



D.C.F.

2011 - 2012

**BOOK REVIEWS
&
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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About This Guide

This guide was compiled by members of the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award Committee. Our intent is to provide a booklet that will support the use of the DCF program in schools and libraries.

For the guide to be most effective, we strongly suggest that the librarian or teacher supervising the program read all the books on the 2011-2012 list. Many public libraries will have the new list by the summer, which means you can get a head start before the school year begins. No synopsis can possibly take the place of reading a book; however, we recognize that reading and remembering the details of 30 books can be a challenge. It is hoped that the reviews will jog your memory!

Since many DCF readers choose and read books on their own, the intent of the questions is to promote discussion among readers of DCF books. This dialogue can take place between student/adult, student/student or in small groups of readers. Most, but not all, of the questions were written to promote critical thinking and to seek opinions, not “right” answers. None of the questions was designed for purposes of assessment.

The generic questions at the end of the booklet can be used in discussions in which readers have read different books. They are taken from Susan Zimmerman's book, *7 Keys to Comprehension: How to Help your Kids Read it and Get it!* (Three Rivers Press, 2003. ISBN – 0-7615-1549-6).

Author websites, if available, are found at the end of the reviews. Some reviews include additional relevant websites. If there is no web address, check the website of the publisher of the book. Their author biographies are usually easy to access and often quite informative.

Compilers:

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Tom Angleberger

THE STRANGE CASE OF ORIGAMI YODA

Amulet, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8109-8425-7. \$12.95. 141 pages.



Is Origami Yoda real? Sixth grader Tommy needs to find out to determine whether he should ask for Yoda's advice about a girl. Outcast Dwight, an origami expert, has designed an origami Yoda. Yoda recently started talking (through Dwight) and giving advice to Dwight's peers. In order to discover the truth about Origami Yoda, Tommy conducts a formal inquiry into recent events at McQuarrie Middle School. Origami Yoda gives advice on all aspects of the middle school experience. For example, Mike always strikes out in gym class (and cries afterwards). Yoda tells him "Better than you they are...Let go of your feelings, Mike. Hate and revenge to the dark side only lead." Mike realizes that baseball isn't his strength and once again strikes out but doesn't cry, thus freeing himself from the torment of being known as the kid who cries in gym class. The case file is a collection of testimonies written by the recipients of Yoda's advice.

The Strange Case of Origami Yoda will delight all kinds of readers. The form and format are immediately engaging. Readers feel as if they are reading the actually case file. The pages look crinkled and worn. Each "testimony" is written in different handwriting or type. The margins are filled with doodles and notes. Tommy's formal inquiry into the validity of Origami Yoda's advice is both hilarious and endearing. The questions and situations that the characters encounter ring true and represent those experiences of the average middle school student. Every young adolescent will be yearning for their very own Origami Yoda to offer them sage advice as they make their way through the trials of middle school and the pages of this book.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Tommy gives the reader background regarding his inquiry into Origami Yoda, p. 1: through p. 3 "Is Origami Yoda real, or isn't he?"
- Kellen tells his story of the advice Yoda gave him when he gets water on the front of his pants, p. 18: "What happened to me was this" to p. 22 "That's when I knew that Origami Yoda is for real."

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think Harvey is so adamant that Yoda is not real?
- Do you think Yoda gives good advice to the characters in the book?
- Do you think Origami Yoda is real?
- How would you describe Dwight's character? What do you think his motivation is to create Origami Yoda?

<http://origamiyoda.wordpress.com/>

Blue Balliett THE DANGER BOX

Scholastic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-439-85209-8. \$16.99. 306 pages.



Mr. Zip, a man with ulterior motives, tracks down a box containing an item with great historical value. The box ends up in the hands of the wrong person, an alcoholic man named Buckeye who stores the box at his parents' house. His parents are raising the son that Buckeye abandoned twelve years earlier, our narrator Zoomy. When Zoomy finds a notebook in the box, his curiosity gets the better of him and he goes to his public library to research the origins of the notebook. At the library, Zoomy meets Lorrol, a kindred spirit who shares his desire for the truth. Together, the two children attempt to solve the mystery of what is contained in the Danger Box.

On the surface, this would appear to be a simple mystery, but Zoomy has pathological myopia, a condition that renders him legally blind. He also has a sensitive nature that sometimes goes jittery-splat. Gam, Zoomy's sensible grandmother, has him create lists to keep his mind organized and these help Zoomy to relax. Though blind, Zoomy sees better than most people around him and this thoughtful vision makes him the perfect foil for Lorrol and her impetuous nature.

When his family's store is threatened by the mystery in the Danger Box, an entire community must come together and rally around Zoomy, Lorrol, and Gas.

Read-aloud hooks:

- We learn how similar Gas, Lorrol, and Zoomy really are, p. 31: "Gas is his secret name..." to "...it was Lorrol's idea to start the *Gas Gazette*."
- Gam and Gumps are vividly described, p. 41-43: "I would have exploded long ago..." to "...and no one noticed."

Discussion questions:

- What would you put into your own Danger Box?
- Create a message to Zoomy, Lorrol, or Gas using the code found on p. 38.
- Zoomy and Gas are both list-keepers but have other things in common. Look for examples in the *Gas Gazette* and in the story.
- Gam calls those leftover bits of an uncomfortable idea *worry crumbs*. Do you have any worry crumbs in your life? How do you deal with them?
- "For someone with bad eyesight, I sure was seeing a lot," p.134. Look at the ways that Zoomy sees without having great eyesight.
- Why does Blue Balliett tell the story from Zoomy's perspective?
- Three Oaks, Michigan is a wonderfully depicted small town. What does Three Oaks have that makes it seem so homey and comfortable? How is your town similar or different?

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

Scholastic site: <http://www.scholastic.com/blueballiett/>

Publisher's Weekly interview with Blue Balliett: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/44203-q--a-with-blue-balliett.html>

Darwin Correspondence Project: <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/home>

Jane Leslie Conly
MURDER AFLOAT

Hyperion, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4231-0416-2. \$17.99. 176 pages.



A privileged 14 year old in Baltimore in 1868, Benjy has nothing more to worry about than what candy he will select at the store or when he will see his next door neighbor, the charming Jane, again. When his mother sends him on an errand, he is caught up in a scuffle and captured, along with a group of immigrant Germans, to work on an oyster ship. The captain is a cruel drunk who thinks nothing of throwing a man overboard, food is scarce and the work is back breaking. Ben has to learn how to get along with the Germans who speak no English, how to do the work with frozen fingers and little in his stomach and how to survive in the midst of unfairness and inhumanity. Amazingly, he begins to like the work and enjoy being on the sea, so when he finally escapes he is happy to sign up with another oyster boat. But what of his family—will he ever see them again, or is he destined to be on the sea forever?

Read-aloud hooks:

- Returning from an errand for his mother, Benjy suddenly finds his world changing, p. 8: “there was a scuffle going on” to the end of the chapter.
- The kidnapped Germans and Ben escape from the ship, Ella Dawn, p. 72: “The others came down one by one” to the end of the chapter.

Discussion questions:

- What do you think about the characters Plum and Hawk? Did your opinions of them change as the book progressed?
- Although Ben no longer went to school, he got a different kind of education aboard the ship. Discuss.
- Ben and his family had always enjoyed oysters without realizing what people had to go through to obtain them. Are there parallels today with food we eat?
- Were you surprised by the choice that Ben made at the end? What do you think you would have done in similar circumstances?

No author website

Audrey Couloumbis

JAKE

Random House, 2010. ISBN 978-0-375-85630-3. \$15.99. 162 pages.



Jake lives with his widowed mother in an apartment they share with their friend Suzie's tropical fish. They have a quiet but full life, with weekends devoted to shopping and the karate class they take together.

On one of these weekends just before Christmas, their routine is shattered when Jake's mom slips on ice in the grocery store parking lot and must have surgery to repair her broken leg. Who will take care of Jake when his mother is in the hospital? Jake's "family" includes his Aunt Ginny, his mother's friend Suzie, and their neighbor Mrs. Buttermark. And then there is Jake's grandfather, a man Jake barely knows and speaks with only a few times a year on the telephone. Ginny is away leading a wilderness retreat and Suzie is aboard a Greenpeace boat, so Mrs. Buttermark kindly offers ten-year-old Jake the comfort of her temporary care.

Meanwhile, Jake's grandfather and his "nightmare" dog arrive to supervise Jake's mom's care and to stay with Jake. His grandfather is a retired military man with a gruff approach to child rearing, and Jake is initially apprehensive about getting along with him and his terrifying dog. Using Jake's voice and his often-humorous observations, Couloumbis describes Jake gradually developing a close relationship with his grandfather. The book's conclusion has Jake celebrating an unusual but joyful Christmas with his nontraditional family.

Read-aloud hooks:

- A misunderstanding, p. 20: "The doctor gave her a sedative...."
- Grandad's dog, p.62: "So it was a shock to see Grandad's dog wasn't a friendly kind...."

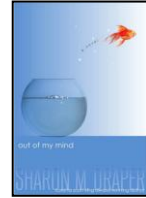
Discussion questions:

- What are some of the changes Jake experiences while his mom is in the hospital?
- Aunt Ginny does something called reflecting with people she doesn't like. How does Jake use this technique on Max, Grandad's dog?
- Why is getting a bike for Christmas so important to Jake? Why has his mom been reluctant for him to have one?
- What are some of the ways that Grandad becomes part of the "family"?

Author writing guidelines: <http://www.kidsread.com/authors/au-couloumbis-audrey.asp>

Sharon M. Draper
OUT OF MY MIND

Atheneum, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4169-7170-2. \$16.99. 295 pages.



Wouldn't it be great to have a photographic memory? Think of all the conversations that you could be a part of, the tests that you could ace, and the doors that would be opened to you.

What if you had a photographic memory, a passion for words, music, and the world around you.....and you had cerebral palsy, were confined to a wheelchair, and could not speak? This is what eleven year-old Melody deals with every day of her life. Don't you dare feel sorry for her though, she doesn't need your pity. Her loving parents and her feisty neighbor, Mrs. V. give her their support and confidence, but never their pity. When doctors deem her incapable of learning, her mom and dad go out of their way to insure that Melody is stimulated by words, music, and experience.

Melody is placed in a "learning community" for other students with disabilities at her elementary school, but her world changes when she starts fifth grade. She receives an electronic wheelchair which gives her the freedom and mobility that she craves. Her new teacher, Mrs. Shannon has a can-do attitude and her elementary school begins "inclusion classes" which allow Melody to mainstream into language arts and social studies classes. Melody takes her first steps towards friendship with a conscientious girl named Rose. When the correct paperwork is filed, not only does Melody have an aide named Catherine during the day, but Catherine helps Melody find a Medi-Talker, an adapted computer that speaks. This device gives Melody a voice for the very first time. Instead of quietly sitting on the sidelines, Melody becomes an active participant and decides to try out for her school's Quiz Bowl team.

Told from the first-person perspective, this is a story of triumph and tragedy that shows how misconceptions about disabilities can prevent real change from occurring in the classroom and in life. Meet Melody, a girl you will never forget.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Chapter 1 introduces Melody's relationship with words, p. 1-2: "Words. I'm surrounded by words..." to "...I am almost eleven years old."
- Read all of Chapter 2 from page 3-8 for the richly descriptive language.

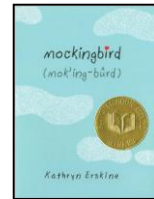
Discussion questions:

- Why does the author begin and end the book with the same passages?
- Melody is a typical fifth-grader in many ways. Show passages that show how she is similar to other eleven year-olds.
- How do the Medi-Talker and her electric wheelchair change Melody's life?
- How does Mr. Dimming change over the course of the story?
- Do you have classmates with a physical disability and if so, how are they treated?
- Imagine a conversation between Melody and Rose on the last day of fifth grade.
- If you were transported to Oz, what would you ask for?

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

Kathryn Erskine
MOCKINGBIRD

Philomel, 2010. ISBN 978-0-399-25264-8. \$15.99. 235 pages.



Caitlin's world is torn apart when her brother is killed in a school shooting. Devon was Caitlin's rock, her defender, and the one person she could turn to for help. Caitlin has Asperger's syndrome and she sees the world in absolutes, in black and white. With the loss of her brother, Caitlin is experiencing something that she doesn't like or even understand: emotions. Caitlin's father tries to help his daughter while dealing with the loss of his son. He is unsuccessful in both areas and withdraws even further into himself.

Caitlin sees Mrs. Brooks, a school counselor, for help with her feelings, which provide some of the funniest moments in the story. Mrs. Brooks is all about emotions and Caitlin's way of thinking does not mesh with her counselor. Mrs. Brooks encourages Caitlin to make a friend, a foreign concept for a girl who likes the predictability of books. During recess one day, Caitlin meets a young boy named Michael who has also experienced loss and the two take a tentative step towards friendship.

Inspired by her new friendship and encouraged by others to ask for help, Caitlin finds a way to bring closure to Devon's death and reunite her family and her grieving community.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Caitlin's description of recess and a classmate's reaction to Devon's death, p. 26-32.
- Caitlin's relationship with books and her understanding of her brother's death, p. 33-37.
- Caitlin's relationship with Mrs. Brooks, p. 40-45: "Hi, says Mrs. Brook, you're early..." to "...when I asked Dad and Devon when the chest would be finished. They said soon."

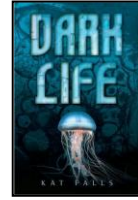
Discussion questions:

- Why does the author tell the story in the first person? Would the story be as compelling if it was told by Caitlin's father?
- Caitlin is very mature in some ways, but less so in her coping mechanisms. Give examples of how Caitlin copes both in and out of school with the loss of her brother.
- Why does the author choose to use capital letters in words or phrases?
- What is the significance of the unfinished chest that Devon was working on for Eagle Scouts? Reread pages 1-3 to help with this question.
- Why is Caitlin threatened by Josh's friendship with Michael?
- How does Caitlin react to Mrs. Brook's absence? Why?
- Caitlin is an artist who doesn't like to use color. What does this say in light of her disability?
- The English language is hard to understand with its multiple meanings. Find passages that show why Caitlin would be frustrated with language.

<http://www.kathyerskine.com>

Kat Falls
DARK LIFE

Scholastic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-545-17814-3. \$16.99. 297 pages.



After earthquakes and tsunamis destroy most of the world, people live in stacked cities topside or underwater in Benthic Territory, a colony on the ocean floor. Ty, the first child to be born in this colony, doesn't like topsiders until he meets feisty Gemma, who goes underwater to search for her brother.

Ty introduces Gemma to his world of underwater beauty, and together they fight pirates, struggle to survive, and uncover secrets regarding the Dark Life.

The second book in the series, *Rip Tide*, will be out in August, 2011.

Read-aloud hooks:

- P. 1: "I should have seen them coming, even this deep. I should have known the squid had squirted its radiant goo to divert a predator. And now my helmet's crown lights served as an even brighter beacon. With a jab to my wrist screen, I snapped them off, but it was too late – I couldn't unring that dinner bell."
- P. 86: "I jerked backward, kicking fast. The outlaw didn't follow. Head cocked, he seemed to be assessing whether I was worth troubling himself over. More dead fish swirled between us, blocking Shade from view. I yanked down the mantaboard and heaved myself onto it, driven by the image of his sightless eyes."

Discussion questions:

- Given the choice, would you rather live on the ocean floor, underwater or topside in one of the stacked cities?
- Ty and the other kids that live underwater in Benthic Territory have what they call dark gifts. Why do you think they keep them hidden? Would you want a dark gift? Would you be afraid to use it?
- Ty and Gemma run into the outlaw Slade and find out some disturbing information about him. Should they tell the adults about him? Why or why not?

No author website

Stuart Gibbs
BELLY UP

Atheneum, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4169-8731-4. \$15.99. 294 pages.



You'd think that just living at a huge brand new zoo/fun park would be exciting enough. But when the zoo's mascot, a hippo named Henry, dies, Teddy thinks he has a murder on his hands and no one except him is interested in solving it. He teams up with the owner's celebrity daughter, Summer, and together they figure out motives for several people, all of whom had reason to hate Henry. Henry, you see, was not the friendly, cuddly mascot people thought. He was a bad tempered, spiteful, animal whose best skill was aiming projectile poop at people who annoyed him.

As Teddy finds out more and more about what is going on behind the scenes, he finds himself in serious danger as an enemy tries to kill him first with a poisonous snake and then a hungry tiger. And then there is his bad luck, too, like the scene he inadvertently caused at the much ballyhooed funeral for Henry, conducted by an Archbishop, and attended by thousands of fans. Murder will out, of course, and all is nicely wrapped up, but not until you have been thoroughly entertained by the humor, puzzled by the mystery and enlightened by the animal facts.

Read-aloud hook: p. 1- p. 3 middle of the page: "too many cop movies."

Discussion questions:

- Would you like to live at a place like FunJungle? Why or why not?
- Before the mystery was solved, who did you think killed Henry?
- This book is essentially about a death, a murder, but the reader doesn't feel sad about the death. How does Gibbs do that?
- What kind of animal do you think would make a better mascot than Henry?
- Summer McCracken is famous because of who her father is. How would you handle that kind of fame?
- What do you think about zoos in general? Should all animals be free, or are there really good reasons to keep some locked up?

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

Heather Henson
DREAM OF NIGHT

Atheneum, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4169-4899-5. \$15.99. 218 pages.



The engrossing story in *Dream of Night* centers on a damaged girl who bonds with a horse on a farm owned by an aging woman. The book brings the reality of abuse—both human and animal—into clear focus. This warm, understated book deals with themes of child abandonment, animal abuse, and the questions that children must answer for themselves in order to become whole.

Heather Henson writes with passion about the horses who suffer abuse, the people who save them, and the children who grow old with too little love, and she writes with knowledge about the human condition, the aches and pains that accompany aging bodies, and the emotions that can assuage those complaints and create a loving home.

The reality of what humans can do to their animals gives this book a terrifying insight into pain from the animal’s point of view. The stream of consciousness from the horse, Dream of Night, creates a sinister tableau of man’s inhumanity. Similarly, Shiloh, a twelve-year-old foster child, presents an inner dialogue that documents her travels from home to home and reveals truths about the child welfare system. Shiloh expects little from her new home with Jess DiLima, an older woman who owns a horse farm and a newly acquired wild thoroughbred stallion. Jess herself feels her age, and wonders why she agreed to care for both an unruly Shiloh and a dangerous horse.

In the end, the relationship between Shiloh and Dream of Night change them both, and give Jess a joy she had long forgotten. The joy only comes, however, after pain they all must endure.

Read-aloud hook: Chapter 2, “Jessalynn,” p. 25: “And even though she knows one of the feisty, long-legged little foals could kick her in the head if she’s not careful, Jess is glad. Just watching the foals makes her heart glad. Because it shows how life goes on. Even in the mud and misery. Life continues.”

Discussion questions:

- How do you explain Shiloh’s late night phone calls?
- What connection does Shiloh make when she arrives at the farm and sees Dream of Night for the first time?
- What is Shiloh’s motive for staying at Jess’s farm? Does she just like horses or does she have other reasons?
- Compare and contrast Shiloh’s and Dream of Night’s behavior.
- How do Jess, Shiloh, and Dream of Night help each other to heal?
- Will Shiloh overcome the anger and fear that Dream of Night mentions at the end of the book?

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

Jennifer L. Holm
TURTLE IN PARADISE

Random House, 2010. ISBN 978-0-375-83688-6. \$19.99. 189 pages.



Eleven-year-old Turtle has always lived wherever her mother was able to find a housekeeping job, even if it meant putting up with bratty rich kids or eccentric adults. But now, in 1935, her mother must accept a job in a household where children aren't allowed, and Turtle is sent to Key West, Florida, to stay with relatives she has never met.

Key West is unlike any place Turtle has ever known. Besides its lush, tropical climate, everyone there seems to know or be related to everyone else. As she settles into her aunt's chaotic household and struggles to hold her own with her rowdy male cousins, Turtle discovers that even she is part of this family and community.

Proud of her toughness and namesake hard shell, Turtle must chance opening herself up to others in order to get what she wants. By sharing the search for some buried pirate treasure and putting herself at risk, Turtle ultimately realizes her goal of being part of a real family. Includes author's notes with photographs and additional resources list.

Read-aloud hooks:

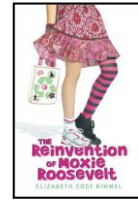
- Turtle's name, p. 99: "Where'd you get that name of yours?"
- Turtle's grandmother, p.124: "I'm not sure, but I think my grandmother might like me..."

Discussion questions:

- What are some of the unusual nicknames given to characters in *Turtle in Paradise*? Why do you think the author used these names?
- Could a service such as the one the Diaper Gang provides exist today? Why or why not?
- How does Turtle get to know Slowpoke? What are some things they discover they have in common?
- What does Turtle mean when she says that her mother "has always been a little funny with the truth"? Why does Turtle feel that she must protect her mother?
- Is the name Turtle a fitting one for the main character? Why or why not?

<http://www.jenniferholm.com>

Elizabeth Cody Kimmel
THE REINVENTION OF MOXIE ROOSEVELT
Dial, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8037-3303-9. \$16.99. 248 pages.



Moxie Roosevelt has never felt like she lived up to her name. A self-proclaimed music geek, Moxie is tired of being invisible. She would much prefer to be, say, a Mysterious Earth Goddess (MEG), or maybe a Detached, Unique, Coolly Knowing Individual (DUCKI). When she enrolls in Eaton Academy for Girls, the boarding school she will attend on a music scholarship, Moxie takes the plunge. Since no one knows her, she decides to take the opportunity to try on different personalities.

Her first conversation begins with ever-so-slightly made-up information about herself, and she soon begins to record her increasingly imaginative personalities in a log in order to keep everything straight. With the slight glitch of being the only person to (accidentally) sign up for *Self Confidence Through Comedy: Releasing Your Inner Stand-Up*, Moxie begins to feel like she is adeptly navigating various social circles and making friends. As Moxie begins to bind herself up in lies, she also finds out how much she truly likes the people she is getting to know. How can she keep her friends *and* all her various personalities?

Then, surly Kate Southington enters the scene and Moxie finds herself exposed. Can *Self Confidence Through Comedy* help her figure out who she truly is? How many of her friends will stick around, and can she win the others back? Most of all, who *is* the real Moxie Roosevelt?

Read-aloud hooks:

- Moxie's Reinvention begins, p. 10: "What was freaking me out..."
- Moxie is an Assertive Revolutionary Activist (ARA), p. 94 – 96; "So you were talking about the sea cow..." to "Or at least for a half hour before French."

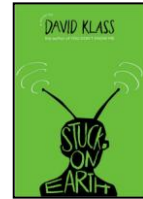
Discussion questions:

- Shakespeare famously wrote, "This above all: to thine own self be true." What is Moxie's "own self?" How does her true personality change over the course of the book?
- Do people choose and change personalities in real life? How does *context* affect the ways we behave? What personalities would Moxie develop to fit in at your school?
- Why did the author choose "Moxie" to be the protagonist's name? At what points in the book does Moxie show true moxie?

<http://www.codykimmel.com/meettheauthor.html>

David Klass
STUCK ON EARTH

FSG, 2010. ISBN 978-0-374-39951-1. \$16.99. 227 pages.



As a species, how are we doing? Are we violent by nature? Do we have the capacity to create beauty or contribute to mankind? Can we save Earth or has our behavior ruined our planet? All of these questions are explored in *Stuck on Earth*.

This sounds like a bummer of a book, doesn't it? Actually, it's a very dark and satirical, but often funny, look at how we are perceived by another race. A conscientious alien named Ketchvar III lands on Earth with a very specific mission: inhabit the body of an average teenager and decide whether the human race should be eliminated. This seems simple until Ketchvar picks the wrong specimen, Tom Filber. Tom is geeky, gawky, socially inept and universally despised by his peers. Mrs. Filber is a screamer; Mr. Filber seems intent on blaming others for his lost dreams, and Tom's sister Sally is simply embarrassed by her entire family. The Filbers are, sadly, your typical American family. Amidst complete dysfunction, how is an alien supposed to be objective?

Ketchvar's encrypted e-mails home show how quickly his assignment could be over. Bullied in school, a place that is "clearly more complicated than mere voluntary incarceration," Ketchvar is only happy when thinking about home and sitting on a swing with his pretty neighbor, Michelle Peabody. When he starts to question his own sanity after some grueling days with no communication from his Elders, Ketchvar takes the advice of a semi-retired teacher and chooses to make a difference on Planet Earth, his home away from home. Perhaps he can save Earth from annihilation himself.

Klass has written a book for anyone who's ever felt like an alien or been a teenager stuck on earth.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Description of Ketchvar inhabiting Tom's body, p. 6-9: "Do not be alarmed, Earthling..." to "...I infuse myself into it and become Tom Filber."
- Ketchvar's first entry to the Revered Galactic Federation Elders after a few short hours in New Jersey, p. 25-28.
- Ketchvar starts to question his own sanity, p. 152-156: "It is two in the morning..." to "...and I have to admit he looks ridiculous."

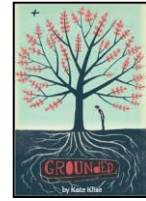
Discussion Questions

- What ultimately saves Earth?
- There are multiple father-son relationships in the story. Pick two of these and compare and contrast them.
- A nice Flindarian Lapse seems appealing to aliens. If you had this ability (p.56-58), where would you go and who would you see?
- The Sadovinians engage in the Great Evening Squeak (p. 58-59). Why is the activity important to Ketchvar? Do we have anything similar on Earth?
- Ketchvar has other alien powers that might make his life seem sort of interesting. Comment on the Schusterfong Summons (p.173) and the Penteluvian Vision stream (p.182). What other powers would you like to possess?
- Look at the questions in the first paragraph of the summary. How do we rate as a species?

No author website

Kate Klise
GROUNDED

Feiwel & Friends, 2010. ISBN 978-0-312-57039-2. \$16.99. 196 pages.



Daralynn's father, brother and little sister have died in a plane crash. The only reason Daralynn wasn't in that plane is because her mother had grounded her for going fishing without her permission.

Daralynn's mother is angry and hurting; she opens a beauty parlor and works in the local funeral home fixing the hair of the dead. Daralynn works at her mom's cutting the hair of the kids in town. She also comes up with the idea of a "living" funeral as a way to make some extra money.

Clem Monroe, a very slick con man comes to town. Aunt Josie, who runs a home for elderly gentlemen, falls for Clem as do the rest of the town's people. Clem has most of the town fooled, but not Daralynn - she has a mystery to solve.

Read-aloud hooks:

- P. 1-3: "I'm alive today because I was grounded." to the end of the chapter.
- To help her mother out, Daralynn decides to put the fun back in funeral: p. 63-65

Discussion Questions

- Grounded has more than one meaning. Can you explain what grounded means in its different forms? How is it used in the book?
- Daralynn's teacher gave her a notebook to write in over the summer. Do you think it helped her deal with her grief? If you could write about anything at all what would you write about?
- In the cemetery Daralynn tell her mother she is afraid. What is she afraid of? Do you think her mother is right?
- Would you like to have a living funeral? If yes, what would you plan for it?
- Dolls are significant in the book. Why do you think the author included them in the story?
- Daralynn makes a very funny mistake when she thinks the crematorium coming to town is actually an ice cream parlor. Can you think of a time when you got a word confused? What was it?
- This is a book about death, but it has a lot of humor. What would you tell your friends about the book to make them want to read it?

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

Debbie Levy
THE YEAR OF GOODBYES

Hyperion, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4231-2901-1. \$16.99. 133 pages.



1938 was a year of change for 12-year-old Jutta Salzberg. Jutta and her family are Jewish and living in Germany under Adolf Hitler's rule. *The Year of Goodbyes* is a compilation of several formats that come together to tell the true story of one year in the author's mother's life. Levy tells her mother's story using messages and images from her mother's *poesiealbumn* (a book similar to an autograph book), entries from her mother's diary as well as short sections of free verse written from Jutta's perspective. Through Jutta's voice we enter her quickly changing world. In the beginning some of Jutta's friends and family members begin to move out of Hamburg, Germany and as the year goes on Jutta's family must also make plans to relocate to escape Nazi Germany.

The Year of Goodbyes is a powerful story that is not easily forgotten. The entries from the *poesiealbumn*, images of the stickers and drawings, excerpts from Jutta's diary and the story told in free verse come together seamlessly to provide the reader with an authentic vision of the thoughts, feelings and experiences of a child living through horrific times. The Introduction and Afterword are critical additions to this slender book. The Introduction provides the reader with background and historical context and the Afterword provides a broader historical context for life in Germany for Jews under Adolf Hitler in the years leading up to 1938. The Afterword also contains brief notes on the fate of friends and family members who appear in the story. Levy also includes family photos and a time line.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Chapter Two "What is Will," p. 4: The *poesiealbumn* entry by Jutta's friend Lisa reads: "Will is power." Jutta describes her attitude (and will power) towards the laws against Jews in Germany. Show and read the *poesiealbumn* entry as well as the text p. 5 - 7 "How serious this sounds...It is hard to feel power, when a friend is leaving."
- Chapter 18 "Give Joy Away," p. 70 - 72: "We pack for our journey...I wonder what Friedel will have to give away."

Discussion questions:

- Compare Jutta's life at the beginning of the story with her life at the end of the story. How has it changed?
- What challenges do Jutta and her family face?
- What goodbyes do Jutta and her family make during this year?
- What different formats tell the story in this book? How do they work together to complete the story?

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

Discussion Guide from the publisher:

<http://a.doling.com/explore/PMPages/DCOM/books/catalog/Printable/Year-of-Goodbyes.pdf>

Cynthia Lord
TOUCH BLUE

Scholastic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-545-03531-6. \$16.99. 186 pages.



Tess Brooks doesn't want to have to leave her island home, but the state of Maine will close the only school on the island if they don't get enough students. The town has come up with a plan to save the school: five families on the island will take in foster kids to bring up the number of students enrolled.

Tess's family has agreed to take in Aaron, a 13 year-old-boy who has been in and out of several foster homes. Not everyone on the island thinks taking in foster kids is a good idea. Even Tess and her family have different expectations of what it will be like to have a foster child live with them. As the story unfolds we see how Tess, Aaron, Tess's family and the town's people come to make it work.

Life on a small island can be great. Tess wants to show Aaron all the things she loves about living on the island - watching a thunderstorm over the ocean or having a seal so close to you can almost touch it or the feel of her dad's lobster boat as it flies across the water. But Aaron has had a pretty hard life with an alcoholic mom and foster care and he still thinks he'll be able to go back with his mom. Getting Aaron to be able to trust enough to see all the good is going to be a tough job for Tess and her family.

Read-aloud hook: P. 143: "One problem with agreeing to keep a secret is that it always starts off feeling like an easy, little decision. But it doesn't stay easy or little. It sits there like one of those jagged ledges hiding under the surface of the ocean at high tide – quietly waiting to rip everything apart if you forget, for even a second, it's there."

Discussion questions:

- The island school will have to close if there aren't enough students. Tess doesn't want to have to leave the island. Do you think the town's plan is a good solution to the problem? Do you have any other ideas?
- Have you ever been the "new kid" in a group? How did it feel? What are some ways that helped you feel part of the group?
- Tess believes in all sorts of superstitions:
 - Touch blue and your wish will come true.
 - If you watch a boat until it's out of sight, you'll never see it again.
 - Crossing your fingers brings good luck.
 - Never whistle on a boat.

Why do people believe in superstitions? Are superstitions good or bad? Do you know any superstitions?

<http://www.cynthialord.com/index.htm>

Mike Lupica HERO

Philomel, 2010. ISBN 978-0-399-25283-9. \$17.99. 289 pages.



Zach Harriman's dad has died. Everyone says it was an accident, a plane crash. Zach doesn't believe it was an accident; he believes his dad was murdered. The harder he tries to find out what really happened to his dad, the stranger things become.

All of a sudden he has powers, superpowers. He can see in the dark, fly, and has incredible strength. But stranger still are the mysterious people that he keeps meeting. Are they good or bad? How can he tell? And what, if anything, can they tell him about his dad?

Zach comes to know that his dad was a hero. He spent his life protecting the country he loved from the "Bads," evil creatures determined to destroy all that he held dear. Now it is Zach's turn to take over where his dad left off. But whom should he trust? His uncle John whom he's known all his life, or the old man he met at the crash site?

Read-aloud hooks:

- P. 1: "There were four thugs, total gangsters, in front of the house with their rifles and their night vision goggles. Four more in back. No telling how many more inside. So figure a dozen hard guys at least, protecting one of the worst guys in the world. Not one of them having a clue about how much trouble they were really in, how badly I had them outnumbered."
- P. 52: "'Be Strong,' Senator Kerrigan had said to Zach. It just made him more determined than ever to find out the truth behind his father's death."

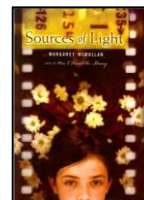
Discussion questions:

- Zach is bullied by Spence Warren in the beginning of the book. Have you ever been bullied? What did it feel like? How do you think Zach should have handled being bullied? How would you have handled it?
- Zach inherits all sorts of super powers from his dad. If you could have any superpower you wanted what would it be and why?
- The story ends with Zach being betrayed by someone he loves. Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? How did it feel? What did you do?

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

Margaret McMullan SOURCES OF LIGHT

Houghton Harcourt, 2010. ISBN 978-0-5470-7659-1. \$15.00. 233 pages.



In 1962 fourteen-year-old Samantha and her mother move to Jackson, Mississippi after the death of Sam's father in Vietnam. Sam wants to meet new friends and blend in, but finds that difficult to do after her mother teaches a class at an all-black college and becomes a target of white supremacist groups. Suddenly, garbage is strewn on their lawn and threatening notes appear in their mailbox. Complicating matters is Sam's relationship with a boy whose father is a member of a supremacist group.

Perry Walker, a photojournalist and a friend of Sam's mother, gives Sam a camera and teaches her to take and develop pictures. Sam learns to overcome her fears and begins to attend and take pictures of voter registrations, sit-ins and other civil rights events. When Perry becomes a victim of a violent protest, it is a roll of film that "sees" the truth and brings the perpetrators to justice.

McMullan, a Mississippi native, portrays the period in accurate detail. Her characters are complex, confused, and sympathetic. In the end, readers will see the humanity of those both on the right side and the wrong side of history.

Read-aloud hooks

- Sam's father: p. 34: "The summer before he left for the last time..."
- Consequences: pg. 56: "Monday morning after the lecture at Tougaloo..."
- Hatred: pg. 90-92: "Old and young white men closed in on..."

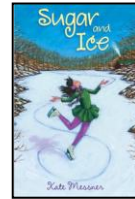
Discussion Questions

- The McLemores tell Sam and her mother that they don't understand why black people are "getting all riled up" (pg. 68). "They don't have such bad lives," Mr. McLemore says. Why do you think the McLemores feel this way? Does the author want us to feel sympathy for them?
- Sam's mother tells her not to fall for a boy like Stone (p. 77). She said the McLemores are as bad as the people who "painted our front door." Do you agree with her? What does it mean to be prejudiced? Is she being prejudiced too?
- What does the camera symbolize in this story? Why do you think the novel is called *Sources of Light*?
- There are many cultural references depicted in this book that define the 1960's -the clothes people wore, the cars they drove, the programs they watched on TV, etc. If you were going to write a story forty years from now about today's world, what cultural references would be in your story? What major events could you include as a background for your story? This story is set in 1969. Did you learn anything about the time period from the book?
- Who are the outsiders in this story? What does it mean to be an outsider? Do you think Sam is an outsider?
- In the end of the book Sam and her mother have a conversation about courage (p.217). Who do you think was courageous in this book? Does Sam think she has courage? How would you define courage?

<http://www.margaretmcmullan.com>

Kate Messner
SUGAR AND ICE

Walker, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8027-2081-8. \$16.99. 271 pages.



Claire Boucher loves ice skating on the local pond near her home outside of Plattsburgh, New York. When a famous coach from Lake Placid sees her skating at the Maple Festival, he offers her the opportunity to train with him as part of a group of elite skaters. She excitedly enters into the world of competitive skating.

Despite praise from her coach and tentative friendships forming with some of the other skaters, Claire finds hostility from other girls she skates with. She must soon deal with the fact that someone is vandalizing her things. Claire begins to be less and less confident on the ice, and finds herself so busy with skating that her schoolwork slips and her best friend at home feels neglected. Her parents are always supportive, but Claire can see the wear and tear her schedule has on her family. Moreover, she is wrestling with her own battles on the ice as she works hard to become the best skater possible and overcome her fear of competitions. When Claire must decide whether or not to continue skating in Lake Placid, she has to look deep inside herself to determine what it is that she really wants. Although *Sugar and Ice* is about the world of competitive ice skating, it is also a universal story of an eighth grade girl who wrestles with friendship, family, crushes and what talent really means to her.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Claire’s first day, p. 45 – 46: “It was 4:50...”
- Claire discovers her dress, p. 210: “When Claire got back to the locker room...” to p. 212 “And nothing Alexis did was going to erase that – Claire took another look at the dress – not even this.”

Discussion questions:

- There are several twists and turns in the plot of this book. What techniques does Messner use to make readers think they know the outcome, only to be surprised?
- In many books, mean girls are one-dimensional characters. How does the author develop the mean girls in this book? Do you feel any sympathy toward them?
- Claire is a very good skater, but has to make a hard decision at the end of the novel. Why do you think Claire made the choice she did? What would your decision have been?

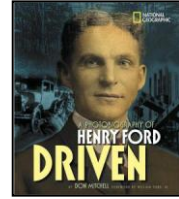
<http://www.katemessner.com/>

Kate Messner reads aloud from the novel: <http://www.katemessner.com/skating-frogs-sea-monsters-on-world-read-aloud-day/>

Don Mitchell

DRIVEN: A PHOTOBIOGRAPHY OF HENRY FORD

National Geographic, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4263-0155-1. \$18.95. 64 pages.



This dynamic biography of Henry Ford by Don Mitchell combines text, relevant archival photographs, and many of Ford’s own words to profile an icon of the automobile industry. Mitchell’s conversational style spells out the enigma that Henry Ford was and lets the reader decide for herself what to think of him.

In *Driven*, we learn about Ford’s inventive genius, his concern for his workers and his wish to improve their lives, his pacifism, and his activism around education and healthcare. We also find out about his resistance to changing with the times, his anti-unionism, his willingness to manufacture war machines despite his beliefs, and his anti-Semitism.

Driven will give young readers a grasp of the complexities and contradictions of this famous visionary. Includes a time line, resource list, and index.

Read-aloud hook:

- Family life, Henry Ford style, p.15: “On Christmas Eve, 1893, Clara was beginning dinner...”
- Ahead of his time, p. 43: “All the world is waiting for a substitute for gasoline...”

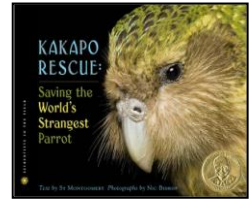
Discussion questions

- As a young boy, what kinds of things did Henry Ford do that predicted his future work?
- Why did Ford call his wife Clara “The Believer”? Did Clara’s nickname prove to be true?
- Henry Ford wanted to make cars for everyday people, and one way to make cars less costly was to use an assembly-line method of manufacturing them. How did the assembly line work, and how did the workers feel about it?
- What are some positive benefits that Ford provided for his workers? What actions did he take that had a negative impact on people? Overall, did Henry Ford do more good or harm?

National Geographic website: <http://www.ngchildrensbooks.org>

Sy Montgomery
KAKAPO RESCUE: SAVING THE WORLD'S STRANGEST PARROT

Houghton Harcourt, 2010. ISBN 978-0-618-49417-0. \$18.00. 80 pages.



The kakapo is a nocturnal, flightless, ground-dwelling, chicken-sized parrot now found on only two islands in New Zealand. It is the heaviest parrot in the world (up to 9 pounds) and may be the longest-lived bird species in the world (up to 90 years). Although most people thought the birds were extinct, expeditions in the 1970s discovered two small colonies on remote islands, and all the parrots were removed to another island. However, breeding didn't go well, and by 1995 there were only 51 kakapo left on earth. New Zealand then formed the National Kakapo Recovery Team to protect the birds and to maintain or establish appropriate breeding grounds. Since then, recovery has been going slowly but steadily, and there are now 120 kakapo in the world. For ten days Sy Montgomery and Nic Bishop visited the island where the birds live to take pictures, talk to the scientists and volunteers, and learn for themselves about these parrots and the amazing rescue effort they have inspired.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Preparation that Sy Montgomery and Nic Bishop have to go through to be allowed on the island where the kakapo live, p. 13: last paragraph, "Before..." to p. 14 "...our airplane."
- Breeding habits, p. 37: "For hundreds of years" to "the most impressive of all."

Discussion questions:

- Do you have any ideas of other ways to help the kakapo?
- Would you want to be a kakapo volunteer if you could? Why or why not?
- Do you think it is worth it to put millions of dollars into the recovery of one species that is almost extinct? Why or why not?
- There are many, many species that are nearly extinct now. How would you choose which ones to save?

Author's website, includes classroom activities: <http://www.authorwire.com/index.html>

Photographer's website: http://www.nicbishop.com/nic_bishop_008.htm

Official kakapo recovery site: <http://www.kakaporecovery.org.nz/>

News clip with experts debating whether the kakapo are worth saving:

<http://tvnz.co.nz/close-up/kakapo-rescue-not-worth-6-33-video-4120688>

Barbara O'Connor

THE FANTASTIC SECRET OF OWEN JESTER

FSG, 2010. ISBN 978-0-374-36850-0. \$15.99. 168 pages.



After his father's hardware store goes out of business, Owen Jester and his family move into his grandfather's house in Carter, Georgia. Now Owen has to deal with a grumpy housekeeper named Earlene and a really annoying girl next door. When Owen catches the biggest, slimiest frog in the pond, he and his best friends, Travis and Stumpy, build a cage for him and catch him flies. But Tooley the frog isn't happy, a fact constantly being pointed out by nosey next door neighbor Viola. Owen needs a distraction from his nagging guilt.

He gets one. Late at night he hears a train go by, then a loud thud, then a tumble, tumble, tumble. He is sure that something has fallen off the train. He and his friends spend the next few days searching the woods behind Owen's house for the mysterious item. What Owen finds is a crate containing an amazing two person submarine. How Owen and his friends, including Viola, get the submarine to the pond and save the life of Tooley Graham is one amazing adventure.

Barbara O'Connor's comic adventure appears to be set in a simpler time, when kids could run out of the house in the morning and not have to be back until dinner. Readers will root for Owen and his friends (including Tooley) and will applaud the subplot of Owen's relationship with his ailing grandfather and the tempestuous Earlene.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Owen, the prankster: p.1: "Owen Jester tiptoed across the linoleum floor and slipped the frog into the soup."
- The train: p. 9: "Far off in the distance, the train whistle blew."
- The submarine, p. 60: "The thing that had fallen off the train."

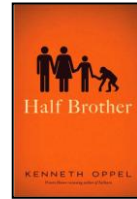
Discussion questions:

- Owen's family had to move in with his grandfather for financial reasons. Owen is unhappy about the move. Did Owen change his attitude? What is his relationship with his grandfather?
- Do Owen's feelings change toward Viola? Have you ever known someone who annoyed you like Viola annoys Owen?
- What would you do if you found something valuable? What is the right thing to do? Did Owen know he would have to return the submarine?
- Owen and his friends had many problems to solve in getting the submarine to the pond. Did they do a good job working together? Who was the leader of the project? Did the leader change?
- Have you ever kept a big secret like Owen and his friends did? What are the consequences of keeping a secret? Do you think Owen was lucky that everything turned out all right? What could have happened? What was Owen's punishment? Was it enough?

<http://www.barboconnor.com>

Kenneth Oppel
HALF BROTHER

Scholastic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-545-22925-8. \$17.99. 375 pages.



By his thirteenth birthday, Ben Tomlin had adjusted to life as an only child. But on that day, because of his parents' work in behavioral science and a move to the college town of Victoria, British Columbia, everything changed. After their move to Victoria, Ben's father seems distant, dislikes sentimentality, and shows more interest in his scientific work than Ben's birthday. Then, his mother brings a small baby chimpanzee into the house. Ben helps name the baby Zan, and then thinks: "We are the weirdest family in the world."

At first, Ben resists his father's instructions to treat Zan as his brother. His parents want him to help teach Zan sign language because the experiment will determine how well chimps can use language. Without realizing it, Ben becomes Zan's caregiver—and Zan steals his heart. When the experiment ends, Zan is taken away and Ben is devastated. He and his mother plot ways to remove Zan from the center where he has been placed.

The emotions expressed in this book really move between the boy and the chimp. Ben becomes Zan's protector and "big brother" in ways that Ben's father and mother could never have predicted. Kenneth Oppel writes powerfully about the human-animal bond, the price animals pay for being part of human-designed experiments, and the impossible love between animals and humans.

Read-aloud hook: Chapter 9, "Give Hug," p. 111: "Zan loved washing up. Sunday night after dinner he sat right up on the counter beside the sink, holding a dish in one hand and the scrubber brush in another. Sometimes he just cleaned the same plate over and over again, but it kept him happy, and we all signed to him while we washed. It was a good way of teaching him *water* and *dirty* and *soap*, which he was pretty interested in. We had to make sure to lock the bottle of soap up right after using it, because Zan liked squeezing it into the water and making more and more bubbles."

Discussion questions:

- What American Sign Language sign did Ben make up for himself, and why did he choose that sign?
- Describe Ben's relationship with his father while he was trying to change Zan's diaper.
- How does Ben react to the failure of Dr. Tomlin's Project Zan and to moving Zan to Dr. Helson's ranch?
- Describe the underlying communication between Ben and Zan. Was it limited to language or something more?
- Predict what would happen in Ben's life immediately after the book ends or when he is twenty years old.
- What do you think about using animals for research purposes? Do the benefits of helping mankind offset any harm that might come to the animals?

<http://www.kennethoppel.ca/>

Laura Resau
STAR IN THE FOREST

Delacorte, 2010. ISBN 978-0-3857-3792-0. \$14.99. 149 pages.



This is the story of eleven-year-old Zitlally, who lives in a trailer park with her parents and two sisters. Everyone in Zitlally's family, except her four-year-old sister who was born here, immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico illegally. When Zitlally's father is stopped by police for speeding, his status is discovered, and he is deported.

Zitlally has always managed to fit in and do well at school, and joins her popular friends in ignoring her next-door neighbor Crystal, a girl who constructs elaborate stories about her life. But when Zitlally's father is sent back to Mexico, she finds that she no longer cares about school or friends, and starts spending time in a junk-strewn forest near her home. There she discovers a starving dog chained to an old truck. She also gets to know Crystal there, and begins to see her in a new way.

Zitlally has grown up hearing the "star" stories of her father's ancient culture and believes that each person has his own spirit animal. She senses a strong link between the fate of her father and that of the dog, whom she names Star. When Star disappears one day, Zitlally and Crystal must find and save the dog in order to ensure the safe return of Zitlally's father.

Includes a brief note about immigration and a glossary of foreign words.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Where Zitlally lives, p. 3-4: "There is a forest behind my trailer..."
- Friendship with Crystal, p. 96-97: "She was smart, I realized..."

Discussion questions:

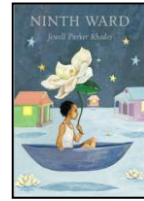
- Zitlally's name means "star" in her father's language. Why does she name the dog Star? What are some other examples of stars playing a part in this story?
- How would you describe Crystal? How would her classmates describe her? When Crystal shows Zitlally how to "eat sunshine" in chapter 9, what does this tell you about Crystal's life?
- Why do you think that Zitlally believes that Star is her father's special animal? How does this belief either worry or comfort her?
- Why does Zitlally offer to give Star to Crystal? Is this a good idea?

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

Jewell Parker Rhodes

NINTH WARD

Little, Brown, 2010. ISBN 978-0-316-04307-6. \$15.99. 217 pages.



We meet Lanesha, the central character in *Ninth Ward*, on the evening of her twelfth birthday as she and eighty-two-year-old Mama Ya Ya finish the jambalaya and eat chocolate cake. Days later, Hurricane Katrina will devastate New Orleans and the Ninth Ward where they live.

Lanesha's mother died when she was born. Mama Ya Ya, the midwife, promises to raise the infant, and the two of them settle into a routine of birthday celebrations, visions of the future, and images of ghosts. Through it all, Mama Ya Ya makes it clearly that she loves Lanesha, telling her: "Your mother and father made magic when they made you." Lanesha sees spirits: her dead mother as well as ghosts of people from the present and the past.

Lanesha reaches out to others at school and in the city, helping and encouraging them when she can. Because a kind-spirited teacher reached out to her, Lanesha decides she wants to become an engineer and build bridges. Like those real connections, Lanesha connects with others, befriending those who might be victims of teasing or who look different from everyone else.

Other children consider Lanesha strange yet she remains true to her beliefs in right and wrong, and the power of knowledge. She holds to her dream to learn math, and become an engineer, even as the water rises around her and she must pull Mama Ya Ya, TaShon, and their dog Spot to the roof. This courageous girl discovers her own power and lives to see the rainbow after the storm of Katrina.

Author Jewell Parker Rhodes makes New Orleans come alive with her characterization of the heat and the people who live in the city. It is a powerful and touching book filled with struggle and survival, love and support for those in need.

Read-aloud hook: "Sunday," p. 9: "This I know for certain: Mama Ya-Ya loves me as the day is long. She is the only one who loves me through and through. When I'm too dreamy, when I don't finish my chores, when I'm grumpy and sad, Mama Ya-Ya just hugs me a long time. Even when she scolds, she finishes with a hug."

Discussion questions:

- Describe the gift that both Lanesha and Mama Ya-Ya have that allows them to see things that others cannot. Did you believe in it when you were reading the book?
- Why is it significant that Lanesha can see ghosts?
- What do you think will happen to TaShon and Lanesha after the end of this story?
- What does Lanesha mean when she says that if you search the sky for rainbows, and don't see any, that they may be there anyway?

<http://jewellparkerrhodes.com/>

Polly Shulman

THE GRIMM LEGACY

Putnam, 2010. ISBN 978-0-399-25096-5. \$16.99. 325 pages.



Elizabeth Rew’s life is a bit like a fairy tale – but not the kind where she turns out to be a princess. Her stepmother rules the house and Elizabeth has to enroll in a new school and quit ballet classes so her sisters’ college tuition can be paid. When she performs a good deed one morning, her actions are noted by her European history teacher, who sends her to the New York Circulating Material Repository for a job. What Elizabeth finds is not only a unique collection of objects, like Marie Antoinette’s wig, and some cool kids who might just become friends, but a world of magical artifacts straight from the pages of fairy tales. She becomes quickly absorbed in her work, and begins to feel more comfortable with other pages like beautiful Anjali, cool Marc Merritt, and unfriendly, yet intriguing Aaron.

As pages and caretakers of the Grimm Collection, Elizabeth, Anjali, Marc and Aaron must figure out what is happening to various magical artifacts that suddenly have no magic. The answer comes through encounters with a huge bird, strangely life-like dolls, a shrink ray, seven league boots, a *kuduo* filled with unworldly deposits, a magical garden and, of course, true love.

Filled with unique takes on traditional fairy tale elements and objects, *The Grimm Legacy* immerses readers in a detailed world of magic, adventure, and romance.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Elizabeth discovers magic, p. 85: “Anxious and bored, I distracted myself...”
- Aaron follows Elizabeth, p. 194: “Marc scored the winning points...” to p. 196 “His smile, which was exquisitely balanced between sarcasm and sincerity, revealed beautiful white teeth.”

Discussion questions:

- Elizabeth’s life has some fairy tale elements in it. How is it similar to or different from a true Grimm Fairy tale?
- The Grimm brothers originally considered themselves scholars who collected stories to preserve culture. Over the years, fairy tales became tamer and more moralistic. Compare one of the original Grimm stories to a common retelling for children. How is it different? What are some examples of modern fairy tale retellings, and how do they approach magic, love, and morals?

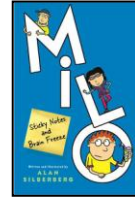
<http://www.pollyshulman.com/>

National Geographic site on Grimm tales: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm/>

Alan Silberburg

MILO: STICKY NOTES AND BRAIN FREEZE

Aladdin, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4169-9430-5. \$15.99. 275 pages.



Almost thirteen-year-old Milo Cruikshank has just moved into house number five and is yet again the “new kid” at school. Milo’s entry into the social scene at his new school has mixed success. Milo quickly finds a friend in Marshall, who shares a passion for the same video game. His annoying neighbor Hillary Alpert won’t stop leaving notes in his locker. Popular and beautiful Summer Goodman ignores his existence. Transitioning to a new school is hard enough, but Milo’s mom died from brain cancer and nothing is the same. His dad removed all evidence of her existence from the house, and instead of a lively and happy home, his house is filled with “fog.” Milo develops an unexpected friendship with an older neighbor whose husband has also died. Through this relationship and the support of his friends, Milo discovers a way to bring the memory of his mom back into his family.

Silberberg weaves both the comedy that is inherent in the middle school experience with the tragedy that accompanies a child grieving the loss of a parent. Milo and his new friends (both young and old) are authentic, sensitive characters that complete this fantastic novel.

Read-aloud hook: Milo tries to convince his dad that he should be home-schooled, p. 14: “Starting over is like hitting the reset button...” to p. 17: “Milo, I know it’s tough but you have to go to school.”

Discussion questions:

- Compare Milo at the beginning of the book with Milo at the end of the book. Has he changed? If so, how?
- Milo talks about a “fog” at his house. What does this mean?
- How does each of the characters help Milo? How does Milo help his family?
- How do the comics contribute to the book?
- Why do you think the author added the comics?

<http://www.silberbooks.com/Milo-page.htm>

Jordan Sonnenblick **AFTER EVER AFTER**

Scholastic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-439-83706-4. \$17.99. 260 pages.



As a cancer survivor, Jeffrey Alper still feels the after-effects of his treatments. He tries to maintain a normal life, although he is not as good at math as he once was—and he must pass a state-wide math test to graduate from middle school. His friend, Thaddeus Ibsen (“Tad”), also a cancer survivor, agrees to tutor him. His new friend, Lindsey Abraham, encourages him too. And, the entire middle school class decides to protest the unfairness of the test.

Jeffrey helps Tad get stronger in gym class and puts up with Tad’s sarcasm, which hides a deep fear of dying. Back in fourth grade, these two cancer survivors became friends at their first meeting, although Tad acted as if Jeffrey was a “... particularly loathsome slice of school-lunch meat loaf...”

Jeffrey rides a bicycle as physical therapy and organizes a ride to raise money for cancer victims. This year, Jeffrey decides to ride the entire 50-mile race, and to solicit donations for Tad. The sadness of the ending reflects the life-changing decisions someone can make when they lose interest in self and gain interest in others. It is a powerful coming-of-age book about male bonding, survival, friendship, willingness to take risks, and the power of the young to change the world.

Throughout the book, Sonnenblick uses Tad’s sarcasm to make strong points about disability. Tad’s no-nonsense quips develop awareness, reminding the healthy that they might take walking for granted—until they must navigate from a wheelchair. This book shows that everyone needs encouragement to get stronger and walk on their own.

Read-aloud hook: “Riding Into the Sunset,” p. 247: “I wish I could remember now what I was thinking during those next two hours, because they were the last good hours I was going to have for a long time. But nobody ever tells you in advance when you should concentrate on the good times—that’s why you’re supposed to try to do it every day. I know, I know: Tad would barf. But it’s true anyway.”

Discussion questions:

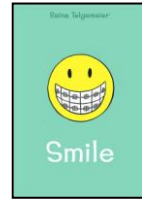
- Describe why Mr. Alper is angry about Jeffrey’s inability to do math.
- How does the author use Tad’s sarcasm and anger to explain the problems associated with a disability?
- Why does Tad give Jeffrey an iPod with “morbidly depressing songs” to listen to during the race? Was he trying to say something personal to Jeffrey?
- How would you create better ways to make disabled students more comfortable in school?
- What do you think about Jeffrey helping Tad’s sister Yvonne to ride a two-wheeler? Why would he spend time with her?
- How would you answer someone who said that Tad’s life was pointless?

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

Raina Telgemeier

SMILE

Graphix, 2010. ISBN 978-0-5451-3205-3. \$21.99. 213 pages.



Sixth grader Raina heads to her first orthodontist appointment and learns that she, like many of her classmates, needs braces. Raina leaves the appointment and heads to her scout meeting where her friends console her. Later in the evening Raina runs through the parking lot, trips, falls and discovers that two of her front teeth are missing. Due to this accident, Raina's orthodontia is no longer so simple. *Smile* follows Raina in and out of the orthodontist's office and through her middle school years into high school. Raina struggles through many excruciating surgeries as she finds her way through the ups and downs of friends and relationships at school.

Smile is based on actual events from the author's youth. This book is not just the story of young Raina's extensive dental work, but also the honest portrayal of her journey through middle school. Most young adolescents will relate to Raina's journey to figure out where (and with whom) she can be accepted for herself. The illustrations throughout the graphic novel are engaging and provide the reader with a perfectly balanced experience of reading the story through both words and pictures.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Page 1 - page 9: This section begins with Raina's first orthodontist appointment and ends with her on the ground (in a pool of blood) discovering that two of her front teeth are missing.
- Page 84 - 86: Raina is back at the orthodontist where he describes the next procedures she will need.

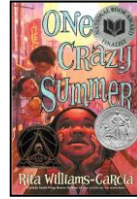
Discussion questions:

- How would you describe Raina? What are some of her character traits?
- What challenges does Raina face throughout this story? How does she handle them?
- How do the other characters in the novel react to Raina's braces and surgeries? Does any character or group of characters stand out?
- Why do you think the author chose to make this story into a graphic novel? Does it work for you? Why or why not?
- This story is based on the author's real life. Why do you think she wanted to write about this part of her life?

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

Rita Williams-Garcia
ONE CRAZY SUMMER

Amistad, 2010. ISBN 978-0-0607-6088-5. \$15.99. 215 pages.



During the summer of 1968, Pa decides it's time for his three young daughters to get to know their mother, Cecile, who abandoned them as young children. So Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern find themselves on a plane to Oakland where their mother Cecile is living as a poet. Eleven-year-old Delphine is the feisty narrator of the story and is clearly in charge of her younger sisters. Through her eyes we see the disappointment of all three girls when they meet Cecile. Dressed like a secret agent with dark shades and a big hat covering her head, Cecile is not thrilled to see them. She takes their spending money, won't let them near her kitchen, and sends them off to "camp" to get out of her hair.

Camp is held at the Black Panther Community Center. There the girls get breakfast and learn about revolution. Yet the reality of the Black Panther movement is very different from what the girls had seen on TV back in Brooklyn. The "Sisters" were kind and generous and the girls get a valuable lesson in African American identity and culture.

Set during a turbulent period in American history, this vibrant novel shows the subtle ways that political movements affect personal lives. Just as memorable is the finely drawn, universal story of children reclaiming a reluctant parent's love. Readers will root for strong Delphine, showy Vonetta, and observant Fern as they try to make sense of their own personal story.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Meeting Cecile, p. 26: "Cecile dropped Fern's bag on the floor..."
- Black Panthers, p. 63: "I thought Black Panthers would only look out for..."
- Identity, p. 80: "A name is important..."

Discussion questions:

- What did you think of Pa forcing the girls to go to California to meet their mother? Was it a good idea?
- What kind of mother was Cecile? Did your opinion of her change at the end of the book?
- Before you read this book, had you ever heard of the Black Panthers? Look online for more information about this organization.
- Revolution means change. Do you think the girls changed after their summer in Oakland? How do you think they changed?
- Do you think the girls will see their mother again? Do you think they want to?
- Of the three sisters, Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern, whom did you most relate to and why?

<http://www.ritawg.com>

Carlos Ruiz Zafón
THE PRINCE OF MIST

Little, Brown, 2010. ISBN 978-0-3160-4477-6. \$17.99. 214 pages.



Max, Alicia, Irina and their parents move to a house on the sea to escape the war. Far from leaving violence behind, the teenagers discover a dark secret that revolves around the house, the sea, and the disturbing statue garden of circus performers in the backyard. When Irina, injured in flight from an evil being, falls into a coma, Max and Alicia must remain on their own in the house and work through the mystery of its former inhabitants with their new friend Roland. The three teenagers explore a long-sunken ship in an experience that almost kills them. As Alicia and Roland become romantically involved, Max searches for more answers, which lead him to old film footage and an empty tomb.

When they meet Roland's adopted grandfather, they begin to unravel the story of Dr. Cain, an evil magician who will not die, and who takes more than money from those he grants wishes to. Moreover, they learn there is a debt he feels he is still owed. When Dr. Cain, in the form of an evil clown, returns to collect his debt, Max, Alicia, and Roland must fight for their lives, at the risk of encountering unspeakable tragedy.

Terrifying to its core, *The Prince of Mist* will inspire readers to read during broad daylight, and, ever after, beware of malicious cats, evil clowns, statue gardens, and sunken ships.

Read-aloud hooks:

- Max visits the statue garden, p. 28 – 30: “The path turned out to be longer than he expected...”
- Irina encounters something scary, p. 77: “Irina felt her hands go numb...”

Discussion questions:

- *The Prince of Mist* includes some elements found in other horror stories, such as an evil clown, supernatural deals, and a creepy animal. Why are these things so scary to people? How does the author put a twist on them to make them uniquely his own?
- Horror novels are meant to create a sense of dread, and an atmosphere of suspense. How does Zafón accomplish this in his novel?
- The setting of this story is assumed to be in Europe, and set in the past, but specific details seem to be intentionally left out. Do you think the author did a good job of making the setting universal, as if the story could happen at any time or in any place? Why would he want to do this?
- The novel ends in tragedy. Did you expect this? Would you have ended it in the same way?

<http://www.carlosruizafon.co.uk/prince-of-mist/>

Generic Questions that can be used for any book:

- Can you make any connections between this book and events in your own life? (text to self) What about connections between this book and other books you've read? (text to text) Can you make any connections between this book and experiences that people you know, or know about, have had? (text to world)
- What research do you think the author of this book had to do in order to write this story? (inferring)
- If this book were turned into a play and you could play any character in the story (without regard to gender) which character would you pick and why?
- Illustrate a scene from this book. (visualization)
- Having read the book, what connections can you make between the book jacket, the title and the story itself. (inferring)
- Design a new book jacket.
- While reading this book, did you make any predictions? What were they? Were they accurate? (inferring)
- **For non-fiction:** See your teacher/librarian, take a brief look at this book together and talk about how it is organized. (determining importance)
- What did you wonder about as you read this book? (questioning)