

# New Books, Good Books, Bad Books and Great Books

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September 2006

Welcome to my highly idiosyncratic book reviews. These reviews are more a blog of my daily reading as I choose books for my middle school library.

Key to reviews:

EL - Elementary aged - usually chapter books and slightly longer novels

MS - of interest for Middle School ages

HS - most appropriate High School age students.

ESSENTIAL - every library of the appropriate level should have this book on their shelves. First priority for purchasing no matter how small or large your budget is.

ADVISABLE - Second tier library books. I still like them, but only buy them after you have stocked up on ESSENTIALS and if your budget can handle them.

OPTIONAL - Last tier of books to buy. Get these if you have a large budget or if you can find them in paperback. Even use your Book Fair profits and get them for "free". Don't buy them if your budget is very small.

NO - Usually a book is here because it has described sex, excessive swearing, is poorly written, or for whatever reason I just don't feel like I can recommend it for a school library.

**Downer, Ann** *The Dragon of Never-Was*, 320 p. Simon Schuster - Theodora would prefer to forget the events of last summer, but her burgeoning magic doesn't give her a chance. This time she and her father are summoned to England to examine something that looks like a dragon scale. She must solve a mystery from the past and from another dimension in order to save herself and her friends. Fans of Hatching Magic will enjoy this. If you have a large fantasy collection then feel free to add the series. EL, MS-OPTIONAL

**#33 Friend, Natasha Lush**, 178 p. Scholastic - Samantha "Sam", is trying to figure out life in high school with a newly "lush" body and life with an alcoholic father, or "lush", so she sends an anonymous note to someone who she thinks would be able to mentor her. Someone else finds the note, but that person still has words that Sam needs to take control of her life. Two swear words and an excellent message. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Duval, Alex** *Vampire Beach: Bloodlust AND Initiation*, @185 p. Simon and Schuster - Jason and his family move the swankiest part of Malibu, the gated community of DeVere Heights. What he doesn't know is that his aunt had to pull some strings, because they are the only family behind the gates who aren't also vampires. With his friend Adam, he discovers the secret and then has to decide what to do with the information. Good, clean vampire fun. MS - ADVISABLE

**Schreiber, Ellen** *Vampireville*, 176 p. HarperCollins - Goth-girl Raven and her vampire boyfriend Alexander have managed to fool Jagger into thinking Alexander has turned Raven into a vampire, but they must still stop Jagger and his sister Luna from turning Travis, Raven's historic nemesis, into a vampire also. This series was published before Twilight, but may be overshadowed by the new series. I like that the Vampire Kisses point are short and sweet and to the point. I hope Ms. Schreiber keeps it going. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Buckley-Archer, Linda** *Gideon the Cutpurse*, 400 p. Simon Schuster - The last time Peter saw his father he told him that he hated him. Now Peter has been flung back to England of 1763, along with Kate, whose father helped create the technology. Their rescuer, Gideon, was until recently a thief - and there is someone who would like to silence Gideon for good and also capture the teens from the future. The historical action is interspersed with small bits about the happenings in the present day. The teens have the ability to "blur" into their reality, but find themselves always back in 1763. Their blurring attracts the attention of those who can help them come home. First in the trilogy; I am looking forward to the second. EL, MS-ADVISABLE

**Ferguson, Alane** *The Christopher Killer*, 274 p. Penguin - Cameryn is determined to follow in her coroner father's footsteps. After he takes her on as his assistant, however, their second assignment leads her straight into a murder, and the victim is one of her best friends. A TV psychic claims to have predicted the murder and brings swarms of publicity into the little town of Silverton, CO. Cameryn may find herself to be the murderer's next victim. The forensic scenes (two bodies and an autopsy) are graphic without crossing into voyeuristic. I wouldn't put this in a 6,7,8 school, but it will probably fly in a 8,9 school. MS-ADVSIABLE, HS-ESSENTIAL

**Paratore, Coleen** *The Wedding Planner's Daughter*, 193 p. Simon Schuster - Willa and her mother move further east fairly regularly, but now they are on Cape Cod - and there isn't much further to go. Willa would love to have her wedding planner mother fall in love and get married herself, but Willa herself is the one who almost crushes all of her dreams. A cute book about the perfect wedding and running from your problems. Out in paperback already. EL, MS-ADVISABLE

**Augarde, Steve** *Celandine*, 496 p. Random House - When Celandine was young, she is sure that she saw little people living in an overgrown forested area near her home. Now she older, and has great need to escape the terrible situation she is in at her boarding school, so she runs to find those small creatures. The "Various" as they call themselves take the girl in, but none of them know that danger from others like them is on its way. It has been 2 ½ years since I read The Various, but I think that this novel is actually a prequel to it. At least it feels like a prequel (I could be wrong). The sequence is not chronological, which may mess up some readers, but nothing is too complicated to impede enjoyment of the novel. The clear writing and young protagonist make this appropriate for lower grades, but the length means it can also be appreciated by older readers. The barebones cover style, unfortunately does not help sell the book. EL, MS, HS - ADVISABLE

**Wiess, Laura** *Such a Pretty Girl*, 224 p. Simon Schuster - Meredith has been safe for three years, but now her rapist - her own father - is getting out of jail early for good behavior and her mother insists that Meredith welcome him back with open arms. In the few dramatic days following his release, Meredith discovers some unexpected supporters and the strength within her self to survive. Very engrossing and a speedy read that will generate lots of word of mouth among

students. The book does mention, of course, the rape, without describing it. Meredith also is pretty cozy with her older boyfriend, but again the descriptions are fairly limited. The "F" word is used once, and other swear words less than half a dozen times. MS, HS-ESSENTIAL

**Baker, E.D. *No Place for Magic***, 250 p. Bloombury - Emma and Eadric are ready to marry, but Emma insists that they receive his parents' blessing. In Eadric's country, however, witches and magic are not respected. When the pair arrive, they are immediately set with the task of rescuing Eadric's little brother from evil trolls - and Emma is going to try to accomplish this without depending on her magic. A nicely done addition to the Frog Princess series. EL, MS-ADVISEABLE

**#29 Truss, Lynne *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves: Why commas really do make a difference***, PICTURE BOOK Penguin - A panda walks into a diner, eats a bit, shoots a couple of arrows and then leaves. So begins several pages of misplaced and replaced commas and great illustrations for each convention. The importance of the lowly comma becomes very evident. This title was originally published as a non-fiction title that expounds at great length (yes, I have read it). This much shorter, and to the point adaptation, would be an excellent tool at every level of education. You will need a opaque projector or its modern equivalent in order to make the most of this title. EL, MS, HS - ESSENTIAL

**Cooper, Susan *Victory***, 208 p. Simon Schuster - Sam has been pressganged onto Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson's flag ship before the battle of Trafalgar. Molly has moved with her mother and step family from her beloved London to Connecticut, bringing along a severe case of homesickness. The two young people's stories come together when Molly finds a piece of Admiral Nelson's history preserved by Sam between the pages of a book. Books about sailing ships and sea battles seem to be doing well in many libraries. If this is the case in your library, then this will be a good addition. EL, MS-ADVISEABLE

**Smith, Lane *John, Paul, George and Ben*** PICTURE BOOK Hyperion - A fun, humorous look at the early lives of five (Tom, too) important men in American history. A great true/false section at the end of the narrative elevates this from mere entertainment, to a way to introduce these men to middle or high school students. EL, MS, HS - ADVISEABLE

**Kerr, P.B. *Cobra King of Kathmandu*** 384 p. Scholastic - John, Philippa and their best friend Dybbuk travel to India on the hunt for a murderer - not knowing that they must also save their Uncle Nimrod and breakup the resurrection of an old snake cult, whose leader is bent on capturing djinn for his own nefarious purpose. A likable, well-written addition to the series. EL, MS - ADVISEABLE

**#28 Abbott, Tony *Firegirl*** 145 p. Little, Brown - Tom is normal sixth grader, with a best friend, a bit car crazy and a secret crush on the prettiest girl in his grade. Then Jennifer, the victim of a horrible fire, comes to his class while she is receiving burn treatments and skin grafts, changing everything Tom thought he knew about himself and his best friend. This is a short and powerful novel that should be read aloud to every elementary and middle school student across the nation, followed up by an intense discussion about how to treat people with differences. The unembellished writing drives home the author's intentions and shows how it is as easy to befriend someone, as it is to ridicule them. EL, MS-ESSENTIAL

**#27 Feinstein, John *Vanishing Act: Mystery at the U.S. Open***, 256 p. Knopf - Stevie and Susan Carol are covering another major sports event as they pursue their dreams of becoming major sports reporters. This time they are at the U.S. Open of tennis, where a major star disappears as she is approaching the court for her first game. Never kids to turn down a great mystery, the two do their best to expose the truth behind the kidnapping. This novel is as engaging as the author's first, with loads of information about sports reporting, tennis professionals and the seedy world of athlete agents. The action is engaging enough that even if people recognize that there are major flaws in the background logic, they will be willing to forgive because the read was so much fun. MS-ADVISEABLE

**Coombs, Kate *The Secret-keeper***, PICTURE BOOK Simon Schuster - Kalli has been hearing and keeping the villagers' secrets for years, but is made sick by the burden during one long winter. The villagers find a way to ease her heart and help her recover her spirit. Don't make the mistake of dismissing this picture book as a rip off of Sharon Shinn's *Safe-keeper's Secret*, though at the beginning the similarities are a bit irksome. Instead, enjoy this sweet little book that is so full of hope. Can anyone think of a way this would be useful in a secondary classroom? EL - ADVISEABLE

**#26 Steele, J.M. *The Taker***, 350 p. Hyperion - Carly must get into Princeton, but she tanks the SAT and only has eight weeks to study for the final retake. Then she receives a text message from "The Taker", who promises to raise her score at least three hundred points, but she must study and act as if she is working hard on her own. For her tutor she enlists Ronald Gross - the nerdy guy who has lived across the street, and whom she has ignored, forever. Along the way Carly learns about lies and love, test-taking skills and life-skills. This is the second SAT fiction book I have read in the last six months and I enjoyed this one the best. A fun, quirky look at the too serious world of the SAT's that many high school seniors will relate to. MS, HS - ADVSIABLE

**#25 Strasser, Todd *Sidewayz Glory***, 197 p. Simon Schuster - Kennin wakes from his horrific crash and finds himself with a badly broken leg and in the hospital, having lost five days in unconsciousness. Even with his cast on, he finds himself pressured on all sides - from Tito, who wants to make up for causing the crash; from Derek, who wants him to race at Mr. Mercado's new drift track; from Jack, who wants sole control of Kennin's sister; from Mariel, who still trying to make her boyfriend jealous. On the track and in his life, Kennin is never sure if he will ever regain control of anything. Excellent end to the Drift X trilogy. Buy at least two copies of each title, because at least one will be stolen! MS, HS- ESSENTIAL

**Muchamore, Robert *Maximum Security***, 287 p. Simon and Schuster - 13 year old James Adams is tapped for a highly dangerous mission - entering a maximum security prison for juvenile offenders as an inmate and cuddling up to the only son of a major weapons dealer. CHERUB can not protect James once he is inside - not from the factions within the inmate groups, and not from guards who might be out for revenge. A much grittier CHERUB novel than the previous two. References to make body parts, a very graphic body cavity search scene, and violent fights elevate the maturity of this novel. Think hard before you put it in the middle school. MS-OPTIONAL, HS-ADVISABLE

**#24 Sorrells, Walter *The Silent Room***, 233 p. Oz' new stepfather pushes him and goads him into fighting until Oz' mother finally agrees to send him to a detention facility. Life on the facility's tiny island is harsh and unbearable and the other boys whisper about 'The Silent Room'. Oz' and the other boys in his dorm have discovered an old boat abandoned in the swamp and work desperately to get it in working order so that they can escape. Oz, befriending the daughter of the camp director, learns that the director's wife and one of the benefactors are actually dangerous con artists, who have plans for the boys under their care. When I started reading this novel, I first thought I was experiencing dejavu, but then realized that I was mixing it up with Willo Davis Robert's "Blood on his Hands," because both novels use the evil stepfather setting up the stepson in order to get rid of him as the major step up for the action. This sin one of those books that will make you queasy with tension as you read, a feeling that middle school students love. MS-ESSENTIAL

**#23 Davidson, Ellen Dee *Stolen Voices*** 188 p. Lobster Press - At 15, Miri is supposed to be looking forward to being Masked and Bonded to her age mates. Unfortunately, she has no Talent and feels like a failure. Unable to join her friends, she sneaks in and witnesses the ritual - and is caught by the Masker - who has other plans for Miri. With the help of a rebel servant, Miri escapes to the Secret Valley and finds her destiny. An excellent piece of science fiction from a small press out of Quebec. I hope you can get your hands on a copy. MS, HS-ESSENTIAL

**Lasky, Kathryn *Born to Rule***, 160 p HarperCollins - Alicia, a princess of B----- is away for her first summer at princess camp. She has formed a bond of friendship with her roommates, but she is struggling with the challenge every princess must face - finding and training a songbird. To further complicate things, rumors of a ghost haunting Alicia's tower seem to have some truth, distracting Alicia with an enticing mystery. Fluffy and cute, prefect for middle elementary. EL- ADVSIABLE

**#22 Haddix, Margaret *Among the Free***, 194 p. Simon and Schuster - Luke had been working in the stables at the Population Police headquarters for some time when he is taken on a patrol designed to issue new ID cards to the entire population simultaneously. When an old lady refuses to comply, Luke is ordered to shoot her; instead he makes a bold decision, leading to more decision which may change the course of his country's history forever. This is an excellent end to the Shadow Children series. Plain, unembellished language brings the series to a swiftly moving, engrossing end. EL, MS - ESSENTIAL

**#21 Westerfeld, Scott *Specials***, 372 p. Simon and Schuster - Tally has been turned into a Cutter - ceramic bones, super healing and extra icy. Along with her friend Shay and the other Cutters, Tally sets in motion world-changing events involving every important figure Tally has ever come in contact with. The end of Tally's story is filled with excitement,

action, adventure and plenty of twists and turns. I did struggle with the feeling that Tally was just constantly being used by everyone around her, but with all of the excitement, plot sometimes takes a back burner. Tally's final decision, while I think it was inevitable, was made incredibly quickly, but I still enjoyed the ride. MS, HS - ESSENTIAL

**#20 Meyer, Stephanie *New Moon***, p. - Return to Forks and the romance between human Bella and vampire Edward. Stir in a few werewolves and some really ancient vampires from Italy to spice things up. I am going to give away absolutely zero plot points in this review. The novel is excellently written. Even though you know it is setting things up for further books (one book?), you will still keep reading straight through until the end. MS, HS-ESSENTIAL

**Delaney, Joseph *The Last Apprentice: Curse of the Bane***, 462 p. HarperCollins - Tom Ward and his master, the Spook, must confront the Bane with the help of Alice, Tom's witchy friend, who is turning further to the dark side. Very dark and full of creepy ways to conquer evil. If you district tried to ban Harry Potter, you don't want to add these books. On the other hand, if you students can tell the difference between make believe and reality and like spooky stuff, then by all means get this. I do not recommend this series for elementary students at all. MS-ADVISABLE

**Barron, T.A. *The Eternal Flame***, 293 p. (and an extensive appendix) Penguin - Tamwyn, Elli, Brionna and Scree each have separate and essential parts to play during the final battle over the fate of Avalon. With the help of their many friends they may just find a way to defeat Rhita Gawr and his minions forever. I have been read several books with a lot of action lately and this one does not disappoint. I was worried that the author was handling too many points of view, but I should have had more faith. Elementary and middle school fantasy readers will enjoy this series. EL, MS - ADVISABLE

**#19 Barry, Dave and Ridley Pearson *Peter and the Shadow Thieves***, 541 p. Hyperion - Peter is settling happily onto the island and especially enjoys tormenting Captain Hook, as he now calls Black Stache. Then another enemy returns to the island, bringing greater danger as one of the Others comes seeking the chest of starstuff. In order to protect Molly and her family, Peter must make the long voyage to England. From the cover of the book, you may expect a retelling of Peter and Wendy's adventure. Instead, you getting a rollicking tale that sets you up for more adventures to come - adventures you will look for with impatience. EL, MS - ESSENTIAL

**#18 Spradlin, Michael P. *To Hawaii, With Love***, 198 p. HarperCollins - Book Two of the Spy Goddess series. Rachel is still not convinced that she is the goddess Etherea come to life, but Simon Blankenship, Etherea's immortal enemy reborn, is still trying to capture and use her. Rachel and her group discover another of Mithra's artifacts is hiding in Hawaii. When the kids are left behind, Rachel engineers the kids' means to follow - landing herself in a whole lot of trouble (many times) and endangering her friends' lives. Spradlin hits the spoiled rich girl tone of voice in Rachel dead on and creates a not-too-campy romp that very nicely mixes spy novels with fantasy. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Watts, Leander *Beautiful City of the Dead***, 254 p. Houghton Mifflin - On her first day at a new school, Zee is befriended by Relly - a young man with a rock band that needs a bass player and holds a very large secret. Zee happens to play the bass quite wickedly, plus she has a head for lyrics and is the catalyst the boys need to propel them towards actual gigs. Unfortunately, evil is willing to use Relly to get their hands on Zee - because they need her also. A great title and a catchy front cover will draw teens in, and they will not be disappointed by the contents. MS, HS-ADVISABLE

**Hokenson, Terry *The Winter Road***, 175 p. - The morning Uncle Jordy is supposed to fly Willa's mother onto the next remote settlement in the far northern reaches of the Hudson Bay area, Willa finds him sleeping off a drunk instead. So Willa takes matters into her own hands and flies the plane herself - an unplanned first solo flight. A severe storm wrecks the plane and leaves Willa with a little food and a large store of homegrown survival knowledge. After she fails to grab the attention of the rescue planes overhead, she makes the life-changing decision to find her own way to safety. At first I was a little skeptical that this was just a blatant "Hatchet" ripoff. But the longer I read, the more I liked, and then fell in love with this excellent first effort. Descriptive, exciting writing, excellent survival skills (as if I would know! - city girl that I am!) and by the end I had tears in my eyes, because I couldn't stand the suspense any more!!! I can't wait for the author's next book. EL, MS, HS - ESSENTIAL

**Flinn, Alex *Diva***, 261 p. - RELEASE: OCTOBER. Caitlin has no desire to try out for the cheerleading squad like her friends want her to and she really wants to get away from her ex-boyfriend who beat her, so she secretly applies for the local Performing Arts High School with her beautiful voice tailored made for opera. Once she blackmails her mother into letting her attend, she has to find a new friends and a new path as she tries to fit in a place where everyone wants to

stand out. SOOOO well done! I read so many books about subjects that I know nothing about - and sometimes I just don't get them. This time, though, even though I am not an opera fan, Ms. Flinn's writing helped me enjoy the subject despite my personal lack of interest in opera. Readers will be drawn to the title and they will not be disappointed by the experience! MS-ESSENTIAL

**Wallace, Rich *Dunk Under Pressure***, 119 p. - Cornell "Dunk" Duncan is not the greatest sixth grade basketball player, but he has practiced his freethrows enough to make it on a traveling team. He feels he has ruined his team's playoff chances when he chokes under pressure, but understanding coaches and friends help him to bounce back. Wallace's *Winning Season* for younger and reluctant readers has another strong addition. I personally appreciate the upbeat tone of the writing, compared against the many cut throat sports novels for teens I usually read. EL-ESSENTIAL, MS-ADVISABLE  
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**Goschke, Julia *Langley Longears***, PICTURE BOOK - Langley has much longer ears than any of his sibling dogs. So long, in fact, that he is often mistaken for a rabbit. When trouble strikes, however, it is Langley and his long ears that save the day. A cute picture book to talk about the differences that make us all unique and valuable. EL-ADVISABLE

**Minor, Wendall *Yankee Doodle America: The Spirit of 1776 from A to Z***, PICTURE BOOK - A abecedarian of important persons, places, things and events from the years surrounding 1776. Illustrations are photos of paintings done in the style of old American tavern signs. Great for a quick overview of important parts of American history. In a middle school or high school each item could be assigned out to individuals or partners for more in depth research. EL, MS, HS-ADVISABLE

**Katz, Karen *Can You Say PEACE?***, PICTURE BOOK - Brightly colored, lively illustrations for a book that has little children from around the world saying "peace" in their language. A nice change from the traditional "hello" or the "happy Holidays" that I have used in my class. 11 countries are illustrated and 11 others are included in the back of the book. Possible uses - research the word for peace in other languages; have students compile a glossary of important words from other countries; have the students map the country locations. EL-ADVISABLE

**Rosenthal, Amy Krouse *One of Those Days***, PICTURE BOOK - A look at all of those different kinds of "bad days" with a hopeful note that each day ends with the coming of night and the start of a new day and a new chance. The childlike illustrations work well with this book, which is so apt in its account of the many little (and some bigger) things that can go wrong and make your whole day miserable. I would advise middle schools with Teacher Advisory programs to add this book to their stash of classroom read-alouds. EL MS - ADVISABLE

**#15 Barretta, Gene *Now and Ben: The Modern Inventions of Benjamin Franklin***, PICTURE BOOK - A good look at the role that Benjamin Franklin's inventions and ideas have played in the formation of our modern society. Bright illustrations are a little childish seeming for older students, but I think they will actually catch the eye of the middle school student. A class on American history, a science class or a Technology, Life Careers class could all use this book as a jumping off point to further studies. EL, MS - ESSENTIAL

**#14 Dessen, Sarah *Just Listen***, 371 p. - Annabel is starting her sophomore year without a friend in the world. A dramatic fight with her best friend left her alone all summer and everyone has taken sides against Annabel. Except Owen - a young man with anger management issues and a very odd Sunday morning radio show. Annabel's problem is wrapped up in her sister Whitney's eating disorder and her mother's breakdown over her grandmother's death. Though this book feels like a direct rip off of *Speak*, its depth and crafting allows the reader to forgive the obvious parallels and enjoy it on its own. There are less than a dozen swear words, but two of those are "f". There is also a tense sexual scene that stops just at the edge of going too far in to the unnecessary description cliff. If you have ninth graders in your school, I say go for it. It will have a huge circulation like *Speak*. HS-ESSENTIAL, MS-ADVISABLE

**Collins, Suzanne *Gregor and the Marks of Secret***, 341 p. - Gregor's mother is finally getting healthier and is almost ready to come back above ground. Bane, the cute little furball, is now a gigantic, paranoid monster. Then Luxa discovers that something sinister is happening to the 'nibblers', problems caused by the rats of Underland. The duo's reconnaissance and rescue mission ends up endangering many lives and only uncovers a larger threat. Book Four in the *Underland Chronicles*. A worthy successor to the series. EL-ESSENTIAL, MS-ADVISABLE

**#13 Papademetriou, Lisa *The Wizard, the Witch and Two Girls from Jersey*, 273 p.** - While Heather and Veronica argue over who is going to purchase the last available copy of the assigned class novel, the quarreling twosome is propelled into the land of the story. There they quickly manage to botch things up and kill off the tale's heroine, and Heather, the blond, shallow one, is forced to take on the Princess' role, while Veronica, the smart one, forges a new role for herself as a servant. The two encounter all of the main characters and situations of the book, but change many things during their adventures, managing to save the world in their own unique way. A campy, funny and totally derivative work that fantasy lovers will thoroughly enjoy. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Kaaberbol, Lene *The Serpent's Gift*, 377 p.** - At a local market one day Dina sees a strange man who she quickly discovers is actually her father, Sezuan - the man that her mother has been running away from since before Dina was born. In their frantic flight from Sezuan, the family unthinkingly takes refuge in a Draconis Foundation house, where they end up deeper in debt. When Nico and Davin are taken prisoner by the Prince's men, only Dina can save them by making a deal with her father. Only one more book to go in this quartet and it just gets better with more telling! MS-ESSENTIAL

**#12 Korman, Gordan *Born to Rock*, 262 p.** - Just before high school graduation, Leo Caraway loses his scholarship to Harvard, is kicked out of the school's Young Republican club and discovers that his father is the front man for the most notorious punk band in history. Leo decides to hit up "dad" for the money for college, but first agrees to follow "Purge" on their cross-country reunion tour. Very funny, very good. Add this to your collection right away! MS, HS - ESSENTIAL

**Cinda Williams *The Warrior Heir*, 426 p.** - Jack has taken medication all of his life because of a heart condition when he was a baby. Now 16, he forgets one day and weird things start to happen - like being pursued by the criminal element, helping his aunt dig up an antique sword, and being able to do magic. Eventually Jack discovers that he is the central figure in an ancient power struggle, which includes a fight to the death. Excellent addition to the realm of fantasy. I hope that your students will latch onto it as much as they have the Pendragon series. I think its more along the lines of Tamora Pierce or Jane Yolen in quality! MS, HS - ESSENTIAL

**#11 Clements, Bruce *What Erika Wants*, 215p.** - The judge in the family court has appointed Erika her own lawyer as her mother tries to wrest custody of her from her father, whom she has lived with for the past five years - ever since her mother took her older sister and left for Arizona. Erika is sure that she wants to live with her mother full time, but as the story unfolds, the real picture is much more complicated. An excellent look at the lies we tell ourselves in order to cope and the dynamics of a family in turmoil. Though the narrative seems disjointed and incomplete, it only adds to the piecemeal approach of Erika's own thoughts and feelings. MS-ESSENTIAL

**#10 Jaffe, Michele *Bad Kitty*, 268 p.** - Jasmine is an accident prone amateur sleuth who must hid her activities from her loving, but status conscious father. While on vacation at the fabulous Venetian resort in Las Vegas, Jasmine is attacked by a cat and hurled headlong into a deadly mystery involving one of Hollywood's hottest stars. Her best friends leave LA to come to her rescue - from a murder and fashion disaster. I was ready to roll my eyes, but it turned out to really cute - and a really good mystery to boot. The true bad guy is not obvious and the forensics work is well done, while being very fashion forward. MS-ADVISABLE

**Koss, Amy Goldman *Poison Ivy*, 166 p.** - The American Government teacher's bright idea is to have a civil trial of a bullying victim against the three girls who have tortured her for years. Using the students from the class as lawyers, judge and jury members, the teacher hopes to prove a point. Told from the point of view of the many different class members involved, the book also points out a fatal flaw of the judicial system and the power of the lure of popularity in fixing the trial. The worst flaw in the book is the author's use of a crippling shy student as the lawyer for the prosecution. I think the point could have been made without such inept representation. Otherwise, the book is another compelling book about popularity and bullying. I was personally disappointed by the end, but not surprised that the author would choose that direction. Middle school girls will probably eat it up. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Perkins, Lynne Rae *Criss Cross*, 337 p.** - Debbie, Hector and Lenny's lives intersect and diverge and cross and recross in mostly simple ways of the lives of the young. YAWN. This seems to e one of those books that adults think kids will like.

It kind of reads like an episode of Seinfeld, but it has neither wit nor passion to involve a student's attention. MS-PAPERBACK

**# 9 - Riordan, Rick *The Sea of Monsters*, 279 p.** - Percy has made it safely through another school year - until the near fatal dodge ball game against a team of giants. When he and his friends flee to Camp Half-Blood, they find that camp is in deep trouble and that Chiron has been replaced by a constantly sarcastic Tantalus. Percy and Annabeth take themselves off on a voyage to discover an antidote for the concoction used to poison the camp guardian, facing down many monsters and their former friend Luke along the way. A worthy successor to the first in the series. EL, MS - ESSENTIAL

**# 8 - Sheth, Kashmira *Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet*, 243 p.** - Jeeta is a member of a traditional Indian family, working to arrange marriages for the two oldest daughters in modern India. Jeeta's new friend Sarina belongs to a less-traditional family, and Jeeta begins to see that there may be more choices available in her life than she previously thought and that everything traditional is not bad. A good new look at Indian culture. Will be a great addition to a cultural fiction collection. MS-ESSENTIAL

**# 7 - Shusterman, Neal *Duckling Ugly*, 211 p.** - Cara DeFideo is uglier than a human being should ever be. Ostracized at her high school, she one day receives a mysterious message telling her to "Find the Answers." Cara resists, until she is humiliated at her prom. She runs away and discovers a community where she may find a place to belong. But when she goes back to her hometown to say goodbye, she sets in motion a chain reaction that may leave her with no place in the world. Nicely done! I am really enjoying this entire series (Dark Fusion). Well written, Mr. Shusterman! MS-ESSENTIAL

**Carter. Ally *I'd Tell you I Love you, But Then I'd have to Kill You*, 284 p.** - Cammie has lived at the Gallagher Academy for Girls with her mother ever since her father died. The locals think that Gallagher is for rich girls, but really it is a super secret spy academy. The girls may know everything about anything and in seven different languages, but when Cammie catches the eye of a town boy, she realizes that she knows nothing about being a girl in love. Okay - since these girls do see the "real" world every year during spring break, I did have a hard time believing their naivete. BUT, the book is so adorable and fun, that I really tried not to care. This is by no means Alex Ryder for girls, but many girls will enjoy the ride. EL, MS-ADVISABLE

**# 6 - Strasser, Todd *Slide or Die*, 198 p.** - Angelina creates street racing cars from scratch and is interested in the quiet and handsome new boy in school, Kennin. Then one night at an illegal drift race, Kennin proves that he has the skills and attracts more attention than he wanted.

***Battle Drift*, 201 p.** - In book 2, Kennin is committed to play a part in the drift racing race-off, but he has caught the eye of not only the hottest girl in town, but also a sleazy recruiter for night clubs who is dating Kennin's sister and his own boss, who is the owner of a Vegas casino. Everyone seems to want a piece of Kennin - even his incarcerated father.

Gearheads will enjoy these fast-paced, easy to read novels full of tension, glory and racing. An easy pick for reluctant readers, with the added bonus of being free of swearing and sex. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Rodowsky, Colby *That Fernhill Summer*, 170 p.** - One day Kiara picks up the phone and discovers that there are actual people on her mother's side of the family - a whole set of people she has never known. Her mother is being called back to the family homestead because the matriarch is lying near death in the hospital. When the cantankerous Zenobia recovers enough to come home, Kiara and the two other girls cousins her age volunteer to entertain their grandmother for the summer. The girls quickly find out that there may be no pleasing their constantly criticizing grandmother, but there may be a small way to connect with her and they can build an important relationship with each other. The cover shows a family divided by race, which really has nothing to do with Zenobia's ire. Extremely well done and a delight to read. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Naidoo, Beverly *Web of Lies*, 242 p.** - Femi and his sister are waiting for England's refugee services to process their father's request for asylum. Meanwhile the children are going to school and trying to keep things together throughout the long ordeal. Then one day Femi attracts the attention of a gang leader and slowly he gets drawn in to that world, telling his family more and more lies, endangering their lives and endangering their chances of staying in the UK. Ms.

Naidoo does a great job of building the tension in this sequel to *The Other Side of Truth*. A worthy, if not superior, successor. MS-ESSENTIAL

**Belton, Sandra** *Store-bought Baby*, 245. Leah's adopted older brother has died in a terrible car crash which he caused. Now Leah, her parents and her grandmother are trying to pick up the pieces of their lives. Leah become obsessed with searching for Luce's birthmother. Luce's girlfriend and Leah's best friend agree to help her, if only to help her keep perspective. A poignant story of a family after the death of an essential member. Their grief is well portrayed without being melodramatic. MS, HS-ADVISABLE

**Gantos, Jack** *The Love Curse of the Rumbaughs*, 185 p. - Ivy is the daughter of a single mother in a small town. After school she is watched by a set of identical twins - old men who quietly go about running their pharmacy, while indulging Ivy. Then one day Ivy sees something in the store's basement which spooks her. Okay, why am I trying to explain the plot of this book in a nice way. It really is a freaky story about two sons with a talent for taxidermy, who have an Oedipal complex and then preserve their mother's body after she dies. Ivy is the daughter of one of the men, but not even her mother knows which one. Ivy seems to have inherited the Oedipal curse and hones her own taxidermy skills against the day that her mother passes away. A perfunctory sex scene just adds to the fact that I can wholeheartedly tell you to stay far away from this title. Analyzing my feelings for this book, I predict that it will be a strong contender for next year's Printz Award. NO!

**Kidd, Ronald** *Monkey Town*, 259 p. - A young high school teacher agrees to go on trial for teaching the theory of evolution. Even though it started out as a way to get publicity for the dying town, it instead turns into a media circus that almost tears \_\_\_\_\_ and her family apart. Before this book, I only knew the little snippet that most other educated students know about the Scope's Monkey Trial. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book and think it would be a good additional to a historical fiction library, and could be promoted for use in an American History class or a Civics class. MS, HS-ESSENTIAL

**# 5 - Korman, Gordon** *The Abduction*, p. - (First in the Kidnapped series) Meg and Aidan Falconer are trying and failing to get their lives back together after finally proving their parents' innocence just a few months earlier (see *Chasing the Falconers* series). Then one day Meg is kidnapped right in front of her brother as they arrive home from school. The Falconers have to let the dreaded FBI Agent Harris back into their lives. A great beginning to another action-packed series by Korman.

**Vrettos, Adrienne** *Skin*, 227 p. - Between his parents arguments, his sister's eating disorder and the snubbing by his former best friends, Donnie just wants to disappear, fade, become invisible. But he also keeps trying to fix things, even when there is absolutely no way things will ever get better. Yes, the author uses the "f" word more than a dozen times, but all of them seem to fit exactly where they are. It is painful to watch the progression of the family's breakup, Karen's disease and Donnie's extremely painful adolescence. As powerful as *Speak*, *Cut* or even *Emily's Secret*. I don't think many middle school's will carry it because of the large number of "f" 's, but high schools should give it careful consideration. HS-ESSENTIAL

**Cheripko, Jan** *sun moon stars rain*, 160 p. - Danny's father died years earlier after saving a dog caught in a roaring river. Now, Danny is back in his home town after quitting his prestigious music school. His friendships with the local, eccentric, real estate baron and the town drunk stir up old issues that will not only hurt feelings, but could also be very dangerous. A dozen swear words (one "f" and a half dozen "sob") may cause you to pause when considering this as a purchase, but the book is an excellent read that many students will enjoy. MS, HS - ADVISABLE

**Dokey, Cameron** *Sunlight and Shadow*, 184 p. - Mina, the daughter of the Queen of the Night and Lord Sarastro, Lord of the Day has been raised by her mother. The night before she is supposed to go to live with her father, he arrives by surprise and takes her away by force in order to bend her will to his and compel her to marry the man of his choice. Mina has a mind of her own, however, and takes matters into her own hands, with a little help from a man with a magic flute. Based, of course, on the opera and extremely well done. MS, HS - ADVISABLE Simon

**Langrish, Katherine** *Troll Mill*, 276 p. - Peer has lived happily with his friend Hilde's family for a while now, until one night when his neighbor's wife thrusts her baby into his arms and throws herself into the sea. Rumors abound that the

wife was a silkie, held captive by her husband. Besides that, though, Peer decides to clean up his uncles' old mill to make a living for himself and impress Hilde. But the trolls are on the move and Granny Green-teeth has her own plans for the silkie baby. More complicated than Troll Fell and not quite as satisfying, though the uncles do meet a fitting end. EL, MS-ADVISABLE Harpercollins

**Carman, Patrick** *The Tenth City*, 186 p.- RELEASE: May 2006 Alexa and her friends have set off in an attempt to reach the Tenth City, in order to find a way to save their friend Yipes and keep the last Jocasta out of the hands of Victor Grindall, the servant of Abaddon. I know many of you will have to buy this book because it is the third and (I hope) final book in the series. For me, though, the book is a poor attempt at creating a religious allegory. I enjoyed the first book so much, the second book almost as much, but this one not at all. I could not let me self go to enjoy it. Instead, I could only see its shortcomings. OPTIONAL Scholastic

**Crutcher, Chris** *The Sledding Hill*, 230 p. - Eddie's father has died and then less than a month later his best friend Billy is killed in a freak drywall accident. Billy is still around though, trying to get Eddie to listen to him; Eddie has stopped talking all together. It isn't until the local preacher/English teacher works behind the scenes to ban the required reading in the Really Modern Literature class Eddie is taking that Eddie starts listening carefully - to Billy, to the people around him - and starts hearing what his father had always tried to teach him. Though I have to say that I wasn't too thrilled with Chris Crutcher writing a book about a Chris Crutcher book, I still liked what the real novel had to say. I am trying to get my 9th grade English teachers to adopt it as a novel, because it covers all of those hot button censorship issues without actually giving anyone something that they could point at and say "This is BAD". MS, HS-ESSENTIAL Harper

**Carlson, Melody** *Torch Red*, 207 p. - Zoe is tired of being the only virgin left in her group of friends, so she makes up a conquest from the summer to make them stop talking. Then she meets ultra-jock Justin, who gets her involved in some sticky situations and Zoe isn't sure that losing her virginity to him is what she really wants to do. Meanwhile, during rehearsals for the school musical, Zoe catches the new girl Shawna first making out with and then having sex with her best friend's boyfriend. Nothing is described, but many things are hinted at. This book definitely belongs in high school. HS-ADVISABLE Also - Bitter Rose, Blade Silver, Deep Green, Dark Blue, Burnt Orange, Pitch Black

**Horowitz, Anthony** *Evil Star*, 317 p. - RELEASE: June 2006. Matt just really wants a normal life. The boys at his exclusive school won't accept him and the powerful people of the Nexus won't leave him alone. When he goes to meet a secretive man with a dangerous book, Matt is almost killed and then is sucked back into the gate mystery - this time headed off to Peru, where he meets the second gatekeeper and a larger group also trying to save the world. Even better than the first. Lots of great folklore and better action. MS, HS-ESSENTIAL

**Batson, Wayne Thomas** *The Door Within*, 310 p. - Aidan finds the text of an ancient book that draws him into a parallel universe where kingdoms are in peril from an evil Lord who wants to control an entire world. Though the premise itself is a well-worn theme, Batson a does a great job of breathing life into it and giving it a fresh look. Schools that love MacHale's work and Nimmo's will also like this. I almost gave up on it, but my 14 year old took it from me and told me he really liked it. EL, MS-ESSENTIAL ([www.tommynelson.com](http://www.tommynelson.com))

**Knox, Elizabeth** *Dreamhunter*, 365 p. - Laura and her cousin Rose are almost old enough to make their Try at crossing the border into the Place, where dreams are caught that can be shared with others. Laura succeeds, but Rose does not and the two of them find themselves working against a nefarious plot by the Secretary of the Interior, a man who is not content with a secondary role in their world's governance. An extremely rich book that reads beautifully. I am going to read it again so that I can find those other dimensions that I don't always appreciate in a first reading. Perfect for fans of Tamora Pierce and Patricia Wrede. MS, HS-ESSENTIAL

**Lorbiecki, Marybeth** *Jackie's Bat* 32 p. - Through the eyes and initial prejudice of the new bat boy for the Brooklyn Dodgers, we see Jackie Robinson's first season in professional baseball during a time of extreme racism in the US. A great picture book to introduce baseball, racism and the Civil Rights Movement. The illustrations are perfect for the time period and tone of the book. The afterword adds just a touch of history that would then let older readers explore other books about Jackie. EL,MS-ADVISABLE Simon and Schuster

**Cunnane, Kelly** *For You are a Kenyan Child*, 31 p. - A Kenyan boy is supposed to be watching his grandfather's cattle, but gets caught up in visiting friends and seeing sites all over his small village. A good book for a quick introduction to life in Kenya in a small village. By the end of the reading, your students will know at least two words in the language. I really

**Roberts, Willo Davis** *The One Left Behind*, 139 p. - Mandy's parents and all of her brothers have left for the weekend - leaving her home alone. No one meant to do it; she let them all think that she was going with someone else. It's been a year since her twin sister died in a sad accident and Mandy wants some alone time. Instead she gets mysterious happenings at night and she discovers a boy not much older than she, who has kidnapped his own little brother to keep him out of the hands of real kidnapers. Published posthumously, the book feels unfinished to me - as if Ms. Roberts hopefully had at least another 50 pages to write to flesh the story out. The end comes to a very dramatic but very rushed flurry of action. But, younger readers will still enjoy this as another of the author's thrillers. EL-ADVISEABLE, MS-OPTIONAL Simon

**# 3 - Jones, Patrick** *Things Change*, 216 p.- Perfect student Johanna is swept away when her major crush, Paul, starts paying attention to her. As they become intimate, she finds out that it is very important to keep Paul happy, because otherwise he will hurt her. She tries once to break up with him, but he sweet talks his way back into her life, where she opens herself up for more physical pain. It isn't until she talks to one of Paul's ex-girlfriends that she finally has the guts to cut it off for good. A small amount of swear words and the mention of sex a couple of times without descriptions. This is a very valuable book for a high school library - ready to put in the hands of those girls who suddenly have that wary look in their eyes and take to wearing long sleeve shirts even in the lovely spring days. Well done. HS-ESSENTIAL Walker and Company

**# 2 - Lubar, David** *Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie*, 270 p. - In pursuit of the love of his life (the girl next door who morphed into a hottie over the summer), freshman Scott finds himself joining the newspaper, running for student council and joining the stage crew of the school's spring play - and Julia doesn't even end up on any of these activities. As he tries to keep up with his homework and still get up the nerve to even say "hi", Scott also meets Lee, the local eccentric goth girl and has to deal with his mom having a new baby. Filled with Scott's personal lists, advice for his unborn sibling and snippets of his of his articles for the paper. Lubar does an excellent job and I really can't say enough in its praises. Two thumbs up from my kids, too. MS, HS-ESSENTIAL

**Vande Velde, Vivian** *Now You See It...*, 275 p. - When Wendy puts on a cool new pair of shades, she suddenly starts seeing things that no one else can see. She finds herself caught up in a struggle to save an elven prince, who used to be the nerdy guy in the back row. And her unlikely ally is the head cheerleader, who in reality is an ancient looking crone. Light fantasy that the younger crowd will love. EL, MS-ADVISEABLE

**#1- Carlson, Melody** *Dark Blue: Color Me Lonely*, 204 p. - When her best friend since kindergarten makes the cheerleading squad, Kara finds herself cast adrift. Her whole life was wrapped up in making Jordan shine and now she is afraid she has no identity. When she is ready to pull herself out of her depression, she finds a loose-knit group of lunch buddies and one of them introduces her to the one being who is always there to fill your life with love. I thought I might be put off by a evangelical toned book, but I actually loved it. I even have given the first two books to my own daughter to read. I think any religious person would be interested in these. And someone who is not religious can still find a lot of truth in the pages. MS, HS-ADVISEABLE

**#1 - Carlson, Melody** *Deep Green: Color Me Jealous*, 199 p. - Jordan has alienated the other members of the cheer squad by latching onto one of their former boyfriends - right after the breakup. Now the jealous ex is doing her best to make Jordan look like an idiot and manipulator. She tries to get her old friend Kara to be her fall back friend, but Kara has someone else she would like Jordan to meet. Just as good as the first. The author portrays the essential problem without devolving the coarseness or vulgarity. MS, HS-ADVISEABLE

**Cabot, Meg** *Avalon High*, - When Elaine's family moves to a new town, she is intrigued by a hot-looking senior, who also is very kind and helpful. As she gets to know him better, she finds herself playing a part in what seems to be a modern King Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot love triangle. But Ellie refuses to play her part - that of the tragic Lady of Shallot - and changes the course of destiny. Teen girls will love the romance. I am not sure whether they will care about the Arthurian parallels. But there is nothing wrong with a good romance. MS-ADVISEABLE

**Butler, Dori Hillestad *Do You Know the Monkey Man?*** 193 p. - When Samantha was three, her twin sister drown in a boating accident. Ten years later, a psychic tells her that her sister is very much alive. Now Samantha wants to track down the father she hasn't heard from for so long and clear up this mystery. The only things this book is lacking is a better title and cover. Help students see past those and they will pass it around amongst themselves. Feels like Cooney's *Whatever Happened to Janie* - and you know that students are always looking for a new Cooney. I hope that Ms. Butler has more novels like this one in her! MS-ESSENTIAL

**Cohn, Rachel *Two Steps Forward***, 227 p. - Its been 18 months since Annabel has seen her Australian crush Ben. Now, Annabel is going to LA with her Mom to see all of the steps who have moved there from Australia. Even stepbro Wheaties will visiting - and Ben will be coming for a visit too! As much as Annabel loves all of the new steps in her life, misunderstandings will happen, tempers will flare and the kids will need to kiss and makeup. An extremely cute sequel. EL, MS-ESSENTIAL

**Ursu, Anne *The Shadow Thieves***, 420 p. - When Charlotte's cousin Zee comes from England to live with her family, more than Charlotte's unpopularity is about to change. When Charlotte's few friends and a large number of other schoolmates starts falling gravely ill, Zee and Charlotte discover that they are the ones who must save the world. Another excellent novel loosely based on Greek Mythology. Its billed as the 1st in a series. EL, MS-ESSENTIAL

**Czech, Jan M. *Grace Happens***, 153 p - Grace has spent her life traveling from set to set with her movie star mother. She hasn't minded, except for the fact that she has always been curious about her father. Then one summer, Grace's mother takes the pair to her home town of Martha's Vineyard and all of her mother's secrets are revealed. Cute book - the secret is not dire - in fact its pretty fun and fantastical. Girls will love it. EL, MS-ADVISBLE

**Flanagan, John *Ruins of Gorlan***, 249 p. - An orphan of the keep, Will is taken by the local ranger as his apprentice, even though his heart is set on being a warrior. As he learns the ranger skills, Will discovers that brut strength is not the only way to save a country. Great stuff! A perfect boy book. Much more intrigue and excitement than magic, so it strikes a happy medium. I am definitely looking forward to the next installment. EL, MS-ESSENTIAL

**Pratchett, Terry *Johnny and the Dead***, 213 p. - Johnny Maxwell has already saved an alien race. Now he finds that he can see and hear the dead and must find a way to save a cemetery. A reprint of the original 1993 novel, which is still well worth reading. I love watching the ghosts as they find new powers and Johnny's part of the story is equally enjoyable. MS-ADVISABLE