



**D.C.F.**

**2009 - 2010**

**BOOK REVIEWS  
&  
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

[www.dcfaward.org](http://www.dcfaward.org)  
Vermont Department of Libraries  
Montpelier, VT

# 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 2009-2010 list. Many public libraries will have the new list in and ready to go, often in a designated section, by the summer. These excellent books make a pleasant summer diversion for adults who may be overwhelmed during the school year. 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's 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).

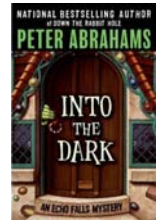
Author websites, if available, are found at the end of the reviews. Some reviews include additional relevant websites. If there is no web address, check the website of the publisher of the book. Their author biographies are usually easy to access and often quite informative.

## Compilers:

- Beth Reynolds, Chair, DCF Committee
- Liz Bourne
- Kate Davie
- Kathy Dulac
- Dawn Fairbanks
- Mary Linney
- Steve Madden
- Grace Greene, DOL liaison to DCF Committee

## Peter Abrahams INTO THE DARK

HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 978-0-0607-3708-5. \$16.99. 300 pages.



While visiting her Grampy's farm, Ingrid Levin-Hill witnesses an angry altercation between her grandfather and Mr. Thatcher, a conservation agent. Several days later Ingrid and her friend Joey find the body of Mr. Thatcher, dead, on her grandfather's property. Ingrid is sure her grandfather didn't kill the man, but who did? During the investigation Ingrid finds out there are quite a few things going on in Echo Falls besides just the murder of Mr. Thatcher.

While trying to help clear her grandfather of the murder charge, Ingrid uncovers a terrible secret: her grandfather has cancer. He doesn't want anyone to know about it even though revealing his secret will give him an iron clad alibi (he was in the hospital during the time of the murder). Not only is Ingrid worried about her grandfather, but her parents have split up and her best friend has moved away. Ingrid certainly has her hands full solving this case. This is a fast paced murder mystery that will keep you guessing till the end.

### Read-aloud hooks:

- "About the Indians," Ingrid said  
"Indians?" Grampy looked up; he had bluish patches under both eyes, like bruises.  
"The ones you said we stole the farm from."  
"What about them?"  
"Is it true?"...Page 15
- "Grampy! Grampy!"  
Dead, yes. A man, yes. A white-haired man, yes. But not grampy. And also not a stranger: Ingrid had seen this man before, once in person and once on the front page of *The Echo*. It was Harris H. Thatcher, missing conservation agent....Page 77
- All at once, Ingrid was crying, there on the station steps, a big round lamp over her head. What was wrong with her? This was no good.... Oh, no. An Echo Falls police cruiser, the one with Chief on the side. Ingrid froze. The cruiser made a quick U-turn and stopped right beside her. Chief Strade looked out his window. "Ingrid?" he said...Page 190-191

### Discussion questions:

- Why was Ingrid's grandfather so upset with Mr. Thatcher?
- Why was Joey not allowed to talk to Ingrid after they found the body?
- Ingrid finds out some devastating news about her grandfather that he doesn't want anyone in the family to know about. What should Ingrid do with this information? Why do you think her grandfather was so adamant about not telling anyone?
- What parallels are there between the play of Hansel and Gretel and the situation Ingrid is dealing with?
- How does Ingrid use Sherlock Holmes' methods of deduction?

This is the third mystery by Peter Abrahams set in Echo Falls. Read one of the earlier ones (*Down the Rabbit Hole* or *Behind the Curtain*), and compare the two books. Which do you think is the more interesting mystery?

[www.peterabrahams.com/](http://www.peterabrahams.com/)

## David Aguilar 11 PLANETS

National Geographic, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4263-0236-7. \$16.95. 48 pages.



“A soda can dropped on the surface [of Venus] would be crushed by the atmospheric pressure.”

“If we reduced Earth to the size of an apple, the solid ground we walk on would be as thin as the apple skin.”

“Like a piece of iron left out in the rain, the Martian soil has rusted red.”

Using vivid metaphors and dramatic computer-generated art, David Aguilar describes our solar system in ways that make its vastness accessible to the most concrete nonscientist. Aguilar is a world-class scientist himself, Director of Science Information at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, so it’s especially remarkable that he writes with such concise clarity.

Beginning with a handy mnemonic to remember the names of the planets in order, [“My Very Exciting Magic Carpet Just Sailed Under Nine Palace Elephants’], *11 Planets* introduces the solar system and how it was formed. It ends with a section on comets and the Oort cloud, as well as a glimpse at other solar systems and ongoing discoveries.

Most of the book is devoted to luscious two-page spreads. The Sun, eleven planets, and the moons of Earth, Jupiter and Saturn, are each illustrated by a digital portrait. These original paintings by Aguilar combine actual scientific data with computer graphics and show places or events we can’t actually see. The features include a paragraph of text filled with interesting facts for browsers, report writers or young astronomers. Useful (sometimes funny!) captions explain illustrations, charts, and diagrams.

**Read-aloud hook:** “How Our Solar System Formed” – Read the text on p.8 and “You can think of our solar system....way out in the courtyard (Pluto and Eris).” p.9

### Discussion questions:

- On page 23, there’s an image “taken by the HIRSE orbiter.” Why do you think most of the images in this book are computer-generated art, not photographs?
- Ceres has been called a planet (1801), an asteroid (1850) and now a dwarf planet (2006). Why do you think its status has changed so often?
- Why might Saturn’s moon, Titan, hold information about how life began on Earth?
- Neptune wasn’t discovered using a telescope. How did scientists decide there was another big gas planet?
- Planet #11 is Eris, discovered in 2005. What kind of planet is it, and why did its discovery encourage redefining the planets?
- At the end of the book. Aguilar describes a tangible way to represent the size and scale of our solar system using a variety of groceries - try it!

<http://www.aspenskies.com>

\* see also, [Harvard Magazine](#), March – April, 2004 (p.47 -52) for an article about his space art

<http://www.cfa.harvard.edu/~dwilner/misc/0304-46.pdf>

## **Blue Balliett**

### **THE CALDER GAME**

Scholastic, 2008. ISBN 978-0-4398-5207-4. \$17.99. 400 pages.



The three friends, Calder, Petra and Tommy, go on a field trip with their class to see an exhibit of Alexander Calder mobiles in their hometown of Chicago. In spite of having a miserable teacher who tries to spoil everything, they were inspired and excited by the art and are introduced to the "Calder game," which invites participants to join five ideas or things that move in relation to one another, while looking for "balance, beauty, and surprise." Shortly thereafter Calder's dad takes him with him to England where they stay in a small village which, coincidentally, has just had an anonymous donation of a Calder sculpture. But the villagers hate it, and when it goes missing some are delighted. But the sculpture is not the only Calder to go missing; Calder Pillay, the boy, also is missing.

To help with the search, Mr. Pillay summons Petra and Tommy to England, where they discover that puzzles, history, a maze and a mysterious art benefactor all figure into the two disappearances.

This book suggests lots of activities: learning more about Calder and his art; making mobiles; learning about pentominoes; playing the Calder Game; finding the hidden letters in Brett Helquist's drawings.

**Read-aloud hook:** The villagers are mostly opposed to the Calder stature in the square. Calder, in the post office, overhears some of them discussing it: Begin at p.90 "he was busy for several minutes" ...and read to the bottom of p.93.

#### **Discussion questions:**

- This is the third art mystery by Blue Balliett. Read one of the earlier ones (*Chasing Vermeer* and *The Wright 3*) and compare them.
- The three friends Calder, Petra and Tommy have an unbalanced friendship. What keeps them together? How does it change when Petra and Tommy look for Calder?
- Why do you think the residents of Woodstock did not like having a Calder sculpture in their town square?
- Do you have a favorite artist? If so, what is there that you like about his/her art?
- Compare your own town with the town in England that Calder Pillay visited. What is the same about the two towns? What is different?
- If you could go to England, what would you most like to do or see?

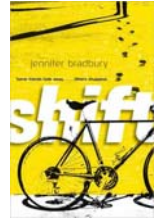
<http://www.scholastic.com/blueballiett/games/index.htm> (Activities for all Balliett's mysteries)

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/collateral.jsp?id=31760> (Discussion guide)

## Jennifer Bradbury

### SHIFT

Atheneum, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4169-4732-5. \$16.99. 245 pages.



After high school graduation, best friends Chris and Win undertake the cycling trip of their dreams from their home in West Virginia to Washington State. Two young men leave, but only one comes home.

In Jennifer Bradbury's debut novel, *Shift*, Chris Collins recounts the story of how one trip could be so very different for him and his best friend Win Coggans. Told in the first-person, *Shift* relies on the use of flashbacks to provide a powerful look at how far one friendship can go on two bicycles.

Chris begins his freshman year at Georgia Tech to find an FBI agent hired by his best friend's father waiting to interrogate him over Win's disappearance. Chris is surprised to discover that Win has still not come home. What does Chris really know about his best friend of ten years? The reader is then brought back in time to before high school graduation as Chris begins to plan the two month cycling odyssey. This movement helps to build the suspense and tension felt by Chris and ultimately the anger, frustration and jealousy of knowing that his friend still has a hold on him even when he isn't around. When Mr. Coggans threatens his father's job, Chris decides to find his friend with the clues that he has at his disposal: postcards and flashbacks to conversations with Win on the trip. How do you find a friend who may not want to be found?

#### Read-aloud hooks:

- Father and son relationship: p 17-19: "My dad's a man of few words...."
- Money. p. 90-92 "The cashier began pulling our groceries across the scanner.... "I was afraid of what I already knew."

#### Discussion questions:

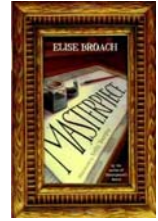
- How are Chris and Win's parents alike and different? Does Win ultimately have role models to turn to?
- The term *shift* has multiple meanings in this novel. Discuss why the author chose it as the title and its other meanings within the novel.
- Traveling with your best friend can be fraught with problems; could you take a trip of this magnitude with your best friend?
- Win needs Chris for his trip to be successful, but does Chris actually need Win or could he have made the journey by himself?
- Chris and Win find community at the Assemblies of God church where a revival is taking place. How does the story of Jacob figure into the novel? What do you think that Win says to the preacher?
- Would *Shift* have been more or less successful if the author had not used the flashback technique? Why?

<http://www.jennifer-bradbury.com/shift.html>

<http://cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com/2008/07/author-interview-jennifer-bradbury-on.html> (Author Interview)

**Elise Broach**  
**MASTERPIECE**

**Holt, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8050-8270-8. \$16.95. 304 pages.**



Espionage, stealth, robbery: to keep alive and safe, these are all essential for Marvin and his family. After all, when you are a beetle living in the home of humans you need to be on the lookout constantly. One mistake and you will be crushed to death under the heel of a shoe or in the folds of a Kleenex. So, it was unusual for Marvin to take the risk that he did on the boy James's 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. James received a pen and ink set from his artist father, and when Marvin came across it he couldn't keep himself from trying it out. Using his two front legs as brushes, he carefully dipped them into the ink, and, looking through the bedroom window created a perfect miniature painting of the outdoor view.

Soon everyone thinks James is a gifted artist, and he is introduced to some important people at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After a couple of "tests" to see if he is really as good as he seems, he is pressed into service (with the help of his hidden friend, Marvin, of course) to help catch a thief who appears to be collecting a whole set of drawings by Albrecht Durer. But not all the grownups who are supposed to be trustworthy are, and Marvin and James become caught up in some very dangerous international art business.

Mystery, suspense, friendship, miniature worlds, art and an unusual friendship make this a book for just about everyone.

**Read-aloud hook:** p. 28 bottom of page: "without really thinking...to top of page 30, ending with "core."

**Discussion questions:**

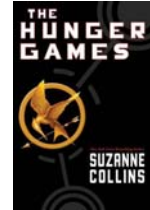
- A boy and a bug are unusual friends. Is there any kind of animal you would like to befriend? What would you want to ask him?
- What do James and Marvin like about one another? How do they communicate without words?
- How are the two families (human and beetle) interdependent?
- Compare the kinds of art in this book with that of two other books on this year's DCF list, the book about Christo and Jeanne Claude and *The Calder Game*. How are they different? How are they alike?
- Durer's four drawings in this book are called Fortitude, Justice, Temperance and Prudence. Which virtue do you think is the most important? Why?

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

**Suzanne Collins**

**THE HUNGER GAMES**

Scholastic, 2008. ISBN 978-0-4390-2348-1. \$17.99. 374 pages.



In the ruins of what used to be North America, a nation called Panem holds the annual event known as The Hunger Games. Each year each one of the twelve districts sends one boy and one girl to a fight to the death contest that is televised on live TV.

How Suzanne Collins is able to take such a gruesome premise and spin it into a highly entertaining page-turner that will keep you on the edge of your seat until the very last sentence, is astounding. There is action, romance, fashion, gadgetry, and humor, all contained within this story of survival. Katniss lives with her sister and mother, and when her little sister is called to be part of the Games, Katniss takes her place. Thus begins the roller coaster ride that is this book. And yes, phrases apply to the reading as well as the riding “You must be this tall” (i.e. this book isn’t for everyone) “And please make sure your hands remain on the bar in front of you.” (i.e. the ride is so wild you’ll be holding onto the book tightly. If not, someone may snatch it from you.)

As you read these philosophical-ish questions keep popping into your head: How much is too much? Does entertainment supersede humanity? Is it possible to look out for yourself and others at the same time? How can one expertly skin a rabbit, yet be so clueless when it comes to others’ affections? What if a district can’t afford to send a gift to their contestant? Is this where we’re headed as a society? Should I vote for this one as my favorite DCF book on the list?

Collins’s genre-bending new trilogy is filled with fully realized characters that will stay with you until the bitter end. Now let the Games begin!

**Read-aloud hook:** *The legendary announcer, Claudius Templesmith, has just declared the opening of the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games.*

“Sixty seconds. That’s how long we’re required to stand before the sound of the gong releases us... She never misses. And I’m her next target” (pp. 148-150).

**Discussion questions:**

- Which character did you most identify with? Did rooting for that character mean the demise of the other contestants?
- In which time period does the story take place? Is it set in the past or the future?
- Katniss seems to be able to take care of herself, a born survivor. Name some of the things she does in order to survive. What would you do in that same situation?
- Of all of the inventions and gadgets given to the contestants, which one would you wish to try out?
- What was your reaction when you saw the words, End of Book 1? Would you rather it all be put together in one book, or do you like the trilogy aspect?

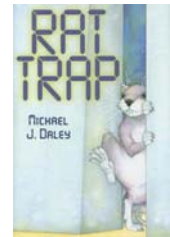
<http://www.suzannecollinsbooks.com/>



**Michael Daley**

**RAT TRAP**

**Holiday House, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8234-2093-3. \$16.95. 212 pages.**



If you are the only child on a space station full of work-obsessed scientists, you can use a friend to liven things up. But if your friend is a genetically engineered, hyper-intelligent, lavender rat who can speak in sign language and hack computers, things can become too lively -- especially if she is a fugitive.

In their first book, *Space Station Rat*, Jeff and Rat defeated the rat-hating minder robot, Nanny, using only their wits and a bit of liverwurst. In *Rat Trap*, even greater danger threatens when Rat's creator, Dr. Vivexian, and his C-10 robot travel all the way to the space station in order to return Rat to his laboratory. Dr. Vivexian knows Jeff is hiding something, and is relentless in his pursuit of Rat. Through resourcefulness and bravery, Jeff, Rat, and their computer friend LB, manage to hide all traces of Rat, despite the fact that everything on the space station is closely monitored -- even what goes down the toilet. But then an unbalanced Nanny is reactivated, and a zero-gravity battle between robots jeopardizes the entire station.

The plotting is tight, with risks taken, plans foiled, and battles engaged at a brisk pace. Jeff and Rat are compelling, well-drawn characters whose fears and compassions are highlighted by the lack of humanity on the part of their adversaries both human and inorganic. This is superb science fiction for younger readers.

**Read-aloud hooks:**

- Jeff and Rat react to the news that an investigator is coming to recapture Rat: p. 29, "Back in the boy's room . . ."
- Rat make the acquaintance of the computer, LB, who already knows a great deal about Rat: p.69, "Rat dropped onto the console . . ."

**Discussion questions:**

- Do you think it would be ethical to create an animal like Rat? Why?
- How would you feel if your parents moved you to a space station? What would you take with you? What would you do for fun?
- How would you rank the humanity of the characters in this book? Who is more humane, Dr. Vivexian or Rat? Nanny or C-10?

<http://www.michaeljdaley.com>

<http://spacestationrat.com/>

**Frances O’Roark Dowell**  
**SHOOTING THE MOON**

**Atheneum, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4169-2690-0. \$16.99. 163 pages.**



Twelve-year-old Jamie Dexter is a military brat through and through. Having lived on military bases all over the world, her family is living in Fort Hood, Texas when her brother T.J. enlists in the Army Medical Corps and is sent to Vietnam. Jamie’s father, the Colonel, is less than excited with his son’s decision, much to Jamie’s surprise. “The Army way is the right way” is his creed, and he has raised his children to believe in duty and loyalty, so why is he so upset with TJ’s sacrifice? Jamie must turn to young Private Hollister for card games and military talk in her brother’s absence. Hollister has already lost a brother to the Vietnam War, but enjoys the company of this spirited girl.

Jamie eagerly awaits her brother’s letters from the front, but is disappointed when he sends her a roll of film instead of detailed descriptions of Army life. He asks her to develop the pictures and send him the contact sheets. Since Jamie adores her brother, she asks the battle-wary Sgt. Byrd to teach her how to develop his film. What Jamie sees in TJ’s photos is boring at first, but as more film cartridges are sent and processed, she begins to see the Vietnam War for what it really is. When rumors indicate that Private Hollister could be called to the front, Jamie’s loyalty to her father and her way of life is put to the ultimate test.

Dowell perfectly captures both time and place in her depiction of life on a military base in 1969.

**Read-aloud hook:** The very first page establishes Jamie’s character, her loyalty, and her card-playing ability. “The day after my brother left for Vietnam, me and Private Hollister played thirty-seven hands of gin rummy, and I won twenty-one.”

**Discussion questions:**

- The title *Shooting the Moon* has many meanings. Brainstorm the different meanings and decide which one best suit the events in the book.
- Why do you think that T.J. chooses to send Jamie rolls of film instead of letters?
- The book contains some colorful military lingo. Make a list of the words that you’ve never seen before and use the book clues to define them. Are any of them used today?
- How are Jamie Dexter and Cindy Lorenzo alike and different?
- How does Colonel Dexter redeem himself in his daughter’s eyes?

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

**Richard Farr**  
**EMPERORS OF THE ICE**

FSG, 2008. ISBN 978-0-3743-1975-5. \$19.95. 217 pages.



**Help Wanted**

Looking for fit, hard-working scientists for two-year commitment to outdoor job. Expect extreme discomfort, very little pay, no time off, and no contact with friends or family.

Would you apply?

*8,000 people did.*

One of those was Apsley Cherry-Gerrard, a 23-year-old Englishman with no special skills, Coke-bottle glasses, and a good sense of humor. Through his eyes, Richard Farr tells the true story of one of the most heroic and tragic expeditions in history – Robert Falcon Scott’s Antarctic Expedition of 1910.

Sold to the public as a way to extend the glory of the British Empire by becoming the first to make it to the South Pole, Scott’s expedition was much more than that. He assembled a team of great adventurer-scientists, people who wanted to extend human knowledge through their studies of life in the world’s harshest climate. “Cherry” is a great guide for the reader, for he is up for any adventure, but he doesn’t pretend to be an expert on any of the science. After traveling from England to the southern tip of New Zealand, the crew prepared for the journey to Antarctica, where they would spend the next two years. The first day out from Dunedin, NZ, though, was almost their last: “Almost immediately, the new, more violent motion of the waves caused a cascade of problems that nearly turned our Polar expedition into the shortest on record” (p. 25). Farr’s account of the thirty straight hours bailing out the hold, of Osman, the sled dog who was washed overboard by one wave and brought back to the deck by the next, and of the sight of water creeping to within inches of the boiler plates (boiler plates + water = steam explosion) will leave readers marveling that this was only the beginning of the journey. Things had to get better, right?

Well, that depends on how you look at life. And the members of the Polar Expedition Party viewed life as a continuing adventure. Whether they were dodging killer whales that crashed up through three feet of ice for a meal, trudging over 60 miles through temperatures of -70° F to be the first humans to hold the eggs of an Emperor penguin in their hands, or preparing for what could very well be one’s last trip out of the tent, Scott and the other members of his expedition pressed on with amazing enthusiasm and good humor. When facing almost certain death, these explorers defined heroism by their ingenuity, camaraderie, and, when circumstances called for it, acceptance. *Emperors of the Ice* is a monument to their spirit.

**Read-aloud hook:** Cherry, Birdie, and Tom Crean are returning to the hut after dropping provisions for a later trip. Page 66 – “So much for the funny part.” To page 67 – “Then our old friends the killer whales came to visit.”

**Discussion questions:**

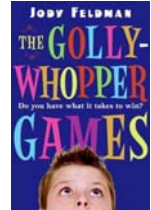
- Do you believe that as many people would apply for such a chance today? Why or why not?
- Bill Wilson's theories about birds, dinosaurs, and evolution are interesting. Learning what you have about him, how do you think he would have reacted to later news about the penguin eggs?
- Cherry and others on the expedition often understate the dangers they faced. Find an example and explain what the dangers were and why you believe they didn't emphasize those risks.
- Would you look forward to a month-long camping trip if you only packed biscuits and pemmican to eat?
- 2010 is the centennial of the Scott Polar Expedition. What do you feel is its place in history?

<http://www.richardfarr.net>

**Jody Feldman**

**THE GOLLYWHOPPER GAMES**

Greenwillow, 2008. ISBN 978-0-0612-1450-9. \$16.99. 308 pages.



**“My coat keeps me the warmest during this January freeze,” bragged Tracy.** If the above sentence equals ZEBRA, then what does the following sentence equal?

**The pain in Matthew’s elbow lingered through the month of March.**

(Move to table #2, directly behind the piñatas.)

--pp. 133-134

Welcome to the world of the Gollywhopper Games! Taking her cue from the classic *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Jody Feldman has created a riches-to-rags-to-riches story that will appeal to anyone who has ever dreamed of winning it all. To celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Golly Toy and Game Company, the folks at Golly have come up with the Gollywhopper Games. And, like so many thousands of other eager kids, Gil Goodson has shown up to get a chance to play. But Gil has more on his mind than the prizes for playing in the game; he wants to see the face of Bert Gollywop when Gil, son of a former vice president at Golly who was accused of stealing company secrets over a year ago, shakes his hand. To get to that point, though, Gil has to navigate a maze of puzzles. Trying to solve the puzzles is half the fun of the book.

But there’s more. Not only does Gil face the task of solving the puzzles, but he also must overcome the obstacles put before him. Bert Gollywop would love it if Gil left the competition, and other contestants have come to the finals because of help by their parents. Gil has to get through these puzzles—tests involving company trivia, math, old sayings, logic, character, and much more—in order to come out on top. Gil’s journey begins with one little ticket, but who knows where it will end?

**Read-aloud hook:** p. 103, “Dear Gil,....” to end of p. 104.

**Discussion questions and an activity:**

- If you had been in charge of the Gollywhopper Games, how would you have set them up?
- Have you ever had to deal with someone who was cheating at something? How can you handle this kind of situation?
- Create a difficult, yet solvable, multi-step puzzle for friends to solve.
- Describe life after the Gollywhopper Games for one of the other contestants.

<http://www.jodyfeldman.com>

**Helen Frost**

**DIAMOND WILLOW**

**FSG, 2008. ISBN 978-0-3743-1776-8. \$16.00. 128 pages.**



The story of *Diamond Willow* takes place in a fictional town in the interior of Alaska, where no paved roads connect the community to those spread around it. Snowmobiles, airplanes and dogsleds take the members of this small town the few places they want to go. One resident is 12-year-old Willow, a half-Athabascan who loves her family’s sled dogs and longs for the freedom mushing them on her own would give her...if only her parents realized she is grown up enough to do so.

Willow finally gets permission to take the dogs on a solo trip to her grandparents’ house, but her inevitable youthful carelessness ends in tragedy when the lead dog Roxy – the best and her favorite – is blinded by a branch when the sled misses a turn in the path. Willow’s father intends to euthanize the dog, so Willow makes another run, this time without permission, to see if her grandparents will care for Roxy. The resulting nighttime adventure ultimately unites the family and uncovers – and heals – the family wound concerning Willow’s never-before-discussed stillborn twin.

Two things make this book particularly worth discussing. The Athabascan culture pervades the book, particularly in the prose sections told in the various voices of Willow’s ancestors, here reborn as the spirits of wild animals. Also notable are Willow’s sections, told in diamond-shaped poems in which certain key words are in bold type and form a sentence that reveals the heart of Willow’s thoughts.

**Read-aloud hook:** Pg. 13: Twelve-year-old Willow knows she is more grown up than her parents think, and desperately wants them to let her mush a team of dogs by herself through a portion of Alaskan wilderness to her grandparents’ house. **(After you read this poem, read the sentence formed by the bold-face words.)**

**Discussion questions:**

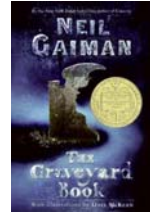
- Imagine living in an area as rural as Willow’s town. How would the lack of transportation and the weather alter your current lifestyle?
- Willow really chafes under her parents’ reluctance to let her be independent. Do you feel that way in your own life? Despite the obvious differences between her life and yours, what are some areas of common ground?
- In the story, Willow’s Athabascan ancestors watch over her in the form of various wild animals. Does your ethnic culture view its ancestors in a similar way? If not, talk about how having that view might change the way you live your life.
- In many adventure stories, the protagonist is tested, makes mistakes and learns things, especially about him- or herself. What are some of Willow’s tests? Her mistakes? What does she learn about herself? About others?

<http://www.helenfrost.net/>

**Neil Gaiman, with illustrations by David McKean**

**THE GRAVEYARD BOOK**

**HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 978-0-0605-3092-1. \$17.99. 312 pages.**



When the man Jack killed his parents and his sister, the baby toddled out of his house and up the hill to the graveyard. Mr. and Mrs. Owens, two of the ghosts who live there, promise his mother they will protect him from Jack -- which they do, with the help of Silas, the only non-ghost resident of the graveyard. They decide to keep the baby and raise him as their own. Named Nobody (Bod for short,) he is given the Freedom of the Graveyard, which allows him to see and do things denied to other mortals. Silas supplies his material needs, and the other ghosts are his family and friends. Bod rarely leaves the graveyard since Silas insists it is not safe. His few forays out into the world do tend to go badly at times, as he runs afoul of unscrupulous antique dealers and school bullies. But there are dangers within as well, as Bod discovers when he inadvertently discovers the ghoulish gate. He does make one living friend, and she helps him to explore his world. She also helps to prepare him for living with the living -- which he must, of course, eventually do.

Though it sparkles with an otherworldly sensibility and a more satirical tone, much of *The Graveyard Book* will feel familiar to readers of Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The several layers of meaning will attract readers on many levels and be rewarding to them all.

**Read-aloud hooks:**

- Chapter 1 "How Nobody Came to the Graveyard": p.2
- The ghosts discuss whether or not they can keep the baby: p. 22, "His mama gave the boy..."
- A slightly older Bod meets a girl: p. 39 "Boy? What're you doing?"

**Discussion questions:**

- At the end of the book, Silas says that he was once a "monster" and did worse things than Jack. What do you think he did? What made him change?
- Why do you think the author used a line of text from their headstones to introduce most of the ghosts? Did you enjoy the use of this device?
- Where did you notice social satire along with all the folklore and history? What purposes did it serve?

<http://www.neilgaiman.com> (Includes "The Graveyard Book Video Tour," which is a recording of the author reading the book aloud. Also includes adult language on occasion.)

**Jessica Day George**  
**SUN AND MOON, ICE AND SNOW**

**Bloomsbury, 2008. ISBN 978-1-5999-0109-1. \$16.95. 323 pages.**



The “lass” is the ninth child of an impoverished family of the North, yet another mouth to feed who will someday need a dowry; her lack of name is a deliberate gesture on the part of a bitter mother. In this retelling of the classic Nordic tale *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, the lass idolizes her oldest brother, Hans Peter, an adventurer who has returned home a shadow of his former self, but with a knowledge of a strange alphabet that he teaches to the lass. When an enchanted ice bear comes to beg the lass to live with him in a palace for one year, her greedy mother all but pushes her out the door, while Hans Peter urges her to refuse: “You cannot know what evil there is in the world.”

Hans Peter turns out to be correct. The strange language he had taught the lass was the language of the trolls whose evil queen had placed a spell on Hans Peter during his travels. The lass is taken to the palace and gradually learns she must defeat the troll queen to free not just the soul of the man trapped in the ice bear, but also the girl Hans Peter loves. In doing so, the lass discovers her own strengths as well as the depth of her love for the man trapped inside the bear.

George’s pacing and language immediately place the reader in the realm of the fairy tale, where a sense of enchantment and distance combine to touch something basic and familiar in all who hear the tale. The romance between the lass, Hans Peter and their respective lovers will enthrall older readers, but is subtle enough not to detract from the adventure for others.

**Read-aloud hook:** p. 57-61. The lass’s third brother, Askeladden, who was named a traditionally lucky name, is out hunting for an “isbjorn” or polar bear. While Askeladden is out, the bear himself comes to the house, frightening the lass, Hans Peter and their parents. The lass had developed the ability to understand animals after an earlier encounter with a magical reindeer, and only she can understand the bear. (**Stop after “‘Let me get my things,’ she said.”**)

**Discussion questions:**

- Have you read either the original *East of the Sun, West of the Moon* or Edith Pattou’s *East* (Harcourt, 2003)? Compare one or both to Jessica Day George’s version. (The original tale can be found on the following website: <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/books/norway/thornethomsen/eastsun.html> )
- A particular fairy tale often shares details or characteristics with other fairy tales. What other stories come to mind when you read this one? Why?
- Fairy tales are known for their examination of larger questions or personal qualities that transcend time and geographic boundaries. What qualities or questions does *Sun and Moon, Ice and Snow* consider, and what judgment is the reader expected to make about each (or is the reader not expected to reach a certain conclusion)?

<http://www.jessicadaygeorge.com>



**Allegra Goodman**

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND**

**Razorbill, 2008. ISBN 978-1-5951-4195-8. \$16.99. 280 pages.**



When Honor was ten, she moved with her family from the North to Island 365 in the Tranquil Sea. It soon became apparent that life there was different. Upon taking an admission test to enter school, Honor discovered she wasn't like the other kids. She didn't care for pottery or sewing, she'd much rather climb trees; she didn't have the Corporate Creed memorized, nor did she know The Earth Mother's Five Year Plan. In short, she didn't fit in. But she wasn't the only one who stuck out. Her parents didn't wear the right style or color of clothing; failed to have a picture of the Earth Mother on display in their home, and they liked to play music and sing old fashioned songs. It was going to be a bit of an adjustment getting used to this new life.

One day at school Honor meets a boy named Helix while he is using a metal detector on the playground. Soon after, they become friends and Honor and her family are invited for the afternoon to Helix's house. When they stop inside to get a snack, Honor is amazed at the amount of food in the cupboards, and the décor of the house prompts her to ask if Helix's family are High Level. No sooner does he answer yes, than an Unpredictable Storm sends both families into the basement to wait it out. The storm rages into the morning. As the all-clear sign is given and they head out to survey the damage, none of them yet know how their lives will become intertwined.

Twists and turns abound in Allegra Goodman's story of dystopian society. Secret codes, hidden identities, and mysterious controlling forces all add to the unease of a world gone wrong. As Honor balances her parents' unorthodox methods with her own desperate need to belong, she must learn who she is before she can stand up for what is right. Even if it means standing up alone. She has to--her family is depending on her.

**Read-aloud hook:** *As punishment for fighting with Hester, Honor will be working with Helix at the Recycling Center three mornings a week starting at an hour before sunrise.*

"Helix was staring down at the drifts of paper on the floor... He kicked a pile of white pages at his feet. "These matter. Lies matter." (pp. 175-177).

**Discussion questions:**

- Imagine a world with Earth Mothers, and Safety Officers, New Weather Bureaus and Orderlies. Name something you like to do that Honor is unable to do on her island.
- Honor, Helix, and their classmates all had names that started with H. Pick a letter and have everyone in the room choose a name starting with that letter. What does your new name say about you; what is its true meaning? Why does Honor want to change her name? What happens after she does?
- Why does Quin get in trouble at school? Why is he so upset at what they call him?
- Honor and her family have their pictures taken and put inside a snow globe. Which scenery does Honor choose? If you had a snow globe, what would it look like?
- How did you feel when Honor came home to discover that her parents were missing? Did you know this would happen? What clues led you to think it might?

<http://www.allegragoodman.com/> Please note: Ms Goodman is primarily an adult author, but her site is still a great resource—especially for aspiring writers.

**Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan**  
**CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE**

**Roaring Brook, 2008. ISBN 978-1-5964-3071-6. \$19.95. 50 pages.**



In the cold gray winter of 2005, Christo and his partner in art and in life, Jeanne Claude, unfurled a project that they had worked on for 26 years. Dubbed “*The Gates*,” the artwork consisted of 7,503 saffron fabric panels installed in New York’s Central Park along 23 miles of walkways, weaving in and out, rippling through the heart of the city. The installation was up only 16 days, but during that time it delighted and touched people, making them happy, brightening up their days.

*The Gates* was the largest exhibit to date, but far from the first of Christo’s and Jeanne Claude’s amazing projects. They have wrapped the Pont Neuf in Paris; surrounded islands in Biscayne Bay, Florida and installed thousands of umbrellas both in Japan and in California. Each of these projects has taken years to complete. From the first drawings that Jeanne Claude does, through all the permits, letters, engineering, and procurement of materials, there is an enormous amount of work for each production. The end result for each of these is a changing, shifting, beautiful temporary wonder that is available after the fact only in photos, books and sometime films.

Not only does this book give a sense of the beauty of the work and the dedication of the artists, but it also makes clear their philosophies and standards. The two artists do not accept donations or volunteer labor for their projects; they pay for everything themselves. When the projects are taken down, everything is removed and reused or recycled. After *The Gates* project, for instance, the steel bases were melted down to make soda cans, and the fabric was shredded and made into carpet padding. The artists do not sell any part of their projects to either private collectors or to museums: once they are done, they are gone forever.

**Read-aloud hook:** pp22-23 Valley Curtain, 1979-1972 This section shows the dangers, the impermanence of their art as well as their determination to complete a project.

**Discussion questions:**

- Some people say that Christo and Jeanne Claude, born on the same day, were destined to meet and marry, that it was fate. Do you believe in fate? What exactly IS fate?
- What is your definition of art? Do the installations that Christos and Jeanne Claude do qualify as art?
- If you could do any major art installation in the world, what would it be and where?
- All of Christo and Jeanne Claude’s art is short lived. Do you think all the time, money and effort that go into these art works are worth it?

<http://christojeanneclaude.net/>

<http://mowrites4kids.drury.edu/authors/greenberg>

<http://us.macmillan.com/author/sandrajordan>

## Margaret Peterson Haddix

### FOUND

S & S, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4169-5417-0. \$15.99. 314 pages.



Thirteen years ago a plane just appeared on the runway, possibly out of thin air. No pilot or crew on board, just 36 babies. Those few who witnessed it still aren't sure what it was. Now in the present day, Jonah and his friend Chip have had some strange things happening to them. Jonah knew from a young age that he was adopted; for Chip his own adoption is a relatively new discovery. This common thread bonds them together, and with the help of Jonah's sister, the trio are trying to figure out the source of some weird events—anonymous letters keep appearing and people are somehow disappearing.

Once the FBI gets involved a list of names surfaces, kids they believe were adopted just like Chip and Jonah. But why are the kids receiving letters, and just who is threatening to come and get them? Finding the answers to these questions means meeting with everyone on the list, no easy task. At the same time, Chip, Jonah and Katherine must discern which adults can be trusted, and who should be avoided at all costs.

Haddix's new series starts off with a bang. Filled with page-turning action, cliff-hanging chapter endings, and time travel-- it will be hard to put it down once you start. Yet running underneath it all are some heavy thought- provoking topics: adoption, the disruption of history, theoretical physics, and the use of technology for "The Greater Good." Those who pick this book up will finish quickly, but the questions it raises will linger on.

**Read-aloud hook:** *Jonah and his sister, Katherine, are in his room talking about some of the mysterious events that have been happening when they are interrupted by a knock at the door. "Is this a private party, or are adults allowed too?" Mom called from the hallway.... BEWARE! THEY'RE COMING BACK TO GET YOU.* (pp. 54-56)

#### Discussion questions:

- Katherine confesses that she sometimes wishes that she were the adopted child and that Jonah were the biological one. Why does she say this? Have you ever wanted to trade places with a sibling or a friend? Why?
- Describe Outer Time. What would you wish to see if you went there?
- Angela witnesses something that can't really be described in logical terms. For 13 years she has continued to believe it actually happened. After that amount of time would you still believe in something that defied logic?
- What are the reasons Curtis Rathbone gives for rescuing the babies? Do you agree or disagree with his reasoning?
- If you were a famous person in history, who might you be?

<http://www.haddixbooks.com/home.html>

**Shannon Hale and Dean Hale**  
**RAPUNZEL'S REVENGE**

**Bloomsbury, 2008. ISBN 978-1-5999-0070-4. \$18.99. 144 pages.**



What would happen if Rapunzel's hair grew from the head of a tall-tale, wild-west kind of a girl, snatched from her lettuce-loving mama as a babe, imprisoned in an Italianate villa - behind walls hiding an environmental disaster?

In *Rapunzel's Revenge*, our heroine escapes Mother Gothel's enchanted paradise and imprisonment in the Carrion Glade to meet up with a cross-dressing stranger in a saloon brawl. This goose-toting, magic-bean-throwing Jack is handsome and helpful, under his mild-mannered goofiness. He joins Rapunzel on her hazard-strewn trek across the Badlands, through dried up towns like Last Chance and Pig Tree Gulch. They do battle with a pack of outlaw kidnappers, herd a ferocious coyote pack, and lasso a giant water serpent. Finally, they disguise themselves as western gentry and sneak into a gala shindig at Mother Gothel's villa. Will Rapunzel finally have her revenge? Can she find and free her long-suffering mama? And what about that goose? This retelling is a completely unique melding of fairy tale romance, wisecracking characters and comic book action. Shannon Hale teams up with her behind-the-scenes writing partner and husband, Dean, who's also a writer and a comic book fanatic. She describes how they came to collaborate on this story, combining her "love of fairy tales and Dean's love of superheroes." Illustrator Nathan (no relation) Hale's clear and expressive style brings another cowboy movie element to this fairytale-western hybrid. His varied panels, with their close-ups, changing perspectives and segmented action mimic the pacing of a Hollywood western. The whole package is an eye-catching, page-turning treat. [yeehaw!]

**Read-aloud hook:** Rapunzel and Jack have finally made it to relative safety after they meet up in a saloon. Now they're trying to figure out what to do next. [Scan and project pp.50 -51] "Maybe we should keep moving..... "It's just morning."

**Discussion questions:**

- This Rapunzel is brave and curious, and a little naïve, too. How does she show her innocence (or ignorance) of worldly realities?
- Shannon Hale's last DCF book had a heroine in a tower, too. What are some other similarities between Rapunzel and Dashti, from *Book of a Thousand Days*?
- Find a part of this book where the action is told in pictures, rather than words. How is the illustrator adding to the novel?
- On her website, Shannon describes how writing the script for a graphic novel is more like writing a screenplay than a novel. How does she let you know what Rapunzel is thinking when the book is almost completely in dialogue?
- Think of a different fairy tale and move it into another setting. How would you have to change your new story from its classic form?

[http://www.squeetus.com/stage/books\\_rap.html](http://www.squeetus.com/stage/books_rap.html)

**M.H. Herlong**  
**THE GREAT WIDE SEA**

**Viking, 2008. ISBN 978-0-6700-6330-7. \$16.99. 283 pages.**



Meet Ben, a fifteen-year old boy with hopes and dreams that include getting a car and living a happy life with his father, mother and two younger brothers. All of that changes when his mother suddenly dies and his father sells the house and buys a boat. In an effort to move on with their lives, his father decrees that everything must go. They will have everything they need aboard the boat. Perhaps as a way to forget the past, Dad has purchased it with the intent of sailing with the family to the Bahamas. For one year the boys will learn the ways of the sea.

But nothing proceeds according to plan. There are life-threatening accidents and mishaps. Living in close quarters increases Ben's dislike of his father. Then, after the father falls overboard in the night, the three boys find themselves alone on an island. Ben is faced with the task of being the father to his brothers. Survival and rescue are up to him. "I tried on words. Majestic. Stunning. Awesome. Then I looked down at my brothers, standing small beside me. We were three small pieces of humanity, the only people on earth, standing on the very top of the island, erect, on two feet, with hands at our sides. In a photograph or a painting we wouldn't show up. There was so little of us and so much more of everything else. ... But we were quiet. Only one word echoed in my mind now. Over and over, pounding like the drumbeat of a dirge. Despair. Despair. Despair."

*The Great Wide Sea* is filled with action and adventure, and perfectly captures life on the open seas. Here the starkness of the ocean is juxtaposed with the beauty of the islands. The familiarity of the brothers' relationships is smack alongside the fear of their impending orphan status. The joy of being on the water changes to the overwhelming sense of aloneness with no land in sight. M.H. Herlong brings her vast knowledge of boats and the water to this thrilling tale.

**Read-aloud hook:** *The boys have taken control of the boat when disaster strikes.*

"I lost the ability to think... and the red life jacket he had put on all alone in the wet, dark boat." (pp. 146-149).

**Discussion questions:**

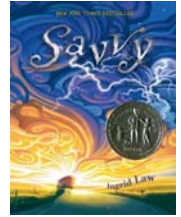
- Have you ever been on a boat? Would you like to live on one? What few items would you take with you, due to the limited space available?
- Why does Ben rebel against his dad?
- Each brother has a different strength or skill - what are they? If you were a member of their family, what might your talent be?
- Why does the author have Ben narrate the story? What might it be like from a different point of view?

[www.thegreatwidesea.com](http://www.thegreatwidesea.com)

## Ingrid Law

### SAVVY

Dial, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8037-3306-0. \$16.99. 342 pages.



Mibs Beaumont is almost 13, and in a family where you develop your own special, magical power - or savvy - in your teen years, that's cause for celebration...or maybe not! One of her brothers can cause hurricanes, and another can create electricity, so Mibs awaits the big day with eagerness and perhaps some unvoiced trepidation. When her father is in a serious car accident right before her birthday, Mibs's previous excitement over her soon-to-be-revealed savvy becomes a fanatical conviction that hers will enable her to save lives and free her father from his coma. When Mibs turns 13 and her savvy instead appears to grant her the ability to hear people's thoughts through the voices of the tattoos they wear, Mibs panics and makes a beeline for her father's hospital many miles away, where their mother has forbidden them to visit.

Mibs, her brothers and a cast of quirky individuals including the local preacher's tattooed daughter and a twice-tattooed salesman of bright pink bibles all find themselves on a bus together, headed (they hope) for Poppa Beaumont's hospital. More people than just Mibs grow up on this trip, with more than a few laughs along the way to lighten the tension. All works out well, and the ending is satisfying but still realistic; even the magic of savvys has its limits. One definition of a successful fantasy is that it is sufficiently grounded in reality to make the fantasy believable, and Ingrid Law has certainly achieved that here.

**Read-aloud hook:** p. 1-5, ending with "My savvy is going to be a good one...I just know it." Starting at the beginning is the perfect introduction to Mibs and her *very* special family. **(Reading any further into the book will give away key plot elements!)**

#### Discussion questions:

- Ingrid Law has created a varied and crazy cast of characters. Who is your favorite character? Why?
- If you had a savvy like Mibs and her family, what would you want it to be? What would be the good points about having that particular savvy, and what would you have to watch for or learn to control?
- Thinking in the "real" world rather than Mibs's magical one, what savvy do you already have?

<http://www.ingridlaw.com>

<http://us.penguin.com/static/packages/us/yreaders/savvy/index.html> (Savvy website)

**Donna Jo Napoli**  
**MOGO, THE THIRD WARTHOG**

**Hyperion, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4231-0816-0. \$15.99. 194 pages.**



Your standard “Three Little Pigs” this is not. No, this world is all too real – no one will be building houses of brick, and there is sure to be more than just one wolf. Here the pigs are warthogs, their home is a burrow in the African savanna, and the wolf – well, it could be any number of predators. Donna Jo Napoli presents the beauty of the rainy season, the majesty and comedy of the savanna’s many inhabitants, and the constant dangers that surround Mogo and his brothers. Laziness and mistakes are costly, and one learns quickly, or not at all.

Born the runt of his litter, Mogo is the most cautious of the three. When their mother announces that they will need to leave the burrow to make way for a new litter, it is Mogo who truly sees what this means. And despite their mother’s caution that they must each find their own way in the world, it is Mogo who attempts to keep his litter together. But nowhere is there a burrow large enough for three adult male warthogs. Piggies out past their bedtime are easy prey. Napoli shows the reality of the natural world, whether it is the vulnerability of the drinking giraffe, the easy targets that the young make for predators, or the attention Mogo pays to which animals make the best grazing companions. This attention to detail makes Mogo’s world come alive for us and breathes new life into an old cautionary tale.

**Read-aloud hook:** p. 33 – Mogo and his brothers learn what their future holds. This may be the closest to the traditional tale that Napoli comes. “Mother threw me a disapproving glance” to end of chapter.

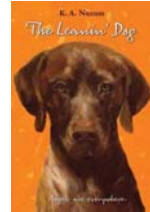
**Discussion questions:**

- Which of the animals described in *Mogo* would you most like to be? Why?
- What do you believe this retelling of “The Three Little Pigs” cautions people to do or not to do? How?
- How does the character Baboony fit into this story? Does it work?
- Besides creating a different setting, how has Donna Jo Napoli changed the telling of “The Three Little Pigs”?
- Over the course of the story, what does Mogo learn about how to survive, and from whom does he learn it?

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

**K.A. Nuzum**  
**THE LEANIN' DOG**

HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 978-0-0611-3934-5. \$15.99. 250 pages.



Eleven year old Dessa Dean and her Daddy live a lonely life in a cabin in the woods of Colorado in the 1930's. As the story unfolds we learn that Dessa Dean and her Mom were caught out in the snow and her mother, a diabetic, froze to death. This tragedy has left Dessa Dean with nightmares, daymares and an inability to leave the front porch without having a panic attack.

Enter the Leanin' Dog! Just before Christmas while Dessa Dean was doing her math homework she heard a howling outside her door. Not knowing just what it might be she cautiously, at first, tried to open the front door. It slammed shut. Her second try was much more forceful and Dessa ended up landing on top of the poor frightened leanin' dog. During the next few days Dessa Dean tries to befriend the wounded frightened dog. Through many a comical mishap, involving the local wildlife, Dessa Dean starts the healing process for herself and for the leanin' dog. The resulting story is a well written heartwarming tale of friendship, healing and hope.

**Read-aloud hooks:**

- Why, it was a dog! Not a daymare at all, but a dog had come ascratching at the door ...” Here, Dog,” I Called. “Come Back!” The dog stopped, and I filled with hope when she turned around. She looked at me, cocking her head...Page 22-23
- There was a spattering against the door, and a second latter the skunk's harsh perfume wafted in from below. Instantly, my eyes teared up, and I commenced to choke. There I stood, dumbstruck, crying and wheezing until finally I thought to wet down a dishtowel... Page 35
- “Dessa Dean! Wake up, girl, wakeup!” There was Daddy's voice shaking me awake. My heart skipped, for it seemed as though things were repeating themselves. Was I stuck in one of my daymares?... Page 90

**Discussion questions:**

- Dessa Dean is still grieving the death of her mother. How does helping the dog help Dessa Dean?
- Why is it so hard for Dessa Dean to go outside? How is Dessa's dad helping her with her problems?
- Dessa makes a great Christmas dinner for her dad. What happens to spoil the Christmas celebration? How do you think her father felt when he got home and Dessa was gone?

[www.kanuzum.com](http://www.kanuzum.com)



**Barbara O'Connor**  
**GREETINGS FROM NOWHERE**  
FSG, 2008. ISBN 978-0-3743-9937-5. 200 pages.



After the death of her beloved Harold, all that Aggie has left is her cat, Ugly, and her home in the Great Smoky Mountains, the Sleepy Time Motel. The motel has come on hard times and Aggie has a difficult time keeping up with the repairs. When she decides to sell the motel and go live with her sister, Aggie is surprised by a quick offer as well as by the customers who come to stay. Clyde Dover and his daughter Willow are piecing a life together after Willow's mother leaves them; Clyde sees real potential in the motel, impulsively buys it, and uproots Willow. Kirby and his mother are stopped by car trouble on their way to his new reform school; he is told "this is your last chance to straighten up and fly right." Loretta and her adoptive parents are on a trip honoring her birth mother who has recently passed to the other side; the Sleepy Time Motel is central to their travel needs.

O'Connor focuses her attention on Aggie, Kirby, Loretta, and Willow in alternating chapters which allow for greater character development. These four people with loss in common gradually begin to rely on each other during the span of a few short days. The simple language and charming cast of characters underlies a novel with a universal message. *Greetings from Nowhere* proves that you can find family, friendship and hope in the most unlikely of places.

**Read-aloud hook:** Harold and the tomato patch: Page 81. "Willow stepped over a twisted clump.... Willow decided that maybe Aggie wasn't crazy after all."

**Discussion questions:**

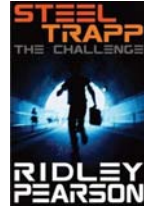
- Why would the author use the name Sleepy Time Motel? Does the new name of Mountainview Inn seem more appropriate? Why or why not?
- Kirby has led a difficult life, but changes the most in this novel. Trace his character from his first appearance to when he leaves for school. How successful do you think he will be in his new surroundings?
- Loretta and her parents make a pilgrimage to places where her birth mother travelled. If friends were coming to visit you from out of state, where would you take them?
- The residents of and visitors to the Sleepy Time Motel become an unconventional family. What family role does each character take?
- Everyone has a possession that they love; what do each of the four main characters have and how did they get them? Why are they important to each of them?

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

**Ridley Pearson**

**STEEL TRAPP: THE CHALLENGE**

Disney, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4231-0640-1. \$16.99. 324 pages.



Steel Trapp and his mother are on a train to Washington D. C. to attend the National Science Challenge. Steel, who has a photographic memory, witnesses a woman leaving a brief case on the train. Why would she say it wasn't hers? Who was the man trying to claim the briefcase and why were the FBI involved? All these questions draw Steel into a dangerous game of espionage.

Steel and Kaileigh, a fellow science geek he meets on the train, try to solve the mystery. In this fast paced spy story Steel and Kaileigh uncover a kidnapping and a plot to fix the lottery to fund a terrorist group. With the help of FIDOE, Steel's science experiment, and his dog Cairo, he and Kaileigh are able to find the kidnap victim and help the FBI catch the criminals.

**Read-aloud hooks:**

- “You’re wrong,” he said. “You’re lying to me. Why are you lying?”  
Her impassive face broke, and she looked clearly uncomfortable. She glanced around the busy platform. He repeated, “I saw you. I am not making a mistake. I don’t make this kind of mistake.”...Page 21
- Grym’s insides twisted: the cop-or fed- wearing blue jeans and a blue blazer seemed to be looking right at him. What to do? All the windows were emergency glass; he could get out if he had to. But how far would he get?... Page 84
- Steel couldn’t breathe. It was like one of those nightmares that can’t get any worse, and then it does. First his mother had gotten up from her seat- a major embarrassment. Then she’d approached the tall agent.  
He felt cold all of a sudden. Cold, and sick to his stomach....Page 130

**Discussion questions:**

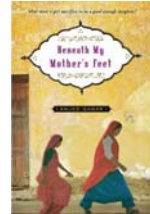
- Steel chose to leave the science challenge to find the kidnapped women. What might he have done differently to help the women and participate in the challenge?
- How was Kaileigh able to use the science of her experiment to help catch the terrorists?
- What would you have done if you had seen someone leave a briefcase somewhere?
- Pearson wrote VERY short chapters for this novel. Why do you think he did this?
- Would you like to have a photographic memory? Why or why not?

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

**Amjed Qamar**

**BENEATH MY MOTHER'S FEET**

**Atheneum, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4169-4728-8. \$16.99. 198 pages.**



Nazia, a fourteen-year-old Pakistani girl, lives in a working-class district of Karachi. She attends school, cares for her younger brother and sister, and awaits her arranged marriage to her cousin. When her father is injured on the job, her Amma and in turn Nazia are forced to take work cleaning the homes of the wealthy in order to support their family. Nazia's older brother has disappointed the family by leaving home after obtaining his high school diploma; the men of the family have a habit of disappointing others.

When Nazia's dowry is stolen and her Abbu is robbed of the rent due their landlord, the family situation becomes dire. While packing their meager belongings, Nazia is visited by her Uncle Tariq who has come to inspect his future daughter-in-law. He is shocked at her appearance and calls the marriage off. With no place to live, Amma takes her children and pleads with one of her employers to allow them to stay there and work for free. The plight of Sherzad, a young servant sold to her mother's employer, becomes an obsession for Nazia as her own future spirals out of control. Can Nazia find the strength to fight for what she needs, or must she suffer and remain the dutiful beti that her mother wants her to be?

Steeped in cultural, religious and societal expectations, *Beneath my Mother's Feet* is an unwavering look at one young woman's dreams.

**Read-aloud hooks:**

- Setting and Nazia's reputation established: p. 1 "The musky scent of mustard oil..."
- Nazia is loyal to her father: p.30-34 "In less than an hour Nazia and her mother finished up and headed home."... "Would she ever go back to school again?"

**Discussion questions:**

- "Our lives will always be in the hands of our mothers, whether we like it or not." This quote and the title **Beneath my Mother's Feet** have significance in the Islamic faith. Discuss how the quote and the title relate to the events in the novel.
- Money, social status, and occupation are shown to be of great importance in the Pakistani culture. How similar are the attitudes to those in our country?
- Most of the men in this novel are portrayed in a negative way. A few stand out as being better than the rest. Discuss.
- What do you think is the ultimate fate of Sherzad at the bus station?
- There are many families in this novel. How do the women in each family differ in their dealings with their own children?
- Qamar uses sensory language to describe Karachi, Pakistan. Try to find the most richly depicted passages and discuss. What language would you use to describe your town?

<http://www.amjedqamar.com/Author.html>

<http://readingyear.blogspot.com/2008/05/sneak-peek-keep-your-eye-on-this-new.html>

(Author Interview)

**Marie Rutkoski**

**THE CABINET OF WONDERS**

**FSG, 2008. ISBN 978-0-3743-1026-4. \$16.95. 272 pages.**



Petra stretched and squinted in the morning sun as two men unloaded an ungainly something from the back of their cart.

“Your da had an accident,” one of the men reported. But this was no accident.

In an attempt to augment his royal powers with Kronos’ way of seeing, Prince Rodolfo had blinded Mikal Kronos by enchanting and removing his eyes. *The Cabinet of Wonders* tells how Petra brings back her father’s sight by stealing back his eyes, now hidden somewhere in Rodolfo’s Salamander Castle.

How does a 12-year-old girl get from a modest village into the heart of far-away, jewel-of-the-empire Prague? Petra is a schemer: bold, smart and a little devious. Astrophil, a talking mechanical spider, is her companion and advisor. A friend helps her devise a ruse to get onto a cart headed for the city and then arms her with three of his marvelous Marvels, marbles encasing multiplying enchantments. On her first morning in Prague, Petra catches and then protects a ghost-fingered Roma thief. Neel and his sister become important allies and Petra’s ticket into the castle. Within its walls, she finds an acid-weeping countess, an international spy, and finally, the Cabinet of Wonders where Kronos’ eyes now live – except when the Prince is wearing them.

At the center of this fantastic quest is Kronos’ clock, a mechanical marvel, more beautiful than any other in 16<sup>th</sup> century Bohemia. Like this book’s characters, their gifts and inventions, nothing is quite as it seems, and this clock has extraordinary potential. Will Petra reach its heart in time?

**Read-aloud hook:** Petra’s father has returned from Prague with neither his eyes, nor payment for the fabulous clock he constructed while in the city. Now he is blind and bitter. Petra has to do something. “You want to do *what?*”... “No,” she said reluctantly.” (pp.53–54)

**Discussion questions:**

- This book is full of fantasy, magic and actual history, too. What realistic details has the author used to make her story seem believable?
- Astrophil is like a demon or familiar for Petra. How does he serve and entertain her? Does he remind you of characters in other books?
- In what ways do the special abilities of Petra’s friends Tomik and Neel help her?
- Petra risks her life to recover her father’s eyes, and yet he is angry with her when she returns with them. Why do you think he is so furious?
- This book is the first of a series. Which characters do you think will feature most prominently in the next book? Can you predict the next book’s central problem?

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

**Jon Scieszka**

**KNUCKLEHEAD: TALL TALES AND MOSTLY TRUE  
STORIES ABOUT GROWING UP SCIESZKA**

**Viking, 2008. ISBN 978-0-6700-1106-3. \$16.99. 106 pages.**



This memoir from our National Ambassador of Young People's Literature describes a childhood that was not terribly remarkable -- but the recounting of it is exceptional. Jon Scieszka grew up in Flint, Michigan, with five brothers. From playing "Slaughter Ball" to making bombs out of dry cleaning bags, they collectively put the professional skills of their principal father and nurse mother to the test on a daily basis. Remembering life with his brothers, Scieszka says, is where he, as an author, begins to "get his ideas." Chapter 36 ("What's So Funny, Mr. Scieszka?") describes the fateful day in Sister Margaret Mary's religion class when he realized that the power of humor was his to wield.

The entertaining exploits of the brothers Scieszka are packaged in ultra-short chapters which are delightfully accessible. Illustrations include period graphics and primary documents from the Scieszka family archives. *Knucklehead* presents a cheerfully unsentimental portrait of a marvelously functional family that will leave the reader wishing they lived next door. Even the index to this book is funny!

**Read-aloud hooks:**

Almost all of the short chapters in this book would work. Two of the best might be:

- Chapter 16 "Brothersitting" p. 48
- Chapter 33 "Car Trip" p. 93

For a particularly difficult to engage and/or largely male audience (pre-read first):

- Chapter 8 "Crossing Swords" p. 27

**Discussion questions:**

- Many of the illustrations in this book (including its cover) date back to the 1950s and early '60s, when Mr. Scieszka was a kid. How do they add to the story? How would a different style of illustration change the effect of the story?
- Can you think of an episode from your childhood that would fit in with these stories? What happened?
- What parts of his childhood do you think Mr. Scieszka might have left out of this book?
- How do you think Mr. Scieszka's childhood might have been different if his family had used computers, video games, and cell phones?

<http://www.jsworldwide.com>

## Neal Shusterman ANTSY DOES TIME

Dutton, 2008. ISBN 978-0-5254-7825-6. \$16.99. 247 pages.



Antsy Bonano is back, and we should all cheer. If his only appearance had been as the narrator and manager in *The Schwa Was Here*, it would have been enough to mark him as one of the funniest, most caring Brooklynites in literature. But wait—there's more! As well as continuing the stories of many of the main characters from *The Schwa*, much of the action here revolves around classmate Gunnar Umlaut and his family. When Gunnar shares with Antsy that he has only six months to live, Antsy determines to give Gunnar some time. Really. He calls it “time shaving.” Soon his idea catches fire; people are pledging months and years of their lives to Gunnar, and Antsy's kindheartedness attracts some very welcome attention from Gunnar's older sister, Kjersten.

Follow Antsy as he and Gunnar “basically sprayed enough [herbicide] to kill the rain forests” (p. 121) for their project on *The Grapes of Wrath*, as he and Kjersten double-date with ex-girlfriend Lexie and “clicking Raoul,” and as he organizes an intervention to try to keep Gunnar's crumbling family together. Along the way, hear Antsy wax eloquently about his friend Howie (“his imagination is a cold winter in Antarctica where the penguins never learned to swim”), Old Man Crawley (“the kind of guy who'd hand out vomit-inducing candy on Halloween, and then sell Pepto-Bismol across the street at jacked-up prices”), his restaurant-running father (“Darth Menu”), and himself (“I'm like flypaper for dysfunction”). Neal Shusterman chooses the freshest ingredients, chops and blends, and sticks it in the oven for 247 pages (with *three* appendices!). The result is unlike any other book you'll bite into all year.

**Read-aloud hook:** p. 46 – Antsy has just given Gunnar a certificate for a month of his life, and later that day he runs into Kjersten, Gunnar's sister: “That afternoon...” until p. 48 – “Do you want your gum back, or should I keep it?”

### Discussion questions:

- Why do you believe so many people get inspired by Antsy's idea of “time shaving”?
- In what way can Lexie see better than most people?
- Follow in the footsteps of Gunnar. Come up with your own made-up depressing quotes, and explain who might have said them and why.
- Why do you think Antsy's sister Christina says, “Someday I hope to have friends as problematic as yours”? (p. 240)
- If you had been in Antsy's shoes and you had to make the speech he never gave, what would you have said? Why?
- Would you call this story a comedy? A tragedy? A drama? Some combination? Support your answer with specific reasons.

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

**Kean Soo**  
**JELLABY**

**Hyperion, 2008. ISBN 978-1-4231-0337-0. \$18.99. 160 pages.**



Young Portia Bennett’s school days are long; it’s not easy to be reading Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia* while your classmates are slogging through *Horton Hatches the Egg*. Nights are no better, with a mother who works extra-long hours and a father who simply disappeared one day. When an all-too-common nightmare jolts Portia awake one night just in time for her to see a benign purple monster “shuffling” through the leaves in her yard, she finds herself with both a new friend and a quest: a quest to find Jellaby’s home, with only a photo of a familiar-looking door in a Halloween fair advertisement for a clue. The pair is joined by another loner, Jason, who has an inexplicable fondness for carrots and a tendency to get beaten up on the playground.

The trio buys train tickets to the town that is hosting the Halloween fair, but is forced to jump off the train mid-ride when a man who has starred in Portia’s nightmares (“I know where your father’s bones are buried.”) suddenly appears on the train, demanding to talk to Portia. This first volume ends with Portia, Jellaby and Jason walking along the train tracks, continuing toward the mysterious door and hoping to elude the man from the train. (Publication date is 4/21/09 for volume 2, *The Monster in the City*.)

Graphic novel fans from a range of ages have and will continue to devour this one; the huggable Jellaby will attract those even younger than the DCF recommendation of grades five and up, while the sinister undertones of Portia’s missing father’s story will keep older readers engaged.

**Read-aloud hook:** p.15-23. Portia has just awakened from a nightmare, and hears a noise outside her window. **Scan these pages to project on a screen; *Jellaby* needs the artwork as well as the words to be effective.**

**Discussion questions:**

- Artists choose their colors carefully, and the artwork in *Jellaby* primarily uses the colors purple and white. What few other colors does Kean Soo use? How do these occasional splashes of other colors work in the story, and why might Soo use them?
- What do you think happened to Portia’s father? What might be his connection to the man in Portia’s nightmare and the man on the train?
- Portia is ostracized by the other students at school, and Jason is more visibly bullied. Why? What is courageous about how they each handle it?
- Kean Soo began his career as an electrical engineer before he turned his love of cartoons into a career as a graphic novelist. What do you see as your career in 15 years? Ask someone in your class which of your hobbies he or she thinks might become *your* second career.

**Kean Soo’s website is NOT recommended for grades 4-8.**

**Michael P. Spradlin**

**KEEPER OF THE GRAIL (The Youngest Templar, Book 1)**

Putnam, 2008. ISBN 978-0-3992-4763-7. \$17.99. 248 pages.



Tristan, left as an orphan at St Alban's Abbey, wants a life of adventure, not the quiet life of a monk. When Templar Knights stop at the Abbey, Tristan is offered a chance to become a squire for Sir Thomas and accompany him on a Crusade. He gladly joins Sir Thomas and leaves with the knights, thus beginning a new life of danger and adventure.

In the Holy Land Tristan proves his bravery by helping King Richard on the battlefield. Things go badly for the Knights Templar, and Sir Thomas gives Tristan a final quest to take the Holy Grail to England. Along the way he meets up with Robard, one of the king's archers, and Maryam, a girl trained as a warrior. Together they attempt to find a way to back to England.

Intrigue, mystery, bravery-- this story has all the ingredients of a great epic. This is just Book one in this new series; the next one, *Trail of Fate*, will be out October 29, 2009.

**Read-aloud hooks:**

- Though I am called Tristan, I have no true name of my own. ...I was found that August night on the steps of the abbey. A few days old at best, hungry and crying, wrapped in a soiled woolen blanket. ....Page 3
- "Attack me," he commanded  
I was reluctant to move.  
"In God's name, boy, I have given you an order! Attack!" he yelled.  
I made a halfhearted lunge with my weapon. With blinding speed he easily parried the thrust, then swung back, striking me solidly across my upper right arm. My arm went numb and I cried out in pain....Page 70
- Without thinking, I spurred my horse and pointed it toward the King. I had no plan in mind other than to get between the King and the attacking force....Page 95

**Discussion questions:**

- Tristan had a good life at the St. Alban's Abbey. Why do you think he decided to become a squire to Sir Thomas? Do you think he found what he was looking for?
- Sir Hugo dislikes Tristan from the start, how does this make things difficult for Tristan? What can Tristan do to make the situation better?
- Sir Thomas entrusts the Holy Grail to Tristan with the instructions to bring it back to England. Who does Tristan meet up with on this journey? How do they help him with his Quest?

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



## Vivian Vande Velde

### STOLEN

Marshall Cavendish, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7614-5515-8. \$16.99. 158 pages.



Is she Isabelle? She has no memory of who she is, or why she is running through the woods being chased by hounds. When their hunter rescues her and takes her home, his wife and his adopted granddaughter, Ravyn, try to help her remember her identity. Ravyn is sure she is a bespelled princess, but another village family claims her as their daughter who was stolen years ago by a witch. The parents' joy at being reunited is both enhanced and diminished by having just lost another child, an infant girl, to the same witch, who has been, quite properly, burned.

Honey, Isabelle's sister, does not share the joy in her return. She is convinced that Isabelle is an imposter who is trying to worm her way into the affections and inheritance of Great-Aunt Isabelle. She goes out of her way to make things difficult for Isabelle, and one day literally goes too far. Isabelle begins to realize that Honey is not just disagreeable, she is dangerous.

It is clear from the first page that a baby was stolen, but was it Isabelle? What starts as one mystery turns into another in this elegantly plotted fantasy. This will be a good title for younger readers who want a scary book, and any reader who enjoys fairy tale novels.

#### Read aloud hooks:

- The Prologue: p. 7
- Ravyn's family tries to determine who Isabelle is: p. 21, "Will she live, Grandmother?"

#### Discussion questions:

- Is the witch in this story a good witch, or a bad witch? Why?
- Do Ravyn and Orsen remind you of any real children you know? How does the author make them seem like real children?
- There are several twists to the plot of this book. How many of them did you figure out ahead of time? Did any of them take you completely by surprise?
- Witches in fairy tales are often depicted as child stealers. How does this book explain why a witch might want a child?

<http://www.vivianvandelde.com> -- The page about *Stolen* includes the photographs which inspired the characters of Isabelle and Ravyn.

## 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)

2009 – 2010 DCF nominees: Themes Matrix

TITLE	ACTION/ ADVENTURE	ART	COMMUNICATING CREATURES	FAMILY PROBLEMS	FRIENDSHIP	GAME/CONTESTS	GENRES	GRANDPARENTS	HUMOR	MAGIC	POVERTY	SCIENTIFIC INSPIRATION	SECRETS	SURVIVAL/DEATH	TRAVEL/DISTANT PLACES
(√) = in a manner of speaking															
<b>11 Planets</b>		√					NonFiction					√			√
<b>Antsy Does Time</b>				√	√	√	ContempFict	√	√				√	√	
<b>Beneath My Mother's Feet</b>				√			Contemp. Fiction				√			√	√
<b>Cabinet of Wonders</b>	(√)			√	√		Fantasy			√					√
<b>Calder Game</b>	√	√			√	√	Mystery						√		√
<b>Christo &amp; Jean Claude</b>		√			√		NonFiction								√
<b>Diamond Willow</b>			√	√			NarrativeVerse	√						√	√
<b>Emperors of the Ice</b>	√				√		Fictional Biography					√		√	√
<b>Found</b>	√			(√)			Sci Fiction						√		√
<b>Gollywhopper Games</b>				√		√	Contemp. Fiction		√						
<b>Graveyard Book</b>	√		√	√			Fantasy			√			√	√	√
<b>Great Wide Sea</b>	√			√			Contemp. Fiction							√	√
<b>Greetings from Nowhere</b>				√	√		Contemp. Fiction		√		√				√
<b>Hunger Games</b>	√			√		√	Fantasy				√			√	
<b>Into the Dark</b>				√	√		Mystery	√					√		
<b>Jellaby</b>			√	√	√		GraphicNov			(√)					
<b>Keeper of the Grail</b>	√						Historical Fiction			√			√	√	√
<b>Knucklehead</b>	(√)			√			Memoir		√						
<b>Leanin' Dog</b>			(√)	√			Contemp. Fiction				√			√	
<b>Masterpiece</b>	(√)	√	(√)		√		Mystery			(√)					
<b>Mogo, the Third Warthog</b>	√		√				Animal Fiction		√					√	√
<b>Other Side of the Island</b>	√			√	√		Science Fiction					(√)			
<b>Rapunzel's Revenge</b>	√				√		Graphic Novel		√	√	√			√	
<b>Rat Trap</b>	√		(√)		√		SciFiction					√			
<b>Savvy</b>				√	√	√	Fantasy		√	√					√
<b>Shift</b>	√			√	√		ContempFict						√		√
<b>Shooting the Moon</b>				√	√	√	Historical Fiction							(√)	
<b>Steel Trapp</b>	√			√	√	√	Mystery					√	√		√
<b>Stolen</b>				√			Fantasy			√			√	(√)	
<b>Sun &amp; Moon, Ice &amp; Snow</b>			√	√	√		Fantasy			√	√		√		√