin Parkinson
Beaver Area MS/HS
BOOK REVIEW | In Washington state in 1890, Joseph Johnson has lost his mother and younger sister to typhoid and his father to a wagon accident. He’s left in the care of a miserable man who underhandedly sells Joseph’s last remaining link to his family, his horse Sarah. This action emboldens Joseph to take his father’s gun and most of the money from Sarah’s sale to follow Sarah’s trail and retrieve her. Moral and resolute, Joseph encounters quite a few setbacks in his long journey, but he never waivers. He frequently remembers wise pieces of advice from his parents, and that advice guides him in his decisions, notably, the decision to bring along an orphaned (it would seem) young Chinese boy in a time and place where racism is relentless. Despite being unable to speak one another’s language, Joseph and Ah-Kee develop a strong understanding and full respect for one another. The journey and its resolution are rife with adventure, a longing for home, and heartache. It is this mixture, lived through the morally steadfast Joseph, that makes the tale such a needed one for young readers.

THOUGHTS | A strong second novel that has me seeking out Gemeinhart’s first (The Honest Truth) and third novels (the just-published Scar Island). Gemeinhart expertly reveals Joseph’s character and makes believable the people and places he encounters. Highly recommended.

BOOK TALK | Joseph Johnson has lost just about everything in his life. His ma and little sister died of typhoid recently, and his pa was killed in a freak wagon accident. That left Joseph with just memories and questions and his horse named Sarah. He’s trying to make a life, live like his parents taught him, and respect his miserable caretaker. So when Sarah is sold behind his back, Joseph is determined. He will get Sarah back. No one is going to take her away, too. But Joseph has a lot in store for him on this journey, including injury, an angry mother bear, a lost Chinese boy, a settler’s family, horse traders and Indians. See if he is up to the task.

By Melissa Scott
Shenango High School
BOOK REVIEW | Curley Hines knows the power of words thanks to his grandfather and his best friend, but he puts them to the test in Mary Knight’s debut novel Saving Wonder. Living in a coal mining town, he has seen his share of tragedy and misfortune, but he loves his mountain and valley. When a new owner comes to take over the industry with his slick son, things start to change. Should they adapt and survive or take a stand and face down Big Coal that threatens everything? Saving Wonder doesn’t have easy answers, but it will open your eyes, leave room for debate, educate and inspire.

THOUGHTS | This has plenty of classroom and home applications, prompting projects and new vocabulary lessons. I also found that the setting and characters were almost instantly identifiable, meaning that the author did a wonderful job capturing the voice of Curley and company. Saving Wonder is a great debut for Mary Knight, joining the recent ranks of authors like R.J. Palacio and Dan Geiminhart as new favs!

BOOK TALK | Can words have power over actions? Curley Hines knows the power of words thanks to his grandfather and his best friend, but he puts them to the test in Mary Knight’s debut novel Saving Wonder. Living in a coal mining town, he has seen his share of tragedy and misfortune, but he loves his mountain and valley. When a new owner comes to take over the industry with his slick son, things start to change. Should they adapt and survive or take a stand and face down Big Coal that threatens everything? Can Curley find the right words when he needs them most?

By Dustin Brackbill
State College Area School District
BOOK REVIEW | Mary, a tomboy who loved all sports, was looked down on for playing tackle football with the boys and writing a sports newspaper for her grandparents rather than a nice letter. When she graduated from college, Mary wanted to write for the newspaper. The only job a female reporter could get was writing about social events and fashionable parties. Mary persevered and World War II afforded her the opportunity to fill in as a sports writer. Still, though, she faced many barriers and prejudices; at some games she wasn’t allowed to sit in the Press Box. Citing Jackie Robinson as a role model, Mary didn’t let the fact that she wasn’t allowed in the locker rooms deter her. She became known for the quality and positivity of her writing. Readers, coaches and athletes came to know and respect her. For over fifty years Mary Gaber reported on sports, and made history doing it.

THOUGHTS | I loved this book. Its powerful story of a pioneering woman breaking into a male-dominated field is complemented by surprisingly striking illustrations.

BOOK TALK | Did you know that there was a time when women couldn’t report on sports? Yes, they couldn’t be in the press box at games or anything! Well this story is about a girl who loved to play tackle football (and was good at it) who grew up to be one of the first ever women sports journalists! It’s a true story!

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School
BOOK REVIEW | Charlie is a passionate about Irish dancing, but misses her older sister Abby, who is away at college. Charlie is encouraged to ice fish with hopes to win a contest so she could use the prize of money towards her feis in Montreal. While fishing not too far out on the ice, Charlie hears the small fish that she catches ask her to have a wish if she will release the fish. At first she wishes not to have a fear of ice and for a certain boy to like her. When her mother applies for a full time nursing posting, Charlie goes out to find the fish and make another wish. Her mother complains about having to send more money to Abby for her textbooks. Her third and fourth wishes are for her friends. One is that Dana will do well with her language test, and the other is that Drew finds success during basketball tryouts. Once again Charlie is off to find the wish granting fish with emerald eyes. Her family is rocked when they receive a call that Abby is ill due to heroin. With her mom’s nursing background it makes her daughter’s decisions harder to handle. While at the treatment center, Charlie sees fellow dancer Leah there visiting her mother. The next wish is that Abby gets better and has the insurance cover the treatment. Her sister drives Charlie to the dance competition and is appalled to learn that Abby took her remaining money and has not returned. Abby has overdosed and is now at the Albany Medical center. At this point Charlie is done wishing.

THOUGHTS | Messner’s All the Answers was one of the titles that I reviewed last year for PSLA and found students gravitate towards that book. Unfortunately, the statistics show that the use of heroin for young people is increasing. While not the only focus of the book, the element allows a window for discussion of this important topic.

BOOK TALK | Do you have any hobbies? Main character Charlie is passionate about Irish dancing. Her hobby is expensive with dance outfits and competition fees. Her friend encourages Charlie to ice fish since there is prize money involved. To her surprise, Charlie catches a fish. She has a choice - turn in the fish or listen to the fish who will grant her a wish if released. Will she turn in the fish or release the fish to make a wish? Her older sister hasn’t been acting the same since she left for college. Should she wish for her sister to become her former self? What could she wish for? What would you do: turn in the fish or make a wish?

By Beth McGuire
Wendover Middle School
Pak, Kenard.

Goodbye Summer, Hello Autumn.


BOOK REVIEW | This gentle nature story perfectly captures the transition from summer to autumn. One late summer morning, a girl leaves her house and begins walking through the forest to town. On her way, she greets the trees, animals, insects, flowers, and wind she encounters. Each time, her greeting is returned, and information about the changing season is shared. For example, when she calls, “Hello, beavers. Hello, chipmunks,” they reply, “Hello! We have no time to play because we’re making cozy nests and dens. It will be cold soon, and we want to get ready.” As she walks, the little girl is accompanied by a giant Great Dane, a blue jay, and a butterfly, and readers will enjoy spotting them on each double-page spread. On each spread, the vibrant watercolor and pencil illustrations perfectly capture the transition between seasons. As the story progresses, the colors slowly transition from mostly greens to browns, reds, and burnt oranges. Careful readers will notice subtle details in the illustrations such as animals tucking into their burrows, leaves changing color, and the girl distributing a fistful of wildflowers she’s plucked along her walk. This is a book that warrants repeated readings to fully appreciate all the subtle details.

THOUGHTS | This title is a perfect addition to fall-themed story times. My kindergarten teachers were excited to add it to their units about autumn and how animals prepare for winter.

BOOK TALK | “Hello, beavers. Hello, chipmunks.” “Hello! We have no time to play because we’re making cozy nests and dens. It will be cold soon, and we want to get ready.” It’s late summer, and all around, animals and plants are preparing for the transition to autumn. A girl leaves her house and begins walking through the forest into town. On her way, she greets the trees, animals, insects, flowers, and wind she encounters. Her greetings are always returned, and readers learn information about the changing season. The girl is accompanied by a giant Great Dane as well as other birds and butterflies. Join them as they take in each change the new season brings!

By Anne Bozievich
Friendship Elementary
BOOK REVIEW | Waylon knows a lot of amazing facts. He also has tons of great ideas for scientific discoveries, even if adults think it’s science fiction. Waylon has troubles that not even science can fix, all the boys are being put on two different teams by the popular kid. Also, his older sister has transformed into something strange; his parents call her a teenager, and the boy down the street calls her scary. When a known bad boy returns after a year away, Waylon is kicked off his team and only has the delinquent to converse with.

THOUGHTS | Waylon is an odd kid. He blurts out facts in class, and is insecure socially. Yet throughout he is a positive protagonist. Waylon struggles and has his down moments, and his sister helps him work through these times. Then Waylon finds a way to solve his own problems, and in doing so helps everyone around him.

BOOK TALK | Did you like the Clementine series? Well this is about her classmate Waylon. He is just as fun, but in a slightly different way. Waylon loves science and making discoveries, but adults think are pretend and will never be actual science, just pretend. He is also worried because the most popular kid in his class is putting everybody on two different teams. Waylon wants to be friends with his classmates no matter what team they’re on!
BOOK REVIEW | Snow White has been transplanted to the Great Depression in Matt Phelan’s mesmerizing new graphic novel retelling of the classic fairy tale. Life is hard for Snow once her mother dies, and her wealthy father finds a ruthless diva of the stage who banishes the beautiful daughter. Once alone in the dark city, a group of street urchins come to Snow’s rescue, and they quickly bond. Tragedy, drama, action, and romance all play out around the cruel Queen of the Follies and her jealous rage. Phelan’s strength comes in the sparse text mixed with emotional illustrations that capture both the story elements (huntsman, apple) with the 20’s city life (ticker tape, Macy’s and Follies). While not everything runs parallel to the fairy tale origin, this unique new take will draw in a wide range of ages to appreciate the skill of Phelan’s graphic design and artistic interpretation.

THOUGHTS | The many references to Great Depression terms like Hooverville will be lost on younger readers, but the opportunity to connect any of Phelan’s graphic novels to history make them an educational incentive. As a collection, they would make for a great course on graphic storytelling and historical fiction alike.

BOOK TALK | The start of the Great Depression brought loss and heartache to many, especially in big cities like New York. For one girl who was fair and sweet, it meant losing her mother, getting sent away from her father, and then being outcast by her new stepmother. Alone and barely surviving, she encounters some small street urchins to assist her, and may just find true love if she can avoid the evil and jealous stepmother known as the Queen of the Follies. Sound familiar? Sound unique?? Both are true in this historical graphic novel version of the classic fairy tale Snow White by Matt Phelan. Follow Snow through Phelan's gorgeous New York City life and feel the fairy tale become real again.

By Dustin Brackbill
State College Area School District
BOOK REVIEW | What does courage and bravery look like? How do families deal with hidden secrets? Questions flow out of Genie, the younger brother who is full of worries and wonder, as he and Ernie are sent to their grandparents house in rural Virginia for the summer. While their parents deal with issues in Brooklyn and go on a last ditch vacation to save their marriage, the two boys deal with new chores, no technology, and intergenerational struggles. The pull between Genie and his grandfather holds the tension in this story, but the other characters all hold a part in the relationships, secrets, and bravery that make this story remarkable.

THOUGHTS | There is plenty to unpack for the readers of Reynolds’ work, and the concept of recording a questions journal may be the perfect device to release their thoughts. The setting and dialogue are genuine and easy to picture for readers who may have never experienced this lifestyle.

BOOK TALK | What does courage and bravery look like? How do families deal with hidden secrets? Questions flow out of Genie, the younger brother who is full of worries and wonder, as he and Ernie are sent to their grandparents house in rural Virginia for the summer. While their parents deal with issues in Brooklyn and go on a last ditch vacation to save their marriage, the two boys deal with new chores, no technology, and intergenerational struggles. The pull between Genie and his grandfather holds the tension in this story, but the other characters all hold a part in the relationships, secrets, and bravery that make this story remarkable. Are you brave enough to ask the hard questions and to tell the truth?

By Dustin Brackbill
State College Area School District
Rex, Adam.

School's First Day of School.


BOOK REVIEW | As a newly built school, Frederick Douglass Elementary isn’t sure what to expect at the beginning of a new school year. It’s been just the school and the janitor all summer, but when the children arrive, everything changes. There’s noisy lockers, splashing water fountains, and spilled nose milk. There’s also brightly colored drawings, lessons about shapes, and new friends to meet. Rex’s gentle text is perfect for reassuring nervous school newcomers, and students will relate to the school’s worries about the unknown. They will also connect to the many familiar activities depicted in illustrator Christian Robinson’s vibrant pictures: exploring the playground with friends, sitting in a circle on the classroom carpet, and filing out of the building during a fire drill.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ This title makes a perfect first-day-of-school read aloud, and it will fast-become a beginning-of-the-year staple.

⇒ It can be used to jumpstart a discussion or writing activity about beginning-of-the-year jitters, or students can tell about a time they felt nervous or uncertain about something.

THOUGHTS | Robinson’s lively illustrations feature a diverse student body, and readers will enjoy pouring over the students’ many activities. This title makes a perfect first-day-of-school read aloud, and it will fast-become a beginning-of-the-year staple.

BOOK TALK | That summer, they dug up the big field, and poured the foundation, and set brick on top of brick until they’d built a school. It’s the beginning of the year, and the new school is nervous about what will happen when it’s filled with children and teachers. It’s been just the school and the Janitor all summer, but soon the children arrive, and they get everywhere. They open and close all the doors, drink water from the fountains, and play on the jungle gym. Most children are happy to be at school, but a few are grumpy or scared. Join the school and its many students as they kick off a new year together!

By Anne Bozievich
Friendship Elementary
BOOK REVIEW | Ten year old Déja Barnes is starting 5th grade in a new school, and she is coming from some difficult circumstances. Her family is living in a homeless shelter; her father is suffering from severe anxiety and a chronic cough; her mom works hard at two jobs but is unable to make ends meet, and Déja needs to step up to take care of her younger siblings. Déja starts the year with some trepidation and a bit of a chip on her shoulder, but she is quickly befriended by two new classmates Sabeen, a Muslim girl, and Ben, a Mexican American boy recently moved to NYC from Arizona. When their teacher begins a new study unit on the 9/11 tragedy, the three classmates learn much about themselves and their community and how the fallout from the historic event affected the lives of so many. The novel does not delve too far into the details of the terrorist attack, but it explores the tragedy in more human terms. The teacher and the author focus on the ideals and values that bring Americans and people together, not what breaks us apart. The novel also addresses some difficult issues such as homelessness, poverty, prejudice, fractured families, and survivor guilt with sensitivity.

THOUGHTS | Rhodes’ novel is a thoughtful introduction to the historical events that still resonate over many aspects of American life. This title would make a good choice for a class reading selection to introduce the topic of 9/11 without going into the full horror of the event. Teachers Guide with curriculum connections for history and social studies available on the author’s website at: http://jewellparkerrhodes.com/children/teaching-guide-towers-falling/.

BOOK TALK | Nobody tells kids anything - ten year old Déja is feeling angry and confused as she has to start the school year at a new school, Brooklyn Elementary. Living in a homeless shelter is putting a lot of stress of her: she is embarrassed by her situation, she has so much responsibility for her younger siblings at home and now she has to start all over in school where she doesn't know anyone. She starts off acting tough but is so happy to find hew new classmates are kind and accepting, especially Sabeen, a Muslim girl and Ben, a Mexican American. When their teacher starts talking with the students about the upcoming anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, Déja realizes that she knows almost nothing about the major event that happened right outside the window of their classroom, a tragedy that touched just about everyone in her classroom.

By Nancy Summers
Abington Senior High School
Schwartz, Corey Rosen, and Rebecca J. Gomez. 

_Hensel and Gretel: Ninja Chicks._


**BOOK REVIEW** | A companion book to _The Three Ninja Pigs and Ninja Red Riding Hood_, this book is just as action packed and fun! Their mother is missing, so these smart sisters decide to get some proactive ninja training at the 3 Pigs Dojo, where the motto is “Get Empowered, Not Devoured.” When their father goes missing, they follow, leaving a trail of breadcrumbs behind. Bad idea, but they persevere. When suddenly a tempting cornbread house is found, will Hensel and Gretel be able to escape temptation? Fortunately one of these fowls keeps their head and is able to sneak in, distracting the fox to rescue Ma. The other, after a momentary lapse of judgement picks the lock and joins the fray!

**THOUGHTS** | The fast pace and perfect rhymes in this book match the success of the other two books by these fabulous collaborators. Girls and boys alike will get a kick out of these powerful poultry.

**BOOK TALK** | Did you read _The Three Ninja Pigs_? What about _Ninja Red Riding Hood_? Well here’s another action packed adventure! These sister chickens go to the “Three Pigs Dojo” to learn some martial arts moves because somebody has taken their mother! Find out what happens when Dad goes missing...

**SUGGESTIONS FOR USE**

⇒ _Fun for an alternative or fractured fairy tales unit._

⇒ _Also good for younger learners who are working on rhyme._

By Emily Woodward

_The Baldwin School_
BOOK REVIEW | Laura Vaccaro Seeger touches on a topic that is common throughout childhood: finding ways to overcome fear. This can be a big deal to kids. The main character goes from scary animals (like spiders) to larger, more abstract fears like being alone or moving. Using bold images and creative cut-outs, Seeger gives examples of how not to be afraid. A humorous ending about brothers will make readers smile. Perfect for the youngest audience, for whom hearing unexplained noises in the dark is a daily occurrence.

THOUGHTS | This book is perfect for Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten! I use it as a fun read aloud, and recommend it to parents who are struggling with fearful children.

BOOK TALK | Have you ever been afraid of anything? This girl is afraid of some things, but look what happens! She thinks this shadow looks really scary. Can you see through this part in the page? What will happen? Look! Did she need to be scared? What else do you think she might be scared of?

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School
BOOK REVIEW | This funny, middle grade chapter book walks the line between frivolous and achingly deep. The main character, Dara, feels in her soul she is an actress first and foremost. What the world sees is a girl who is adopted by an English family who comes from Cambodia. Dara wants SO BADLY to be in the school play, but she doesn’t get a part. Her mother thinks it is because of the color of Dara’s skin. Her teacher says it is because she doesn’t come to drama classes. Follow Dara as she struggles with not only questions of racial bias, but where she belongs in her family.

THOUGHTS | Dara’s dramatic 5th grade viewpoint can be ditzy and grating at times, but the margin doodles and depth of topics make it a great recommendation for any 9-12 year old girl.

BOOK TALK | Who loves movies or the theater? Dara is obsessed with acting and knows she would be perfect for the main part in the play… But she isn’t given ANY part at all!

"The lead role of Maria in The Sound of Music goes to…”
I could practically hear her say "Dara Palmer." This was going to be my big break! But what really came out of my teacher's mouth was "Ella Moss-Daniels." My heart went huuuuggggehhhhht.”

That’s so not fair! It can’t be because of acting ability. Is it because she was born in Cambodia and adopted?

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School

 Sherah, Emma.  
Dara Palmer’s Major Drama.  

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ A good book for teaching about adoption, diversity, and society's manipulation of a perfect woman.
⇒ This would also be a good transition book for someone who loves graphic novels, but needs to read chapter books.

Realistic Fiction
Grades K-6
BOOK REVIEW | Perennial favorite children’s author E. B. White’s life and career are reviewed in this charming bio by Caldecott Honor winning author, Melissa Sweet. Beautifully designed pages with gorgeous illustrations, photographs and collages reveal his charmed life, his treasured childhood memories, his happy marriage, his lifelong love of nature and animals and his gift for writing. Sweet blends White’s own words from his classic tales and his personal correspondences into her well researched and inspiring tribute. Young and old fans alike will enjoy reading about his retreat in Maine, which served as an inspiration for his best loved work, Charlotte’s Web. The book includes an afterword by the author’s granddaughter, a timeline, an bibliography and an index.

THOUGHTS | A delightful biography of a beloved American wordsmith and a recommended title for elementary libraries. Terrific!

BOOK TALK | How many of you loved reading Charlotte’s Web or Stuart Little? If you did, you will love to read about the life of the author, E.B. White. He was an incredible man with an amazing life story. You couldn’t find a prettier or more appealing biography to read – and the artwork by Caldecott Honor winning illustrator Melissa Sweet is beautiful. Her lovely watercolors and collages accompany photos and mementos from E.B. White’s personal collections. Every page is a delight to view. Check it out today!

Sweet, Melissa.

Some Writer! The story of E.B. White.

BOOK REVIEW | Jean Francois Gravelet began his tightrope-walking career at the tender age of 5 as a circus performer. His fame grew as the years passed, and soon he was known worldwide as the Great Blondin. After a visit to Niagara Falls, he decided that he wanted to cross the famous landmark in the best way he knew—on a tightrope. While other acrobats laughed, he knew that he could do it and he did; not just once, but numerous times during the summers of 1859 and 1860. He even incorporated fancy tricks and walked with a man on his back! This short biography is sure to thrill readers of all ages. Tavares’ illustrations showcase Blondin’s death-defying tricks and the beautiful landscape of Niagara. The book contains an Author’s Note and bibliography.

THOUGHTS | An interesting, exciting nonfiction read-aloud for all elementary ages. Pair this book with Mordicai Gerstein’s “The Man Who Walked Between the Towers” or Chris Van Allsburg’s “The Queen of the Falls” for two different kinds of adventure-filled story times.

BOOK TALK | A few years ago, a man walked on a tightrope the whole way across Niagara Falls and it was live on TV. Did anyone see it? Did you know that another man crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope over 150 years ago? He was a circus performer known as the Great Blondin who wanted to do "something amazing, something impossible, something that had never been done before," so he decided to walk across Niagara Falls. No one really believed that it was possible, so huge crowds came to see his performance on June 30, 1859. It turns out that he crossed not once, not twice, but dozens of times during the summers of 1859 and 1860. Every time he performed a new trick to keep the crown entertained. After his final performance, the Great Blondin left Niagara Falls and never returned, but kept performing for many years before retiring to a home that he named Niagara Villa. Matt Tavares wrote and illustrated a beautiful, interesting book in "Crossing Niagara." His two-page spreads of Niagara Falls are breathtaking and really showcase the Great Blondin's spectacular talent and sense of adventure. Check it out!

By Lindsey Long
Nye and Conewago Elementary School


Nonfiction 791.34
Grades K-6

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE
⇒ This book makes a fun addition to lessons on Canada and Niagara Falls.
⇒ I used it in conjunction with Chris Van Allsburg's "Queen of the Falls" for an enjoyable end-of-year unit about Niagara Falls and the amazing exploits undertaken there over the years.
BOOK REVIEW | This gorgeous picture book is based on the childhood experience of fashion model and activist Georgie Badiel. A princess, named Gie Gie, has a magnificent kingdom and wonderful powers. But the one thing she wishes for, to make the water come closer, Gie Gie cannot do. Every day she and her mother walk miles to get water, “dusty, earth-colored liquid.” Gie Gie dances with her mother on the journey there and plays with her friends while her mother waits in line for their turn. When they arrive home, mother boils water for them to drink. Gie Gie cleans their clothes, and the dinner is fixed. The next morning the journey for water is to be repeated again.

THOUGHTS | The pictures are beautifully done and make you feel hot and parched. This book is a gentle, positive way to introduce the struggle some societies have over water. It is also based on a true story and has pictures in the back of Georgie Badiel and how she raised money for a well in a school situated in an area with no water. A great introductory read for a service project and to help students be aware of what some children struggle with.

BOOK TALK | There is a princess who can dance with the wind! She can sing with the stars, but she can’t do the thing she wants to most… bring clean water closer. So early every morning her mother wakes her up and they walk and dance and travel for a long time to get something very important. (Also, did you know that this book is based on a true story? Let’s read it to find out what happens!)

By Emily Woodward
The Baldwin School

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE
⇒ A good book to open any service project having to do with clean water.
⇒ Also a good introduction for any age about poverty and lack of basic needs. This girl cannot go to school because her family needs water.

Verde, Susan and Peter H. Reynolds.
The Water Princess.
Weeks, Sarah & Gita Varadarajan. *Save Me a Seat.*

**BOOK REVIEW** | Ravi and Joe are both kids in need of a friend; Ravi is a new student who just moved to New Jersey from India, and Joe is a quiet kid whose twin best friends moved away over the summer. It might seem like they would naturally gravitate towards each other, but Ravi was top dog at his school in India, and Joe is used to being the last one picked in gym class. He’s also used to bully Dillon Samreen and his sly brand of cruelty. Ravi thinks that Dillon will be his new best friend, but Joe quickly realizes that Ravi is just the next target for Dillon’s bullying. Both boys have a tough start to their fifth grade year for different reasons, but they come together for a common purpose and realize that they’re not so different after all. This is an excellent, quick read that alternates between Ravi and Joe’s perspectives and includes a glossary for each boy (especially helpful for Ravi, who uses a lot of Indian words in describing his food, home life, etc.).

**THOUGHTS** | Another winner from Weeks and newcomer Varadarajan; Ravi and Joe are as real as fifth graders come and your students will find themselves in the midst of a very believable elementary school tale.

**BOOK TALK** | Ravi just moved to New Jersey from India. He was top of his class at Vidya Mandir and he was a star cricket player. He's not too worried about starting fifth grade in Mrs. Beam's class. Joe's best friends just moved away and he's always been a target for the class bully, Dillon. He's not too excited about starting fifth grade in Mrs. Beam's class. Unfortunately, things don't go so well for Ravi on his first day. His mannerisms and English are much different from his classmates and he doesn't really fit in anywhere. Joe feels the same--without his best friends, he doesn't have a niche. While Ravi and Joe don't exactly have much in common, they do share one big similarity: popular bully Dillon Samreen is out to get both of them. The book alternates voices as Ravi tells one chapter and Joe tells the next, and the story spans the first week of school. The boys' lives are extremely different and both face big challenges in fifth grade, but ultimately they both want to find their place. Ravi and Joe are both believable and likeable in different ways and you'll be rooting for them both to find someone who wants to save them a seat.

**By Lindsey Long**
*Nye and Conewago Elementary School*
BOOK REVIEW | “The cat walked through the world with its whiskers, ears, and paws…” and every being that sees the cat has a very different picture of that creature. To a child, the cat looks friendly and fluffy. To a fish, the cat looks enormous and blurry, the result of being separated by a glass bowl. To a bird, the cat is a small brown object with a red stripe (collar) as seen from a great distance above. Every animal has a different perspective so the cat becomes many different things. This book is a 2017 Caldecott Honor Medal award winner, and it is easy to see why Each illustration displays a new style and helps readers experience a new perspective and feeling about how we all see the world differently. A note at the book’s end explains, “The illustrations in this book were rendered in almost everything imaginable, including colored pencil, oil pastels, acrylic paint, watercolor, charcoal, Magic Marker, good old number 2 pencils, and even an iBook.”

THOUGHTS | Brendan Wenzel created a lovely book with lots of discussion possibilities and illustrations that will spark imaginations.

BOOK TALK | Who loves cats? I don't. I'm not a cat lover...I'm more of a dog person. When I see a cat, I see long claws and sharp teeth and eyes that are clearly seeing me as a scratching post. My neighbors, however, all love cats and obviously see them as fluffy and cuddly. Neither of us is right or wrong, because sometimes people see the same thing, but view it differently. In "They All Saw a Cat," lots of animals see the same cat but have different ideas about how that cat looks. It might look scary, cuddly, or just downright delicious! Which animal do you agree with? Check out "They All Saw A Cat" by Brendan Wenzel to find out! This book won a Caldecott Honor medal in 2017 and has beautiful, unique illustrations that show us that our view of the world is only one perspective.

By Lindsey Long
Nye and Conewago Elementary School
7-12 Top Titles
Altebrando, Tara. *The Leaving.*


**BOOK REVIEW** | One late summer day six students left home to attend their first day of kindergarten. They never made it home. Seemingly vanished without a trace, they left heartbroken family and friends fearing the worst. Eleven years later, five of the children have suddenly returned. Now teens, Scarlett, Lucas, Sarah, Adam and Kristen reappear when they are dropped off at a local playground, but they have no memory of the past eleven years. Where were they? Who took them (and why)? And, most importantly, where is Max, the sixth missing student (and why can’t they remember him at all)? Readers follow the alternating voices of returnees Scarlett and Lucas as well as Max’s younger sister Avery as they attempt to discover the truth behind the event that has become known as “the leaving.” As time goes by, the returnees begin to remember bits and pieces of their lost time, but are these memories reliable? Perhaps the teens would be better off not remembering their childhood for some reason.

**THOUGHTS** | This is a great choice for fans of mysteries or thrillers who will quickly find themselves engrossed in the unfolding drama. Thought provoking concepts about the power and importance of memory will remain with the reader long after they reach the final page.

**BOOK TALK** | Eleven years ago, six kindergartners vanished on their first day of school. They were simply gone. Their family and friends who were left behind tried to move on. But one day, five of the six return. They appear fine, but they have no memories of the past 11 years. They seem to remember each other, but none of them remembers Max. Max was the sixth student. The one who didn’t come back. Who took them and why? What happened to them during the missing years? Is there memory-loss story truthful? Most importantly, where is Max? Follow these teens and their families as they try to get to the truth in The Leaving.

**By Elizabeth Henry**

*Lampeter-Strasburg HS/MS*
Bardugo, Leigh. *Crooked Kingdom.*

**BOOK REVIEW** | Kaz Brekker and his crew of misfits: Inej, the silent thief and killer; Jepser the perfect sharpshooter; Nina, the Grisha Heartrender; Matthias, the once cold-blooded Fjierdan and Wylan, the illiterate merchant’s son, have just pulled off a seemingly impossible heist and broken an important Grisha out of an impenetrable jail. This Grisha, Kuwei Yul-Bo, holds the key to *jurda parem,* a dangerous drug that if unleashed could wreak havoc on Ketterdam and the rest of the world. But the merchant who hired them, Jan Van Eck, has double crossed them, kidnapping Inej and refusing to pay the reward he promised for the job. Kaz and his crew must work together to not only free Inej, but to hold onto the secret of *jurda parem* in order to prevent war on their streets. Bardugo once again creates an exceptionally vast world with rich characters and an incredibly tense storyline that will keep readers hooked until the very end.

**THOUGHTS** | Fans of the Grisha trilogy and *Six of Crows* will not be disappointed; these series have taken YA fantasy to the next level and made it one of the best genres on the market today.

**BOOK TALK** | Do you like action? Do you like mystery and adventure? Do you want a book that will keep you hooked until the very last word on the very last page? Then Crooked Kingdom is for you. Kaz Brekker and his crew of misfits—Inej, Jepser, Nina, Matthias, and Wylan—have just pulled off a seemingly impossible heist and broken an important Grisha out of an impenetrable jail. This Grisha holds the key to *jurda parem,* a dangerous drug that if unleashed could wreak havoc on the rest of the world. But the merchant who hired them has double crossed them, kidnapping Inej and refusing to pay the reward he promised for the job. Kaz and his crew must work together to not only free Inej, but to hold onto the secret of *jurda parem* in order to prevent war on their streets. This is the sequel to *Six of Crows,* which I highly recommend you read first!

By Vicki Schwoebel
*Friends’ Central School*
BOOK REVIEW | Cassie, Michael, Lia, Dean, and Sloane are back in the fourth and (hopefully not) final book of The Naturals. Each title of Barnes’s Criminal Minds meets Veronica Mars series has ratcheted up the tension and not disappointed. After learning that her mother is still alive, Cassie and the team are on a mission to track down the Fibonacci cult holding her and figure out why this cult targeted her mother. Before any headway is made, Michael is drawn back to the Townsend estate when a childhood friend is missing. Although she goes missing on a Fibonacci date, she is not tied to the “Seven Masters, […] The Pythia. And Nine” (9). As the Naturals continue searching for clues, Cassie, Agent Sterling, and the others, figure out Nightshade’s real identity and visit his hometown, which Cassie quickly realizes once was her home too. As the Naturals piece together the puzzle of the Pythia, the Seven Masters, Nine, and the influence of a local cult on Nightshade and Gaither, OK, Cassie must face suppressed memories from her past and the impact of her actions now.

THOUGHTS | Bad Blood does not disappoint. It is intense and suspenseful and quite hard to put down. Give The Naturals series to any student who loves mystery, suspense, and crime dramas. A perfect ten!

BOOK TALK | What would you do if you had a natural ability to profile people? An ability to take ordinary actions and emotions and create an accurate portrayal of the person. What if the FBI recognized your ability and brought you into a secret association of teenagers with natural abilities: a lie detector, an emotion reader, a profiler, and a statistician? What if you found your mother’s bloody dressing six years ago, but no body was ever found? How do you move forward? What do you when you learn that your mother isn’t dead? She’s alive and the “queen” of the murderous cult that took her years ago. Do you go after her or accept that she’s left you behind? What do you do when you learn you have a four year old sister living amongst murderers and being used as a pawn? With the FBI and the Naturals on the case, can you locate your mother and sister and save them? Can you save them from the cult, or are they lost forever soaked in Bad Blood by Jennifer Lynn Barnes the fourth book of The Naturals.

By Erin Parkinson
Beaver Area MS-HS
BOOK REVIEW | In 13th century France, Botille and her sisters live and work in the seaside town of Bajas; Botille as a matchmaker; Sazia as a fortune teller, and Plazensa as a tavern keeper. In nearby Tolosa, a young girl named Dolssa is an accused heretic who is sentenced to be burned at the stake, but miraculously escapes. When Botille and Dolssa’s paths collide, the two form an unlikely friendship, and Botille shelters Dolssa despite the dangers of becoming involved with a heretic during the Inquisition. Throughout the novel, which is told in alternating perspectives, Friar Lucien de Saint-Honore continues to hunt Dolssa down, adding an element of suspense to the story. Fans of historical fiction will thoroughly enjoy this title, as Berry has done an excellent job of painting a picture of day-to-day life in medieval France. The bond between Botille and Dolssa, as well as their courageous spirits, will also inspire readers. This is a worthwhile addition to any high school collection.

THOUGHTS | Outstanding historical fiction set during the Inquisition is lacking, and this title serves to fill that gap. The extensive back matter, which includes a glossary, author’s historical note, additional readings, and bibliography, is an added bonus. Despite its length, the short chapters, alternating perspectives, and fast-moving plot make this a relatively quick read. This would be a wonderful supplement to any course that covers medieval Europe during the Inquisition.

BOOK TALK | My name is Dolssa, and I am tired. I am so tired...and hungry. I have been running for days. Perhaps I will just lay down here and die. It is better I die here than at the hands of my enemies. What have I to live for, anyway? My mother, my beautiful mother, is dead. They killed her, and if my beloved Jesus hadn’t saved me from the pyre, they would have killed me, too. Who is this Botille who insists on helping me? Should I trust her? If they find us, will they kill her, too? Read this book, set in 13th century France, to find out whether Dolssa and Botille are able to escape her pursuers or whether they will fall victim to the Inquisition as so many others have before them.

By Julie Ritter
Montoursville Area High School
BOOK REVIEW | This graphic novel presents an immersive history of one of the most famous video games of all time. The story begins with Russian scientist and computer programmer Alexey Patjitnov discussing with his friend the importance of gaming. Then, the story moves to tell the origins of the Nintendo company and the evolution of the gaming world. Alexey creates Tetris to share with his friends, but others soon realize the immense monetary potential of selling such a game all over the world. The story moves quickly, as we hear how the major companies of the day- Nintendo, Atari, and Sega- fought over various rights and with the Russian government to have access to Tetris. It is interesting for the reader to see Alexey’s experience in all of this back and forth. Box Brown’s graphics quickly engage the reader and merge seamlessly with the text. The tale is not simple, but Brown does his best to share all that happened throughout the history of the game.

THOUGHTS | This is an excellent title to give to gamers and lovers of classic games. Highly recommended for high school libraries.

BOOK TALK | (Begin by playing the opening theme of Tetris, available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mlx5bWb3t8c) How many of you recognize this theme? That’s right, it is the music of Tetris, one of the most popular video games of all time! But did you know that the game originated in Russia, and that the creator’s original intent wasn’t to have it massed produced all over the world? In this graphic novel, Box Brown shares the intricate story of early video games and companies, and their race to own the rights to Tetris. Not everyone played by the rules, and the creator of the game was quickly left in the dust. To find out more, read Tetris by Box Brown!

By Lindsey Myers
Shady Side Academy Senior School
BOOK REVIEW | Captured History is a beautiful photography series from Capstone that began in 2012. These two new titles bring to light two very different historic moments in U.S. history: 9/11 and Kent State, May 1970. Both are symbols of war, yet have very different responses. The first hope; the second fear and death (each cover expresses these feelings too: Ground Zero has firefighters raising the U.S. flag, while Death at Kent State shows a dead body with a woman screaming out next to it). Each title integrates photographs and prose to share the iconic moment in U.S. history with students. These titles, along with the previous ones in the series, are a great tool for not only teaching the history, but also for teaching how to read and use images to tell a story, along with use of primary sources in research. In addition to the prose and images, each title also includes a timeline, glossary, additional resources (including a code for FactHound), Common Core connections, source notes, selected bibliography, and an index.

THOUGHTS | This is a must have series for all middle schools and high schools. The images alone make this a worthy purchase, not to mention the prose and resources provided. This series is useful for library classes looking at images, research, history courses, and English classes in need of more nonfiction.

BOOK TALK | Photographs tell a story, often better than words. Through photographs our nation’s history, along with the world’s history, is brought to life. In Captured History from Capstone publishing, various events from the Kent State Massacre to 9.11 to Miracle on Ice and Muhammed Ali are brought to life through primary source images and text. Each book uses pictures to tell the story of the historic event and opens students eyes to the horror, glory, sadness, and strength found in people throughout our Captured History.

By Erin Parkinson
Beaver Area MS-HS
BOOK REVIEW | This is a stunning addition to any middle school science collection. Each page includes beautiful, full color photos of various rocks, minerals, and gemstones in varying degrees of formation. Text boxes and captions include information about the rock, mineral, or gem presented on the page including, but not limited to, formation information, usage (historic and present), varying degrees found in nature, location, general information, such as group, formula, color, form, luster, etc., and fun facts. For instance, did you know that “[m]any objects are misnamed and the Emerald Buddha […] is carved from jade” (165) or “[c]innabar is the chief ore of mercury” (83).

THOUGHTS | Rocks Minerals and Gems is a fabulous addition to any middle school (and high school) science collection. The photographs are gorgeous and the information is very user-friendly. This is a must-have text (and an affordable one).

BOOK TALK | Have you ever wondered about rocks, minerals, or gemstones? Did you know that the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Mayan Pyramids, the Tower of London, and The White House are all made of limestone? What about the difference between shale and slate, or the grades of metamorphic rock? Did you know that many objects are misidentified because jade can look like emerald, or that a perfect emerald, one without any imperfections, is extremely rare and worth more than diamonds (165)? Rocks Minerals & Gems by Sean Callery and Miranda Smith will not only answer these questions, but so many more. With beautiful pictures of various rocks, minerals, and gems, this text is a perfect gem!

By Erin Parkinson
Beaver Area MS-HS
Coates, Ta-Nehisi.
Black Panther: A Nation Under our Feet.

BOOK REVIEW | Fresh from winning the National Book Award for Between the World and Me, Ta-Nehisi Coates takes on the story of Marvel’s Black Panther. People are restless in the African nation of Wakanda. They are unhappy and angry with their long standing leader, T’Challa, Black Panther, and are rising up in revolt. He is determined to stop the ones responsible for this revolt, Zenzi and Tetu, and bring peace back to his nation. With the help of flashbacks, readers are shown the bloody history of Wakanda and the hard times Black Panther has faced as leader. Brian Stelfreeze’s incredibly vivid artwork shines as Wakanda’s history unfolds. But perhaps the best part of this graphic novel are a few other hidden gems, including variant images of Black Panther by different artists throughout the story; a detailed Black Panther chronology, and a behind the scenes glimpse into the graphic novel creation; and a recreation of the first appearance of the Black Panther from a 1966 issue of the Fantastic Four.

THOUGHTS | If graphic novels are even the least bit popular in your library, buy this. With a Marvel Black Panther movie in the works for 2018, and his recent appearance in the Avengers: Age of Ultron movie, this will fly off your shelves.

BOOK TALK | Who has seen The Avengers: Age of Ultron? You may have noticed one important new character—Black Panther. Well Black Panther gets his own graphic novel series that begins here with Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet.

By Vicki Schwoebel
Friends’ Central School
BOOK REVIEW | Labor activist Fannie Sellins lived during the Gilded Age, when American industrial laborers worked in unsafe conditions for low wages. Fannie made it her life’s work to travel the country and fight for higher wages and better working conditions for these laborers. She started out by helping to organize Ladies’ Local 67 of the United Garment Workers of America in St. Louis and then went on to help organize unions for coal workers in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Ultimately, Fannie ended up giving her life for the cause, as she was shot down during a scuffle between deputies and striking coal miners while trying to herd children to safety. In addition to period photographs and other primary source material, the author includes a glossary, timeline of events in the American labor struggle, notes, sources, and additional resources in this well-researched, well-written title.

THOUGHTS | This book is an excellent addition to any middle school U.S. history collection. It reads like a novel, making it both engaging and informative. It provides information on many key concepts pertaining to workers’ rights throughout U.S. history, including strikes, pickets, boycotts, unions and more. This book would pair well with fictional accounts of the American labor struggle, such as Melanie Crowder’s Audacity or Katherine Paterson’s Bread and Roses, Too.

BOOK TALK | Imagine working 10-14 hour days for 6 days a week and only getting paid $145 for the entire week. This is what life was like for many American laborers during the early 1900s. Luckily, there were labor activists who dedicated their lives to obtaining better working conditions and higher wages for laborers. Fannie Sellins was one of these activists. It was not always easy - she faced resistance from business owners and law enforcement officers, and at one point, she was even arrested and jailed for her work. However, she continued fighting right up until she was shot and killed by deputies during a scuffle between strikers and authorities. Read this book to hear her story and gain inspiration from her tireless ambition.

By Julie Ritter
Montoursville Area High School

Farrell, Mary Cronk.
Fannie Never Flinched:
One woman’s courage in the struggle for American labor union rights.
BOOK REVIEW | William “Buffalo Bill” Cody is perhaps the most famous figure of the “Wild West.” In this biography, Fleming examines the legendary figure and attempts to separate fact from myth. According to Cody’s own autobiography as well as the Wild West show he created, life on the American frontier was never dull; rather, it was full of gunfights, raids, racing horses, and skirmishes with Native Americans. Although there was a great deal of violence in the West, this exciting image fabricated by Cody is not entirely true. Comparing Cody’s account of the Wild West to other primary source materials, Fleming attempts to address the inaccuracies. Beginning with his childhood, Fleming presents a thorough account of Cody’s life up through his tours with his Wild West show and his death. Complete with a bibliography, source notes, and period photographs, this compelling title gives readers an objective look at frontier life and the legendary figure known as Buffalo Bill.

THOUGHTS | This is an outstanding addition to any middle or high school U.S. history collection. Not only does the fast-paced, story-like narrative keep the reader’s attention, but I could see the book being used in the classroom in a variety of ways. It provides an excellent introduction to important events, issues, and establishments in U.S. history, including the Pony Express, the Civil War, slavery, and Native American relations. Therefore, it could be used as a discussion starter on any of these topics.

BOOK TALK | Come one, come all! It’s the greatest Wild West show on the planet! See how I raced horses across the land, faced hostile Native Americans, and participated in many gunfights and raids in my quest to tame the wild American frontier. Sound too exciting to be true? Read this book to learn all about William “Buffalo Bill” Cody, and use the facts presented to determine which parts of his exhilarating life were real and which parts were fabricated. An engaging and insightful look at one of America’s most famous legendary figures.

By Julie Ritter
Montoursville Area High School
BOOK REVIEW | A look back at the disastrous and divisive war America fought in the 1960s and 70s, Vietnam: A History of the War describes the turbulent history of the Vietnamese people under the rule of a long list of invaders. It reviews the actions which led to the growing military involvement of the United States in Vietnam at the height of the Cold War along with the impact of the protests of the American people against the unpopular war. The final chapter provides an update on the current positive political situation between the two nations. The book features many of the iconic photos of the war front and the protests at home. Includes chapter notes, timeline, bibliography, and index.

THOUGHTS | Well-written and well-researched, a perfect choice for investigation into a turbulent period in American history. The narrative style makes a difficult topic readable for middle grades and older students.

BOOK TALK | This is the story of the war we didn't win. It happened in a time when our country and our society was changing. For the first time in our history, Americans were questioning the decisions of their government as thousands of young men were sent off to fight in an increasingly unpopular war. The short, well researched and readable history gives the background information on Vietnam's complicated history and reveals how America got embroiled in the war in the tiny backwater Asian nation. The book has so many of the iconic photographs that brought home the grim reality of the unwinnable conflict.

By Nancy Summers
Abington Senior High School
BOOK REVIEW | Freedman presents a comprehensive look at Hans and Sophie Scholl, two university students in Munich, who fought against the changes of the Nazi regime and paid for it with their lives. By creating and distributing anti-Nazi leaflets and leading a group known as the White Rose, the pair spread a dissenting view in an increasingly dangerous time. “We are your bad conscience” they titled one pamphlet targeting Hitler (46). In powerfully written prose, Freedman communicates the Scholls’ much-deserved hero status. Chief interrogator Robert Mohr, himself a Nazi, wrote that “Sophie and Hans Scholl managed a bearing that must be called unique…[They] were convinced that their sacrifice was not in vain” (72). Accompanying photos provide insight into their personal lives and the difficult political and social environment they faced. Today in Munich, a memorial for the two lies near a museum for the White Rose. This is a superb addition to the literature of World War II and the Holocaust. It includes source notes, a bibliography, and index.

THOUGHTS | Though the actions are grim, the message of freedom is overwhelming to the reader, allowing this to be used by middle and high school students. Its short length (87 pages of text) and copious use of well-captioned photos draw in readers. This pairs well with non-fiction or fiction about the Holocaust and World War II (one teacher is pairing it with The Book Thief in our 7th grade Advanced Reading course). It could also be used in conjunction with other books about the resistance movement, notably Philip Hoose’s The Boys Who Challenged Hitler (2015) and Deborah Hopkinson’s anthology Courage and Defiance (2015). This is sobering and encouraging reading.

BOOK TALK | In Germany in 1942, it was illegal to speak against the Nazis. A group of university students in Munich did it anyway. It was illegal to spread anti-Nazi ideas. The White Rose Society did it anyway. Free speech was punishable by death. Hans and Sophie Scholl (brother and sister) were just 21 and 24. They spoke freely anyway. Would they succeed? Would they be captured? Read We Will Not Be Silent to find out.

By Melissa Scott

Shenango High School


**BOOK REVIEW** | “There was life before you, and then life with you. There wasn’t supposed to be life after you.” This haunting sentiment is at the emotional core of Paula Garner’s outstanding debut, *Phantom Limbs.* Sixteen-year old Otis Mueller has had to say his share of tough goodbyes. His beloved younger brother, Mason, passed away several years ago at the young age of three, and Otis has shielded himself from the painful details ever since. His first love, the girl-next-door Meg (in whose room Mason was napping at the time of his death), moved away and out of Otis’ life soon after. Otis found an outlet for his grief and loneliness in competitive swimming. He also found a coach and big sister figure in Dara, an amputee whose phantom limb pains and thwarted swimming career haunt her daily. But just as Dara is ramping up Otis’ training regimen for a run at the Olympic trials, Meg contacts him to say she’s coming home for a three-week visit. Oh, and her new boyfriend will be joining her for a long weekend with Otis and his parents at the Mueller family lake house. The trip is a-w-k-w-a-r-d, and also a catalyst for Otis to acknowledge his true loyalties and for Meg to reveal her secret pain.

**THOUGHTS** | *Phantom Limbs* hits all the right coming-of-age notes with humor, heart, indelible moments, and a realistically imperfect protagonist.

**BOOK TALK** | “There was life before you, and then life with you. There wasn't supposed to be life after you.” Sixteen-year old Otis Mueller has learned the hard way that life doesn’t always work out the way it’s supposed to, and he’s had to say his share of tough goodbyes. His younger brother, Mason, passed away several years ago at the age of three. His first love, the girl-next-door Meg moved away and out of Otis’ life soon after. Otis found an outlet for his grief and loneliness in competitive swimming. He also found a coach and big sister figure in Dara, an amputee whose phantom limb pains haunt her daily. But just as Dara is ramping up Otis’ training regimen for a run at the Olympic trials, Meg checks in to say she’s coming home for a three-week visit. Oh, and her new boyfriend will be joining her for a long weekend with Otis and his parents at the Mueller family lake house. The trip is a-w-k-w-a-r-d. Could it also be a way for Otis, Meg, and Dara to acknowledge their true loyalties and secret pain? Read *Phantom Limbs* to find out!

**SUGGESTIONS FOR USE**


⇒ *Phantom Pain information from the Mayo Clinic:* [http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/phantom-pain/basics/definition/con-20023268](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/phantom-pain/basics/definition/con-20023268)

**By Amy V. Pickett**

*Ridley High School*

**Realistic Fiction**

**Grades 7-12**
BOOK REVIEW | In 1242, travelers gather over ale at a dark inn to hear the story of three children and their greyhound. Each traveler, from a wizened nun to a thieving jester, relays a chapter (or more) of their run-in with these children, who, during the course of the tale, go from enlightened thieves to cold-hearted criminals. The story begins with prophetic Jeanne and her faithful greyhound, Gwenforte, returned to life 10 years after her death. Accused of witchcraft and on the run, Jeanne runs into William, a larger than life monk-in-training with incredible strength and a kind heart, and Jacob, a gentle, thoughtful Jewish boy who can heal wounds with his hands. On their travels, the children run into malicious knights, a farting dragon, a kind-hearted king, an evil queen, and many others each as unforgettable as the last. While set in the Middle Ages, the story explores issues of race, religion, and sexism that are still relevant today. In a tale not unlike the famous Canterbury Tales, readers young and old will delight in the story of these young adventurers, and are treated to phenomenal artwork by Hatem Aly throughout.

THOUGHTS | This is a delight for readers of all ages. Aly’s illustrations, inspired by medieval illustrated manuscripts, add depth and humor to Gidwitz’s excellent story.

BOOK TALK | The year is 1242. There are no cell phones, no tvs, no internet or iPads or tablets- but there are stories. Several travelers gather at a dark inn to hear the story of three children and their greyhound. Each traveler- from wizened nuns to thieving jesters-tells of their run-in with these children, who, during the course of the tale, go from enlightened thieves to cold-hearted criminals. The story begins with prophetic Jeanne and her greyhound, Gwenforte, returned to life 10 years after her death. Accused of witchcraft and on the run, Jeanne runs into William, a larger than life monk-in-training with incredible strength and a kind heart, and Jacob, a gentle, thoughtful Jewish boy who can heal wounds with his hands. Through their travels, you and the children will meet malicious knights, a farting dragon, a kind-hearted king, an evil queen and many others characters in this awesome medieval tale!

By Vicki Schwoebel
Friends’ Central School
BOOK REVIEW | It’s 1943, and World War II is raging. The last place any Allied supporter would want to be is Berlin, Germany. But that’s exactly where Irish teenager Michael O’Shaunessey lives with his parents, since his father serves as Ireland’s ambassador to Germany. Ireland is officially neutral, but Michael and his parents are working as spies. While Michael is seeking insider information (and trying to choke down Nazi propaganda, book burnings, and more), he learns of the secret “Projekt 1065” (the Nazis’ plans to build jet-propelled airplanes) and a Hitler Youth connection that he could use to get that information. Then, while outdoors for Hitler Youth training, a British bomber is shot down nearby. It is Michael who finds the pilot and Michael’s parents who hide him in the Embassy. The pressure is high for Michael, and the question comes down to: what is one person willing to sacrifice for the freedom of many others?

THOUGHTS | Gratz has written a fantastic blend of history, action and suspense that is perfect for middle and high school readers. First person narration provides Michael’s thoughts and fears as he struggles to know when to speak and when to stay silent. Gratz smoothly interweaves German terms, the Edelweiss Pirates, espionage, Hitler Youth and its special teams like the SRD, and World War II advances in weapons and aircraft.

BOOK TALK | Michael O’Shaunessey is Irish, but he looks and sounds like a perfect Hitler Youth since he’s lived in Germany for the past six years, thanks to his father’s position as Ireland’s ambassador to Germany. Ireland is officially neutral during World War II, but Michael’s family is not. All around them they see loss of life and loss of freedom. Michael learns that his parents routinely try to smuggle information to the Allied cause. Lately they have been hearing about a secret Nazi project, top secret and very important to Hitler. But the information of Projekt 1065 is carefully guarded. Michael learns that a connection he has through the Hitler Youth could let him steal some secrets of Projekt 1065, and he knows he has to try. But what will be the cost? This is a tense story about secrets and trust during war. It will keep you reading to know more!

By Melissa Scott
Shenango High School
BOOK REVIEW | Students may be caught off guard that George Washington’s second inauguration speech was 135 words long and by other statistics detailed in Presidential Politics by the Numbers. Faster than it seems, another election is just around the corner. While Lincoln is regarded by many students and historians as a standout president, the book The Election of 1860: A Nation Divided on the Eve of War details the struggles Lincoln faced and the turmoil of the nation during that time period. A Timeline of Presidential Elections divides the history into ten chapters with clear date boxes. The series is ideal to display around elections and also to supplement topics related to presidents in the classrooms. The books contain chapters with elements that draw in readers including infographics, primary images, maps, critical thinking questions and sidebars. A detailed glossary, further reading suggestions and an index are also included.

THOUGHTS | There is also a fiction book to tie into presidential elections called Tommy McNight and the Great Election (Capstone, 2016). The fiction book is inspiring. The main character, Tommy, struggles with the effects of polio. When he sees that the presidential candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt does not let the disease stop him from political goals, Tommy is empowered to reach his goals. There is a great importance is having fiction and nonfiction pairings for students and this series provides this option. Presidential Politics is set highly recommended for upper elementary and middle school library collections.

BOOK TALK | Every four years something special takes place in The United States of America. What is that something special? The election of a president takes place every four years. How much do you know about the election process? Do you know which president had just 135 words in their inauguration speech? Read this series to learn the answers and so much more.

By Beth McGuire
Wendover Middle School
GYASI, YAA. Homegoing.


BOOK REVIEW | Homegoing is Yaa Gyasi’s exceptionally accomplished debut novel, published for adults but a perfect crossover choice. It follows the parallel storylines of Effia and Esi, two half-sisters in 1700s Gold Coast, Africa (now Ghana), and their descendants. Effia, the beauty, marries James Collins, the British governor of the Cape Coast Castle, a union that strengthens her Fante nation’s partnership with the British slavers. Esi, born to the same mother as Effia but into the Asante nation, is captured from her village and sold into slavery in America. Each chapter picks up a generation later, alternating between the two family lines: Effia’s in Africa, and Esi’s in America. The blunt cruelty of the slave trade, the violence of the slave experience, the uneasy existence of freed and escaped slaves, and the rippling consequences for African collaborators are all braided into this remarkable story.

THOUGHTS | Gyasi has crafted a narrative that’s both intimate and sprawling, set against a backdrop of two continents, three centuries, and many generations. It’s a real literary gem and an absolute wonder to read.

BOOK TALK | Homegoing follows the parallel storylines of Effia and Esi, two half-sisters in 1700s Gold Coast, Africa (now Ghana), and their descendants. Effia the Beauty marries a British slaver named James Collins, governor of the Cape Coast Castle. Esi, meanwhile, is captured from her village and sold into slavery in America. Each chapter picks up a generation later, alternating between the two family lines: Effia’s in Africa, and Esi’s in America. The slave trade, the slave experience, the life of freed and escaped slaves, and the role of African collaborators are all braided into this amazing story. Gyasi has written a crossover novel that’s both intimate and sprawling, set against a backdrop of two continents, three centuries, and many generations. Do yourself a favor and pick up Yaa Gyasi’s exceptional debut novel today!

By Amy Pickett
Ridley High School

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ The very real Cape Coast Castle is at the heart of Homegoing. It may be helpful to share pictures of the building and a map of Ghana during booktalks to orient the novel’s potential readers.

⇒ A recent Daily Show interview with Yaa Gyasi may also spark their interest.

⇒ Finally, this novel would be a perfect companion read to two recent books: Colson Whitehead’s The Underground Railroad and Kenneth C. Davis’ In the Shadow of Liberty: The Hidden History of Slavery, Four Presidents, and Five Black Lives.

**BOOK REVIEW** | Hanneke Bakker is very good at finding things. In 1943 Amsterdam, it’s not so easy to find goods like coffee, sausages, and cigarettes, so Hanneke purchases them with ration coupons procured through her undertaker boss and delivers them to paying customers across the city. It’s dangerous work, but it keeps her non-Jewish family fed and relatively secure. Then one client makes an unusual request for help locating a missing Jewish girl. Still grieving the loss of her boyfriend on the Dutch front, Hanneke is reluctantly pulled into the search for Mirjam and a broader resistance movement. She soon comes face-to-face with the grim realities facing the country’s *onderduikers* (hidden Jews).

**THOUGHTS** | This is a truly absorbing coming-of-age mystery set against the fraught backdrop of the Nazi-occupied Netherlands. It has a compelling hook for booktalks and would be an excellent recommendation for readers of Elizabeth Wein’s historical fiction.

**BOOK TALK** | Hanneke Bakker is very good at finding things. In Amsterdam during WWII, it’s not so easy to find goods like coffee, meat, and cigarettes, so Hanneke purchases them with ration coupons and delivers them to paying customers across the city. It’s dangerous work, but it keeps her family fed and relatively secure. Then a client makes an unusual request for help locating a missing Jewish girl. Hanneke is reluctantly pulled into the search for Mirjam and a broader resistance movement. She soon comes face-to-face with the grim realities facing the country's hidden Jews. This is a truly absorbing coming-of-age mystery set against the fraught backdrop of the Nazi-occupied Netherlands.

By Amy Pickett
*Ridley High School*
BOOK REVIEW | The bold cover of Feminism by Nadia Abushanab Higgins first drew my attention to the book, and I’m so glad that it did! This highly readable nonfiction title opens with a chapter on the three waves of feminism: the 1848-1920 fight for suffrage and other basic rights for women, the mid-20th century second wave that roughly coincided with the Civil Rights movement, and the ongoing “Third Wave.” Beginning in the early 1990s, this Third Wave kicked off with a combination of the previous movements’ wisdom and a thoroughly modern perspective on individuality, power, privilege, and femininity. Higgins then moves on to how things stand in the realms of work, violence against women, sex and beauty, reproductive rights, and the future of the movement. Higgins does not shy away from regrettable chapters in feminist history, such as the failure of white feminists to vigorously protest forced sterilization procedures in the United States. She also has a clearly Pro-Choice position on abortion rights. Excerpts from the book would work well in curriculum areas such as American History and Sociology. The book also serves as a starting point for building a multimedia library of feminist documents, books, images, and video.

THOUGHTS | Kudos to Nadia Abushanab Higgins for creating this nonfiction book for teens that has tremendous value for researchers and browsers alike.

BOOK TALK | Does the bold cover of Feminism by Nadia Abushanab Higgins catch your eye? Yes? So dive right in! Feminism opens with a chapter on the three waves of feminism: the 1848-1920 fight for suffrage and other basic rights for women, the mid-20th century second wave that overlapped with the Civil Rights movement, and the ongoing "Third Wave." The author then moves on to how things stand in the realms of work, violence against women, sex and beauty, reproductive rights, and the future of the movement. Higgins does not shy away from the low points in feminist history, such as the failure of white feminists to vigorously protest forced sterilization procedures in the United States. Kudos to Nadia Abushanab Higgins for creating a nonfiction book that will help readers to redefine the f-word!

By Amy Pickett
Ridley High School
BOOK REVIEW | First recorded in the year 542 A.D., bubonic plague has resulted in decimations of cities and countless gruesome deaths by “buboes,” large lumps beneath the skin. Jarrow tracks the disease from its first recorded history and explains the disturbing differences in bubonic, septicemic, and pneumonic plague. Each was ugly and deadly for at least 40 to 60 percent of victims. It infected rich, poor, humans and animals and was widely feared. It came to be associated with rats, though it took until 1898 for two men (Masanori Ogata in Japan, and Paul-Louis Simond of France) to discover separately that rats’ fleas were spreading the disease. Still, they were dismissed. A vaccine and serum could help to prevent and cure it, but nothing had stopped the spread of the disease. In 1899 the disease hit Honolulu, in Chinatown. With its horrific background, it is no surprise that Surgeon General Walter Wyman feared bubonic plague would reach the mainland. And in 1900, in San Francisco’s Chinatown, the disease arrived. “Disinfect. Isolate. Quarantine.” This process was repeated amid public uproar claiming discrimination or “plague rumor.” Bacteriologist Joseph Kinyoun served as quarantine officer for the city, and soon, as the scapegoat for a mayor and residents unwilling to sacrifice their business and trade. But how could a disease be stopped in a city unwilling to believe it? Excellent in layout and in use of photographs and primary sources, this book includes thorough FAQs, glossary, index, timeline, author’s note and source notes.

THOUGHTS | Jarrow painstakingly follows the disease’s history in a suspenseful story. This is a fantastic end to Jarrow’s trio of Deadly Disease books; see Red Madness (2014) and Fatal Fever (2015). The trilogy could be used in health classes and history courses to discuss medical tracking and management of a disease as well as its social consequences. Bubonic Panic also weaves well into investigations of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and comparisons with the city’s 1989 earthquake.

BOOK TALK | Bubonic Plague. When I say that name, do you think of the Middle Ages? If you do, you’re partially correct. The Bubonic Plague has been killing people horribly since before the Middle Ages, but it’s also still alive today. Don’t believe me? Read this book. Symptoms include: fever, headaches, vomiting, and painfully swollen “buboes” (lumps) on the skin. It has been widely feared in many nations, and the U.S. has also been its victim. No one knew it, but in 1900 the Bubonic Plague was about to arrive on the U.S. mainland via an infected sailor on a Chinese trading ship. When others died and fear increased, city officials argued it was just “plague rumor” and when Chinatown was quarantined, no one could get in or out. What would it take for the city to respect the disease?

By Melissa Scott
Shenango High School
BOOK REVIEW | Sarah is having an existential crisis. Her older brother has been in exile from the family for six years, there’s been a major rift between Sarah and her friends and classmates, and she’s been truant from school for weeks. When her artwork is sabotaged before an exhibition, Sarah stops attending school and spends her days wandering around the streets of Philadelphia. Sarah’s living in angst and denial about her family, her friends, and her art, but three of her former and future selves are helping her put the pieces together. Ten year-old Sarah is the catalyst for 16 year-old Sarah to remember the emotional and physical abuse that tore her family apart, and her 23 year-old and 40 year-old selves are there as proof that things can work out. Accept the strange detours in this novel, as Sarah figures out her complicated family and school life and enjoy this original work. Many of King’s novels have a decided surrealistic bent, but at the heart of all of her books is the very real anguish and search for validation of her teenage characters.

THOUGHTS | A thought provoking book that looks at the effects of domestic violence without portraying the actual abuse. The intermittent chapters narrated by Sarah’s mother, provide a glimpse into the rationalization of the victim who hopes for the best.

BOOK TALK | Imagine that you encounter a former or future version of yourself, five or ten years or more in the past or future - what would you talk about? Sixteen-year-old Sarah is having an existential crisis. Her older brother has been in exile from the family for six years, there’s been a major rift between Sarah and her friends and classmates, and she’s been truant from school for weeks. When her artwork is sabotaged before an exhibition, Sarah stops attending school and spends her days wandering around the streets of Philadelphia. Sarah’s living in angst and denial about her family, her friends and her art, but three of her former and future selves are helping her put the pieces together. An absolute original. Absurd and surreal, but completely believable. A.S. King, delivers another moving story of teenage anguish and search for validation.

By Nancy Summers
Abington Senior High School
Goldie Vance splits time between her divorced parents; her mother is a mermaid at a downtown club, and her father is the manager of a first-class resort hotel in Florida, The Crossed Palms. In addition to valeting cars, sixteen-year-old Goldie also assists the in-house Detective, Mr. Tooey. Detective work is her passion, and she hopes one day to become the head detective. When a hotel resident goes missing, Goldie must track down elusive clues and hot leads to solve the case and prove to Mr. Tooey that she can be a valuable assistant. But her love for curiosity soon gets her into trouble, and gets both she and her father fired from The Crossed Palms. Together with her best friend Cheryl, Goldie’s crush Diane, and a handful of other friends, Goldie’s sets out to solve a seemingly unsolvable mystery.

THOUGHTS | An excellent addition to any middle grade or teen graphic novel collection. Goldie Vance provides a refreshing array of diverse characters in a retro style, while also offering a fun story line and engaging drawings.

BOOK TALK | Goldie Vance splits time between her divorced parents; her mother is a mermaid at a club and her father is the manager of a first-class resort hotel in Florida, The Crossed Palms. In addition to valeting cars, sixteen-year-old Goldie also assists the in-house Detective, Mr. Tooey. Detective work is her passion and she hopes one day to become the head detective. When a hotel resident goes missing, Goldie must track down elusive clues and hot leads to solve the case and prove to Mr. Tooey that she can be a valuable assistant. But her love for curiosity soon gets her into trouble, and gets both she and her Dad fired from The Crossed Palms. Together with her best friend Cheryl, Goldie’s crush Diane, and a handful of other friends, Goldie’s adventure and the whodunnit mystery will leave you clamoring for Volume 2!

By Vicki Schwoebel
Friends’ Central School

Larson, Hope. *Goldie Vance: Volume I.*

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ The Goldie Vance graphic novel can be an excellent way to encourage a reluctant reader, or a fun read for any free reading time.

⇒ It’s an excellent story with diverse skin colors and body sizes.

⇒ Readers can compare this story to other popular detective heroines, such as Nancy Drew.
BOOK REVIEW | March: Book Three is a powerful conclusion to Congressman John Lewis’s graphic memoir of his experiences during the Civil Rights movement. Books One and Two focused on the lunch counter sit-ins and the March on Washington, respectively. The plot of the third book centers around the events and marches in Selma, Alabama. Lewis also shares his experiences traveling to Africa and meeting Malcolm X, and the struggles within the different groups pushing for change at that time. The art, drawn in careful detail by Nate Powell, propels the story forward at a fast clip and engages the audience with stark black and white scenes. This series should be required reading in all high schools, not only because it is engaging in a way that textbooks generally are not, but also because the themes and events are, sadly, exceptionally relatable to the events occurring in our world today.

THOUGHTS | Students and educators alike will be fascinated by Lewis’s story and experiences. This series should be in all high school libraries.

BOOK TALK | (If possible, project a page from the book to highlight the powerful art by Nate Powell). He has been beaten, but always stood up to march once again, never raising a hand against his oppressors. He was forcibly removed from lunch counters, participated in the Freedom Rides, and spoke alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. in the March on Washington. John Lewis has been through a lot in his young life. In Book Three of the graphic memoir trilogy, Lewis, at the age of 25, prepares to take part in the march from Selma to Montgomery. Read and experience March Book Three to discover the story of one of the most important figures of the Civil Rights Movement, and a man who still fights for freedom today.

By Lindsey Myers
Shady Side Academy Senior School

Lewis, John, and Andrew Aydin. March: Book Three.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE
⇒ Excellent addition to any discussion and/or research unit on the Civil Rights Movement.
⇒ Winner of the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature: http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2016-winner_ypl_lewis_aydin_powell_march.html#.WMqcIvnyuCg
⇒ Have students read all three books in the trilogy, and host a discussion during Black History Month.
BOOK REVIEW | “Maybe the things that scare us seem more powerful than they truly are when we keep them secret” (269). It’s summer 1977 in Flushing, Queens. It’s one of the hottest summers on record and the evil that lurks in the city is on the prowl. It’s the summer of Son of Sam, and Nora Lopez worries about her long brown hair attracting the serial murderer, but that’s just the cherry. Arsonists have taken to the city and during a city-wide blackout, businesses are looted and burned to the ground. As Nora witnesses her troubled, pyro-loving brother burn down the neighborhood pharmacy, her fears of failure, family, and her future finally force her to face herself and the lies she’s been telling to protect her family from shame. As Nora draws strength from within, she finally faces her broken family and future with inner-strength.

THOUGHTS | With a backdrop of disco, the Son of Sam murders, women’s liberation, and cultural tensions, Burn Baby Burn is a wonderful piece of historical fiction that reminds readers that everyone faces difficulties, but it’s how one stands up to those challenges that allows the future to unfold.

BOOK TALK | It’s the summer of 1977 in Flushing, Queens. New York City is on high alert as a serial killer, Son of Sam, continues to elude police. It’s the hottest summer on record and not just because of temperature. The crime rate is soaring and during a city-wide blackout, looters and arsonists turn the five boroughs into war zones. Families are pitted against one another and cultural and racial tensions continue to rise. The drug culture is soaring with a disco soundtrack and one eighteen year old is stuck in the middle. Nora Lopez is forced to grab hold of her future or watch everything Burn Baby Burn by Meg Medina.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ Son of Sam site - http://www.biography.com/people/david-berkowitz-9209372


⇒ History.com - http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/son-of-sam-arrested

⇒ Film adaptation - Summer of Sam; explore Son of Sam Law

⇒ Book - Son of Sam case: Simon & Schuster Inc. vs. Members of New York State Crime Victims Board

By Erin Parkinson
Beaver Area MS-HS
BOOK REVIEW | Since many lessons taught about the European Front during WWII are focused on the experience of individuals in the Holocaust, this is an interesting title to share with both classroom teachers and students as an example of what happened to Polish non-Jews during the war. Krysia lived a happy childhood in Poland with her mother, father, and brother, before the start of WWII. When the Soviets take over her area of Poland, the family is forced to share their home with Russians, and her father must go into hiding because of his previous occupation with the Polish court system. Soon, Krysia, her mother, and brother are forced to leave their home and board a cattle car for unknown lands. They live as political prisoners in Kazakhstan, struggling to survive bitter cold, snowy winters and plagued by diseases and malnutrition. The story is well-told and fast-paced, perfect for the younger audience for which it is intended. The authors include a glossary of Polish terms, a map of Krysia’s journey, and photographs of her family throughout the text.

THOUGHTS | This is an excellent addition to memoirs of WWII, and can easily be incorporated in lessons about the experiences of children during the war years.

BOOK TALK | There are so many different stories we know of WWII, but this is one you may have not heard before. Krysia had a beautiful childhood in Poland. But this all quickly disappeared when the German’s invaded Poland and Krysia’s city was given over to the Russians. Krysia and her family are forced to house a Russian family, and her father must go into hiding or risk being killed by the Russians. Soon, the Russians force Krysia and her mother and brother to travel to Kazakhstan as political prisoners. Krysia must grow up fast, and learn how to best help her mother and friends. See how she survived by reading her memoir today.

By Lindsey Myers

Memoir

Grades 7-12

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ Include this title in a unit on WWII to highlight Polish experiences.

⇒ Compare and contrast this memoir with a memoir about a Jewish child during the Holocaust.

Mihulka, Krystyna and Krystyna Poray Goddu.

Krysia: a Polish girl’s stolen childhood during World War II.

BOOK REVIEW | August 4, 1892 was a just an average day in Fall River, Massachusetts, until local businessman Andrew Borden and his wife, Abby, were discovered brutally slain (bludgeoned to death by an ax) in their own home. Terror swept through the town as the police began their investigation and suspicion fell on the Borden’s 32 year old daughter, Lizzie. Arrested and tried for the killing of her father and step-mother, Lizzie was ultimately acquitted of the crime, but she remained under a cloud of suspicion for the remainder of her life. Author Sarah Miller explores this horrific crime and subsequent court case in The Borden Murders. Readers will learn about the dynamics of the Borden household, the details of how the events of August 4th unfolded and how the Lizzie’s court case gripped the newspaper readers of the day. The text is supplemented by photos, newspaper excerpts, portions of court transcripts/testimony and explanatory sidebars.

THOUGHTS | This nonfiction title will keep readers on the edge of their seat as they try to decide Lizzie’s guilt or innocence. A perfect choice for fans of mystery, true crime, or history books, or television shows like Law & Order or Dateline.

BOOK TALK | August 4, 1892 started out as a regular day. I woke up and worked on some household chores. In the late morning, my father took a nap in the sitting room. My stepmother returned from a visit and went upstairs. I went out to the barn in to look for something. When I returned to the house I was horrified to find my father and stepmother had been brutally killed. The police seemed to focus their suspicion on me right away. They think I murdered my family--with an axe! Soon I will be on trial facing charges of murder. The whole town will come out to view the spectacle in the courtroom. Why don’t you come, too? Hear my story and learn about the evidence. Read and decide if I, Lizzie Borden, could have committed this terrible crime in The Borden Murders: Lizzie Borden & the Trial of the Century.

By Elizabeth Henry
Lampeter-Strasburg HS/MS
Mills, Wendy. *All We Have Left.*

**BOOK REVIEW**  Two stories of two teenage girls whose lives are changed by the tragic events of 9/11 are presented in this alternating narrative. Alia is a Muslim American teenager attending a creative arts high school in New York City in 2001. When she gets in trouble at school, her parents refuse to sign her permission slip for a selective summer program for aspiring artists at NYU. In a last-minute, desperate attempt at convincing them to let her attend the program, Alia skips school to go talk to her father at his workplace in the World Trade Center. Fast forward 15 years. Jesse is a white American teenager whose brother, Travis, was killed in in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. After getting involved with the wrong crowd at school, she gets caught vandalizing and is ordered to complete community service hours at the Islam Peace Center, where she gains a new understanding and appreciation for the Islamic religion and Muslim culture. Convinced that she can put her life back together and bring healing to her family if she finds some answers, she begins searching for the truth about her dead brother. Why was he at the World Trade Center on that fateful day in 2001, and what was he doing during his final moments? Her quest for answers leads her to Alia, and she discovers that there is much more to the story than she could have imagined. An uplifting story of healing, courage, compassion, and forgiveness, this outstanding title deserves a place in every young adult collection if only to combat the forces of hatred and fear in today’s world.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR USE**

⇒ Pair this title with Jim Dwyer’s *102 Minutes: The Unforgettable Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers* or with the documentary film *102 Minutes* that Changed America.

⇒ Use it to introduce the Muslim culture and Islamic religion, or to initiate discussions about tolerance and acceptance in a World Cultures class.

⇒ Supplement a unit on 9/11 and its repercussions in a U.S. or contemporary history course with this book.

⇒ Have students read the book prior to a field trip to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum; not only would it give them an idea of what to expect, but it would also help them to understand and appreciate the magnitude of the events of 9/11 and the courageous and heroic acts of many people inside the towers that day.

**THOUGHTS**  An enlightening and heartfelt read, this novel has many applications to our world today and could easily be incorporated into any social studies curriculum. The lessons about tolerance and acceptance that run throughout the book would spark excellent discussions in classes studying various world cultures. Information presented in the book about the Islamic religion and Muslim culture could also be useful as an introduction to the Muslim way of life. It would be interesting to have students compare common misconceptions of Muslim culture and Islamic religion with their realities. In addition, references to ISIS, the building of the World Trade Center, 9/11 itself, and changes in the U.S. since 9/11 are relevant to any U.S. or contemporary history course. To really make history come alive, pair this title with Jim Dwyer’s *102 Minutes*, or hand it to students prior to a field trip to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. A must-have for high school libraries!

**BOOK TALK**  Travis “pushes me to the floor and draws my face into his chest as the smoke engulfs us. Every breath hurts, and I close my eyes and pray as hard as I ever have in my life.” It is September 11, 2001, and sixteen-year-old Alia Susanto is in the north tower of the World Trade Center when the plane hits. Her story is intertwined with sixteen-year-old Jesse McLaurin who, in 2016, is trying to straighten out her life and bring healing to her family by searching for the truth about her older brother who perished in the Twin Towers on that fateful day. Will Jesse find out why her brother was at the World Trade Center that day and what he was doing during his final moments? Will Alia make it out of the north tower alive? Read this book to find out!

By Julie Ritter  
*Montoursville Area High School*
Alfie cherishes fishing with his father, and it is during this activity that he hears a faint cry at St. Helen’s island. The island houses the “Pest House” where those sick are placed. When they find a girl, whose head is bleeding, they hurry back home. Dr. Crow treats the girl; they believe her name is Lucy. She is feverish, half starved, and suffering from pneumonia. Later, cousin Dave finds a toy and a blanket with foreign writing. They wonder if Lucy is a Hun but pledge not to discuss this with anyone else, while gossip around town is that the girl might be a mermaid. Once Dr. Crow brings a gramophone and classical piano music more is revealed regarding Lucy. Her father went to fight the war, and she continued school and piano lessons. To feel closer to her father, she listened to the moon. Upon receiving a message that he had been injured, she leaves with her mother leaving their posh life in New York City to board a boat to England with hopes of greeting the injured soldiers.

**THOUGHTS** | The Pest House, Madhouse (where Alfie’s twin brother received treatment), and treatment of those with illnesses is a topic of discussion that reading the book can encourage. The book allows for conversation about acceptance of others regardless of cultural differences. Topics with curriculum tie in include WWI, the Lusitania, U-Boats, and geography.

**BOOK TALK** | Imagine. The year is 1915. War is turbulent and the outlook is grim. You look forward to spending time with your father and going fishing. While fishing with your father you find a girl who is very sick and in danger. Do you find her help? What if she is a spy? Will the community turn on you and your family if you have an “enemy” in your house? What would you do? See what Alfie and their father do in *Listen to the Moon.*

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**By Beth McGuire**

*Wendover Middle School*
BOOK REVIEW | Trevor Noah, best known as host of The Daily Show, delivers a memoir that’s both moving and humorous. He’s a comedian, after all! Noah was “born a crime” in 1984 to his South African mother and Swiss-German father; under apartheid, their relationship and their son’s very existence was illegal. Each chapter opens with a little background on the author’s home country, including the mechanisms of apartheid, the role of language in South Africa, and the quagmire of racial identity in a former police state. Noah then relates youthful episodes, escapades, and misadventures, with his close relationship to his mother anchoring the entire narrative. The book’s final and most gut-wrenching chapter chronicles his mother’s marriage to an abusive man, which nearly ended in her murder.

THOUGHTS | Trevor Noah is a popular TV personality, but this exceptionally well-written book demonstrates that he is also a gifted author.

BOOK TALK | Trevor Noah was "born a crime" in 1984 to his South African mother and Swiss-German father. Under apartheid, their relationship and Trevor’s very existence was illegal. Each chapter opens with a little background on the author's home country, including the mechanisms of apartheid, the role of language in South Africa, and the quagmire of racial identity in the former police state. Oh, and Trevor’s many misfortunes in matters of the heart (hint: he couldn’t get a date). He then relates youthful episodes, escapades, and misadventures, with his close relationship to his mother at the heart of it all. The book's most gut-wrenching chapter describes her marriage to an abusive man, which nearly ended in her murder. Whether or not you are a fan of Trevor Noah as a TV personality, you will love this exceptionally well-written memoir!

By Amy Pickett
Ridley High School
BOOK REVIEW | Over the Pacific Ocean, on October 21, 1942, a B-17 bomber was flying with eight men aboard. The purpose of the flight was a secret mission to deliver celebrated WWI flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker to the Pacific theater of the fighting on a fact-finding trip. But when the plane runs out of fuel, the pilots are forced to ditch into the Pacific Ocean. Amazingly all eight men survive the crash landing of the plane, but the chances of their survival seem slim. They are adrift in three small rafts in shark-infested waters in enemy territory with minimal supplies of food and water. Author Tod Olson relates their amazing survival story in *Lost in the Pacific*. Over 22 days adrift at sea, the men faced hunger, illness, exposure and more. Sadly, one airman did not survive the experience at sea. As time elapsed, personality clashes emerged (particularly between the authoritarian Rickenbacker and the men) as they debated the best course of action to take. The text is enhanced by the presence of photos, maps and historical images.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

⇒ Lost in the Pacific, 1942 lends itself to several potential writing-related activities. Students could choose one of the men and journal entries told from their perspective. They could write a letter home from one of the men (after being rescued) describing their harrowing ordeal to family members.

⇒ The rescue of the men was major news. Students could write and act a newscast in which they could portray reporters and interview the rescued men about their experience.

THOUGHTS | This title is sure to be a hit with fans of WWII literature as well as fans of adventure stories. Reluctant readers will also find them drawn into the engrossing and action-packed tale. Olson does an excellent job of conveying the personalities of the individual airmen and emotional stressors they faced while adrift at sea. Recommended for middle school purchase.

BOOK TALK | The sun is beating down. Our throats are parched with thirst and our stomachs growl in hunger. The rolling waves of the Pacific toss our flimsy lifeboats to and fro. The fear and stress cause us to bicker between ourselves. It wasn’t supposed to be like this. It was just another mission in our B-17 bomber. But we ran out gas and had to ditch in the ocean. Now there are eight of us crammed into three rafts floating in enemy territory in shark-infested waters. We are at the mercy of the waves—will they take us close to land? And we’re getting weaker everyday—will we all survive? Find out in *Lost in the Pacific, 1942: Not a Drop to Drink*.

By Elizabeth Henry
Lampeter-Strasburgh HS/MS

Olson, Tod. *Lost in the Pacific, 1942: Not a Drop to Drink.*

Realistic Fiction
Grades 7-12

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE
⇒ A good companion book for titles such as Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson and Dreamland by Sarah Dessen on the same topic of dating violence.
⇒ Also could be a reading selection in support of discussions on date rape in Health classes.

Padian, Maria. *Wrecked.*

BOOK REVIEW | In her powerful and thought provoking novel, *Wrecked,* Maria Padian examines the complexities of an on-campus sexual assault. The events of the night in question are revealed in flashbacks interspersed throughout the novel. But, the focus of the story is on Haley and Richard, the roommates of the victim and the perpetrator who become embroiled in the school’s investigation into the incident. Their budding romance is tested as they are immediately thrown on opposite sides of the story. Though neither Haley nor Richard are close friends with Jenny and Jordan, they become uneasy participants in the unfolding inquiry and drama. The truth of what occurred is hard to determine; each character in the book perceives the truth through the lens of their own personal views and experiences. The novel sheds light on the pervasive self-absorption of many of the characters which reveals their lack of empathy for their fellow student. And, the situation is further complicated by the campus culture of binge drinking and easy hookups. The specter of social media harassment adds fuel to the drama. This novel is recommended for older teen readers due to the mature themes, but it does present an important topic for discussion for students of both sexes.

THOUGHTS | A compelling look at a very serious topic and a timely read, especially in light of recent news coverage of campus sexual assault cases. The author manages to convey a powerful message about consent that all young people must understand.

BOOK TALK | There is a big party at the campus Animal House and Jenny, a shy and studious freshman goes along with friends to celebrate the weekend. She has too much to drink and ends up in a bedroom with Jordan, a hard partying upper classman. Jenny comes back to her dorm shell-shocked and depressed and Jordan returns home to brag to his roommates about his conquest. When she files a sexual assault case against him, Jordan and Jenny's roommates are brought in as student advisers in the campus investigation. Richard and Hailey's budding romance is tested as they both view the incident in a different light. Hazy memories and some social media harassment further confuse what really happened that night. Situations like this happen every weekend on campuses across the county. This book will really get you thinking about consent, personal responsibility and empathy.

By Nancy Summers
*Abington Senior High School*
Redgate, Riley. *Seven Ways we Lie.*


**BOOK REVIEW** | The multiple perspectives in this novel truly set it apart from the general teen novel, which are often told from only one character’s first person perspective. In *Seven Ways We Lie,* debut author Riley Redgate has succeeded in authentically representing a diverse group of individuals and providing a convincing voice for each. The story opens with students in Paloma High School at an all-school assembly where the principal announces that they will be investigating allegations of a teacher-student relationship. The students are shocked, and rumors abound. The chapters alternate between 7 characters and their experience of the situation. These characters offer a good representation of the variety of students in high school settings, how their hopes and dreams differ, and what affects each student in different ways. The story deals with real issues in a mature way, not vilifying but also not exonerating the characters for their faults. Redgate, only a recent college graduate, provides true insight into teen lives and how these lives overlap.

**THOUGHTS** | I found myself wanting to stay up late to finish this story, and teens will, too.

**BOOK TALK** | How many times have you lied in your life? Are these important lies? How many ways can you lie? How many secrets do you keep from your friends and family? In *Seven Ways we Lie,* seven students from Paloma High School share their stories in alternating chapters. A rumor has surfaced that a teacher is having a relationship with a student, but no one knows who the student is. As you delve into each of the stories, you learn that appearances are deceiving, and people we think we know can change in an instant.

By Lindsey Myers

*Shady Side Academy Senior School*
BOOK REVIEW | Another compelling dystopian series in the making from Shusterman. In MidMerica, technology and science have advanced so that death is no longer a reality for most people. Illness and injuries can be quickly cured and people can live for centuries, able to reset their clocks to younger ages. But population control remains an issue, so scythes are selected to “glean” individuals to keep numbers down. A scythe is an honored and feared individual who decides who shall die and carries out this sentence using a variety of tools and techniques at their discretion. Scythes are expected to be beyond reproach and the law; they should have compassion and integrity to carry out their task, and every so often a scythe must select an apprentice to train for this awesome responsibility. The serious and respected Scythe Faraday has broken with tradition and selected two, Cintra and Rowan, both seventeen, who begin their training in the arts of killing. When Faraday unexpectedly gleans himself, his apprentices are pitted against each other in a contest in which only one will live.

THOUGHTS | An interesting premise with a look into a world perfected by the “Thundercloud”, the AI super program which has solved all conflicts, cured all afflictions and governed all nations. But what is the value of human existence when there is nothing to provide purpose or meaning?

BOOK TALK | What would you do if you were granted a license to kill? In Neal Shusterman’s latest dystopian novel, Scythe, MidMerica is a place where humans can live indefinitely: all diseases can be cured, all injuries can be healed and each person can reset his or her age back by decades. The two main characters, Cintra and Rowan are chosen as apprentices to Scythe Faraday, one of the respected and feared members of society who have the responsibility of “gleaning” individuals to help control population. And now Cintra and Rowan are learning the art of killing. This is a responsibility neither wants, but under Faraday’s instruction they learn about philosophy, history, and morality as well as weapons and poisons. But not all of the scythes are as honorable and wise as Faraday. Will Cintra and Rowan follow in the footsteps of their mentor or will they be swayed by the power and wealth the position can grant them?

By Nancy Summers
Abington Senior High School

Shusterman, Neal. Scythe.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE
⇒ Excellent choice for independent reading or reading circle title, could also be by classroom teachers used to explore the sociological or philosophical issues discussed in the book such as artificial intelligence, utopias, etc.
BOOK REVIEW | Sachiko Yasui holds memories of her close, loving family. She also holds memories of a desperate war that turned horrific. She lived with her family: mother, father, older brothers Aki and Ichiro, younger sister Misa, and youngest (doted upon) brother Toshi. The war had taken its toll on Japan and food for everyone was scarce. Urging her children to not waste a bit of food or drink, her mother would say, “Every sip is precious.” When Sachiko’s father was drafted into the Japanese army, the family chose to return with him to Nagasaki. It was a fateful decision, for soon thereafter the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima then Nagasaki. Sachiko survived to watch her siblings die, each in a different manner, each due to the effects of the bomb. She endured thyroid cancer treatments and fought back for her physical ability to speak, learning that “every word is precious.” This is her story, told in affecting detail, of the bombing and the aftermath. Despite the horror, this story is unputdownable and ultimately overflowing with a message of peace and understanding. Over a lifetime of questioning and forming her own perspective on the bombings (informed by the teachings of Gandhi, Helen Keller and Martin Luther King, Jr), Sachiko finally has spoken to many about these events, always urging an end to hatred and war. “Every word is precious.” Well-documented and complete with end notes, glossary, and an author’s note.

THOUGHTS | This is a book to promote peace. It would pair well with John Hersey’s Hiroshima.

BOOK TALK | You’ve heard about World War II. You’ve heard about the U.S. dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima, then Nagasaki. You’ve heard that the bombs brought the end of the war. But have you ever heard the voice of someone who lived through the bombing? Someone who witnessed buildings in ash heaps, and screams of humans whose flesh was burning?

Sachiko was six years old, and she was there. She remembers, and this is her story.

By Melissa Scott

Shenango High School
BOOK REVIEW | Nicola Yoon impressed me with her first novel, *Everything, Everything*, and has truly knocked it out of the park with her most recent publication for young adults, *The Sun is Also a Star*. The story tells a day in the life of two characters, but Yoon incorporates other perspectives and stories throughout the novel, and this enables the story to rise above the general YA novels that highlight the give and take between two young people falling in love. The story begins with Natasha, whose family is to be deported to Jamaica after being caught as undocumented immigrants. Natasha, a lover of science, facts, and figures, is determined to do all she can to stay in the home she has known since arriving in the States 8 years ago. The second protagonist is Daniel, who yearns to be a poet, but whose Korean-immigrant parents insist that he become a doctor. He is on his way to interview with a Yale alumni when he sees Natasha walking down the street. The two end up spending the day together and trying to navigate their different worlds and Natasha’s impending deportation. Again, the perspectives and asides that Yoon includes, ranging from a chapter about a lonely security card to a short history of black hair, force the reader to acknowledge the silent stories and history going on all around as we live our own separate lives.

THOUGHTS | This should be in all high school libraries, and would be an excellent choice for summer reading or book club discussions.

BOOK TALK | Imagine that your family must leave the only home you have ever really known, immediately. You have one more day to try and figure out a way to stay in the city you love, in the country you have come to call your own. Natasha believes in science above all else, but it seems like she might need a miracle to save her family from being deported from their home in NYC to her country of birth, Jamaica. She has little hope...and then she meets Daniel, the son of Korean immigrants who finds poetry in every facet of life. He wonders if Natasha is his destiny; she wonders if she will be on a plane tomorrow. Told in alternating points of view, this novel will keep you on the edge of your seat as the two dash around New York in a quest to save Natasha. Join these two young people for one day, as they seek to understand each other and the complex world in which they live.

By Lindsey Myers
*Shady Side Academy Senior School*