Behind You by Jacqueline Woodson  
Death/Interracial Dating/Homosexuality
ISBN: 0-399-23988-X
Jeremiah Roselind is dead at fifteen years old. Miah, as he is affectionately called by most, was shot and killed by two white cops—a case of mistaken identity. The spirit of Miah whistles through loved ones trying to make sense of his death and their lives as they see them now. Ellie was Miah’s white girlfriend. She hurts the most and is trying to overcome the pain of losing her soul mate. Miah is trying to make sense of his death, too, and how to embrace his new role in the afterlife.

Woodson reveals the thoughts and personalities of her characters in miniature time capsules. She allows the reader to uncover who Miah was through the characters’ actions and their feelings about him. Woodson captures the present world, along with the afterlife, and creatively allows the reader to experience bereavement in both. She touches on social taboos such as homosexuality and interracial dating, while also showing the many facets of grief. A well written novel, Behind You is both thought-provoking and heartwarming.

Jeron Shelton
Elgin, IL

Bermudez Triangle by Maureen Johnson  
Relationships/Homosexuality
Nina, Avery, and Mel have been inseparable for years. However, when Nina leaves for summer camp, a secret emerges that shakes the foundation of that friendship: Avery and Mel are in love with one another. When Nina returns, nothing is the same. She feels alienated and struggles to accept the life her friends have chosen; meanwhile, her friends now avoid her to be alone with one another.

Avery and Mel are unable to keep their relationship a secret; rumors circulate throughout school. Embarrassed, Avery begins to doubt her newly discovered homosexuality. To figure out what she feels and who she is, she breaks off her relationship with Mel, seeking comfort in the arms of a man. Left alone, Mel turns to Nina for comfort. Bermudez Triangle is an excellent portrayal of the realistic struggles associated with homosexuality. Since it does contain scenes with the two lovers, I would not recommend it for middle school or younger high school students.

Esther Myers
Manhattan, KS

The Big Nothing by Adrian Fogelin  
Relationships/Music/Family Problems
ISBN: 1561453269
To escape family problems, Justin Riggs sometimes escapes into “The Big Nothing” — a place he can be who he is and not worry about his mom and dad splitting up, his older brother shipping out to Iraq, or whether Jamie Lewis knows he’s alive or not.

Justin is musically inclined and, when visiting one day after school at Jamie’s house, discovers the piano and Jamie’s grandmother, Nana Grace. When Nana offers to help him learn to play, he begins spending every spare minute at Jamie’s practicing. The angst he seems to feel while his Dad and brother are away is diminished by his connection to the music, and he doesn’t mind being around Jamie so much, either!

Written more for middle school, Fogelin writes a sensitive, yet humorous, account of a boy coming to grips with adulthood too soon. Highly recommended.

Nancy McFarlin
Wamego, KS

The Boy with the Lampshade on His Head by Bruce Wetter  
Abuse/Friendship
Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2004, 304 pp., $16.95  
ISBN: 0-689-85032-8
Stanley Krakow doesn’t consider himself to be anything special. He is a young boy whose problems consist of a callous fifth-grade teacher and a bully, who just happens to be Stanley’s older brother, Jerold. Concerned with saving his glow-in-the-dark fish and holding his breath long enough to make it into the Guinness Book of World Records, Stanley creates a world in which he is the hero and everything else is out to destroy him. In his role as super hero, Stanley meets Theresa. Theresa’s everyday battle brings to life the reality of abuse in the home and the need for friends. Through Theresa, Stanley discovers how special he really is. Stanley goes from being a blood-sucking beetle killer to a brave friend who literally saves Theresa’s life.

Bruce Wetter does a fantastic job of capturing the imagination of a unique fifth-grader. Humorously introduced throughout the story, Stanley’s trials and tribulations are sure to captivate young readers as they reveal an unlikely hero: The Boy with the Lampshade on His Head.

Jessica Mattes
Elgin, IL
Call Me María, Judith Ortiz Cofer

Call Me María, by Judith Ortiz Cofer, delivers a poignant story of a sixteen-year-old Puerto Rican girl trying to find her place in the barrio of New York. Maria has gone with her father as he returns to the barrio of New York. Maria befriends Whoopie, who teaches her the ways of the barrio and how to master Spanglish. When her mother does come to New York a year later, Maria realizes it is only for a visit and not to live. Though both parents want her, Maria decides to stay with her father because she has come to accept the life of the barrio. Maria’s voice is a strength in this uniquely written novel as Cofer comfortably transitions between prose, letters, and poetry. Roger Caswell

Children of the Lamp: The Akhenaten Adventure, P.B. Kerr

What do wisdom teeth, The Arabian Nights, an earthquake in Egypt, and a missing couple on a flight to London have in common? Quite a bit, it turns out, for two twelve-year-old twins. John and Philippa Gaunt enjoy an exciting and, at times, dangerous adventure, thanks to what happens to them after a trip to the dentist—and a little luck. Luck is precisely what these twins need after they go to stay with their uncle Nimrod. Only John and Philippa discover they have much more control over luck than they ever thought possible. The twins must quickly learn to harness their emerging powers to help their uncle solve an ancient mystery. If they succeed, the balance of Good and Evil in the world will remain in homeostasis; if they fail, Evil will have the advantage, and the whole world will suffer. It is no surprise P.B. Kerr is also a writer of adult thrillers, as Phillip Kerr. Although the wit and vocabulary may be beyond some young readers, enthusiasts of the Harry Potter series and similar works will enjoy Kerr’s suspenseful, yet fun, tale. Emily Pauly

A Couple of April Fools, Gregory Maguire

The children in Miss Earth’s class are not having a good spring. What with mutant chickens, an escalating rivalry between the Tattletales and the Coyotes (their girls’ and boys’ clubs), a traitor, and a couple of April Fools pranks gone wrong, they hardly notice the fine spring air or the first forsythia blooms. Their problems reach a crisis point when their beloved teacher disappears. Though Thekla Mustard, former Empress of the Tattletales, suspects a romance gone wrong between Miss Earth and her fiancé, Mayor Grass, her classmates are not so sure. However, they all agree they must use their excellent education to locate their teacher. In this, book six of the chronicles of Hamlet, Vermont, Maguire uses humor and a fast-paced plot to create a delightfully entertaining story. Despite the quirky names and bizarre events, Maguire’s tale captures the essence of pre-adolescent experience: the difficulties of peer relationships and the growing understanding that parents are flawed human beings. Virginia Beesley

Double Helix, Nancy Werlin

Eighteen-year-old Eli has always been smarter, faster, and stronger than the average kid. He has never really questioned why until the mysterious and brilliant Dr. Wyatt begins to take a curious interest in him and offers him a job at his renowned lab, Wyatt Transgenics. When Eli’s father pleads with him to decline the offer but refuses to explain why, Eli becomes more intrigued. His life gets turned upside down as he begins his search for answers and uncovers some disturbing secrets about his past. This suspenseful book is both mysterious and exciting. Nancy Werlin takes her readers on a wild ride with Eli as he struggles to gain an understanding of the secrets in his own past that may be his only hope in the future. This gripping novel explores some serious themes such as morality and the ethics of genetic engineering. It is also a story of the ties of love and loyalty that bond a father and son. Sarah Briggs
| Fortune’s Bones: The Manumission Requiem by Marilyn Nelson | Poetry | Front Street, 2004, 32 pp., $16.95 |
| Foxmask by Juliet Marillier | Fantasy | TOR, 2004, 464 pp., $27.95 |
| Hawkes Harbor by S.E. Hinton | Horror | TOR, 2004, 251 pp., $21.95 |

Twelve-year-old Isaac is struggling to remain loyal to the Christian faith and values with which he was raised. In the wake of the 9-11 terrorist attacks, while living a mission life with his doctor and nurse parents in Wonobo, Indonesia, Isaac is taken hostage by anti-Christian Muslims after an attempted evacuation of all Americans goes terribly wrong. He undergoes a transformation throughout this horrible ordeal and discovers more about the driving forces of the Islamic people and, in the end, finds the faith in Jesus that he had lost.

Richard Lewis dynamically explains the faith journey of Isaac Williams in a creative and unique way. He takes his young readers on a journey of their own through the Christian and Muslim faiths, with gruesome yet truthful detail. This book is rich with description, and despite violence and heartache throughout, readers who stick with Isaac will be rewarded.

Katie Nedli
Elgin, IL

A skeleton has been lurking in Mattatuck, Connecticut, for more than 200 years. Historians have recently discovered that the bones belonged to a slave named Fortune who was owned by a local doctor. Following his death in 1798, Fortune’s bones were preserved by his former owner to help further his medical studies.

In Fortune’s Bones, Marilyn Nelson tells Fortune’s story in verse, adapting various elements of a traditional funeral mass. Her poetry has a simple voice, yet a strong tone; it both mourns Fortune’s death, while celebrating the freedom from slavery that his death has provided.

Fortune’s Bones is beautiful and haunting; it is an excellent introduction to poetry for young readers, particularly those with an interest in history and/or slavery issues.

Amy Anderson
Manhattan, KS

Thorvald talks his friend, Sam, into setting sail to find his father. Creidhe hides in the boat, because she know that her friends will need her on their journey. After several weeks in the North Sea, they land on a Foroes Island between Norway and Iceland. The island is ruled by the evil Asgrim. Creidhe stays with the women, while Sam and Thorvald go off with the menfolk to prepare for the Hunt on the Isle of Clouds. Then Criedle is kidnapped.

Meanwhile, Asgrim’s son had hidden the seer of the Unspoken tribe on the Isle of Clouds. They, too, are preparing for the Hunt. Near the Isle of the Clouds, Criedle escapes by jumping over the side of the kidnapper’s boat and drowns.

Marillier weaves a delightful adventure of lies, deceit, secrets, misunderstandings, and romance in this sequel to Wolfskin. Middle school and high school students will be standing in line for Foxmask.

Ruth Prescott
Manhattan, KS

While S.E. Hinton’s first new novel in more than 15 years is marketed as an adult novel, her name recognition will no doubt cause young people to seek out Hawkes Harbor. (Sections of the book, in fact, read very much like a young adult novel. Readers will notice an echo of Ponyboy in the protagonist.)

On the surface, the book is a mere re-working of a stock horror story. And even if, as some have suggested, the plot of the book is drawn directly from the televisied series Dark Shadows, the book is much more than a simple horror story. The characters are well developed and believably unbelievable. We get to know the young protagonist, and we watch the roles of hero and villain shift as the plot develops. Ultimately, the book is a dark allegorical exploration of the descent into madness and the journey toward atonement. The elements of horror are best read as metaphor for the inner workings of the mind. Hinton graphically portrays the depths to which the human mind can sink, yet she also demonstrates our capacity to heal.

Mature, sophisticated older adolescents will find the novel worthwhile. The book should not, however, be recommended to young people simply because they enjoyed The Outsiders. Hinton’s first novel was a gritty young adult novel. Her most recent is a gritty adult novel.

Todd Goodson
Manhattan, KS
Here Today by Ann M. Martin

Coming of Age/Historical Fiction/Realistic Fiction
Scholastic Press, 2004, 288 pp., $16.95

Here Today, Ann M. Martin addresses the problems of fictional, historical, and real families. In the story, 14-year-old_api__ Lisa Bowie, is a sophomore struggling to fit in at school where 15-year-old_API__ Dan Martin is a senior. Lisa's parents are divorced, and she lives with her mother, Amy, who has recently moved from New York City to a small town in Maine. Dan's parents are also divorced, and he lives with his father, who is a successful lawyer. Lisa and Dan are both good at their respective sports—Lisa at basketball and Dan at football. They meet at a basketball game and become fast friends. However, as the year goes on, Lisa and Dan begin to have feelings for each other. They struggle to keep their relationship a secret, and when they finally decide to tell their friends, they are met with mixed reactions. Despite these challenges, Lisa and Dan continue to be good friends and support each other through the ups and downs of high school. The novel is a coming of age story that deals with themes of friendship, family, and love.
Kira-Kira by Cynthia Kadohata  
Experience/World View  
Atheneum Fiction, 2004, 244 pp., $15.95  
ISBN: 0-689-85639-3

To Katie, Lynn is . . . older sister . . . best friend . . . and greatest teacher. Lynn begins Katie's life lessons, teaching her her first word: kira-kira (Japanese for glittering; shining). Katie plasters the world with it. She gives the name to everything from kittens to colored Kleenex. Katie views life as kira-kira. She carries this outlook with her as her parents close their small oriental food store in Georgia and move the family from their supportive Japanese community to an unfamiliar Iowa town. There, her parents work almost 24 hours a day at a chicken hatchery, where they are being treated as animals themselves and making scarcely enough money to support their family.

Katie and Lynn, and a new baby brother, Sammy, view an adult’s world through children’s eyes. They learn the importance of family interdependence—one person hurting meant they all were hurting.

Cynthia Kadohata creates a masterpiece of specific moments entwined in emotions. This novel has the ability to inspire the reader to remember what it is to live with the heart of a child.

Natalie Whetzel  
Elgin, IL

KLEPTO by Lori Weber  
Abuse/Family Relationships/Kleptomania  

Kat’s authentic voice shares the disturbing tale of the abuse she has experienced at the hands of her older sister Hannah. When Hannah is sent to a group home for dealing drugs, Kat is the only one relieved at her departure. Yet, for reasons she doesn’t comprehend, Kat begins to shoplift and relishes the feelings of control. When it’s clear Hannah is soon to return home, Kat’s stealing escalates, rushing to consequences inevitable yet surprising.

Weber’s first novel honestly conveys the anguish over parental neglect, the oftentimes ugliness of life, and brutality of an abortion (Hannah’s). The heaviness of Kat’s story is alleviated in part by best friend Anita’s search for her birth mother and next-door-neighbor-turned-hunk Andy’s gentle, supportive presence. Kat’s tale addresses important issues in a tone which respects teens and their issues. Because of the nature of some of these issues, this title is recommended for readers age 14 and older.

Melissa Moore  
Jackson, TN

L’Chaim! To Jewish Life in America! Celebrating from 1654 until Today by Susan Goldman Rubin  
Jewish History/Immigration  
Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004, 173 pp., $24.95  
ISBN: 0-8109-5035-9

The first recorded settlement of Jews in the United States was in 1654; they came looking for religious freedom. For 350 years, they have played a role in building America and retained their heritage.

This attractive book features many photographs and images from the The Jewish Museum. Chapters are in chronological order, and topics include Colonial, American Revolution, Immigration, American West, Alaska, World War I and II, and the Great Depression.

So many influential people are included in L’Chaim! This would be an excellent resource for research ideas. Fifth- and sixth-graders may find this book useful for information on immigration.

Ruth Prescott  
Manhattan, KS

Meanwhile Adventures, The by Roddy Doyle  
Humor/Adventure/Nonsense  

The Meanwhile Adventures is a fun, fast-paced, and entertaining story that follows the Mack family through their exciting escapades. After Mister Mack is arrested, his three children and dog set out to find their record-breaking mother and help their father escape. What follows is the intermingling of each character’s crazy adventure that leads to the exciting conclusion where the family finally comes together.

The best thing about this book is Doyle’s use of language and his bizarre and hilarious scenarios. It would be hard not to laugh out loud at some of the kooky scenes. Doyle also includes little side notes to the readers that explain certain situations, as well as sections where he banters back and forth with the anonymous reader.

Although it contains somewhat crude language at times, The Meanwhile Adventures is an entertaining book for older elementary and middle school students. It would also be a great piece to read aloud.

Jennifer Sloan  
Manhattan, KS
Names Will Never Hurt Me
by Jaime Adoff
Bullying/Suspense
ISBN: 0-525-47175-8

Almost a year ago, a student was violently murdered on Rockville High grounds. With suspense hanging in the air, four students battle their way through high school.

Kurt tries his best to get through a day of school without turning into a human punching bag, or worse, having to swallow...who she really is, but who is that really? Floater is transformed (by the principal) from being picked on into something even worse: a power-hungry kid who looks to rule the school.

Ryan, the star quarterback, is the king of the school. When the four of them collide, Ryan’s dark secret comes out of hiding.

Jaime Adoff brings to life a brutal story of the realities of high school via four intriguing main characters who cement the reader to the story. Adoff does an excellent job of describing events in a way that ensures the reader will enjoy it.

Barbara Wilson
Elgin, IL

One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies
by Sonya Sones
Death/Change
Simon and Schuster Books, 2004, 268 pp., $15.95

Ruby by Milliken shines as a saga unfolds from the mind of a teenager in this fast-paced novel of vibrant emotions and high drama. Ruby is a fifteen-year-old who has just lost her mother, home, and reason for living. She moves across the country to live with her movie star father leaving behind her boyfriend, Ray, and best friend, Lizzie.

A look into the mind of Ruby is like a journey into the depths of a teenager’s emotions. At one moment, she will be fired up about how she thinks this “loose” girl named Amber is trying to steal Ray; another moment she’ll be writing an e-mail to her dead mother.

Sones writes with a poetic, plot-driven style magically connecting each event to the story, allowing the first-person narrative to come alive in a natural way. Young readers will be drawn to the journalistic feel, poetic setup, and page-long chapters.

Mary McCoy
Elgin, IL

The Orange Trees of Versailles
by Annie Pietri, translated from the French by Catherine Temerson
Historical Fiction
Delacorte Press, 2004, 137 pp., $15.95
ISBN: 0385731035

Fourteen-year-old Marion is uniquely suited to her work as the servant of Louis XIV’s favorite mistress, the Marquise de Montespan. The loss of her mother affected Marion’s ability to sleep for more than one or two hours at a time, making her an ideal “busy girl” for the marquise, who demands a servant’s presence to guard her through the night.

During her vigils, Marion crafts perfumes and concoctions to comfort the marquise as she struggles to keep her position, her marriage, and her position in the Court of Louis XIV’s court.

SarahEllen Morrow
Tempe, AZ

Pepperland
by Mark Delaney
Interpersonal Relationships/Mothers and Daughters/Death and Dying
Peachtree Press, 2004, 184 pp., $14.95
ISBN: 156145317X

Star is a not-so-typical 16-year-old in the 1980s—she is dealing with the grief that comes with losing her mother, her best friend Dooley’s mood swings/search for identity, her own search for her place in the world, and attending therapy sessions.

When musician Star comes across her mother’s letter written to John Lennon stuck in an old yearbook, she senses that something is about to happen in her life—she wants something to happen. Delaney takes us on a tender and touching journey of a young girl coming of age in the 1980s.
Raising the Griffin by Melissa Wyatt
Royalty/Leadership
Wendy Lamb Books, 2004, 279 pp., $16.95
ISBN: 0385730950

When Communism is overthrown in Rovenia, the people establish a constitutional monarchy, in hopes a royal family will attract the attention of tourists and act as a focal point in rebuilding the poor country. Their decision will change the life of Alex Varenhoff, great-grandson of the last ruling Varenhoff.

Alex never dreamed his family might be asked back to the country they were cast out of; he would rather be at school in England. Being a royal is even harder than Alex imagined. He is surrounded by bodyguards, monitored by publicists and the press, followed by screaming girls, in danger from people opposed to the monarchy, and angry with his parents for changing his life. His rebellion has the potential to endanger Rovenia’s democracy. It takes a tragedy for him to be allowed to choose his own fate.

Wyatt provides a realistic portrayal of the trials and choices of a young man forced to face a destiny he thought was buried in the past. Alex’s emotions and responses should resonate with young adults living in situations not of their own making.

SarahEllen Morrow
Tempe, AZ

Sam I Am by Ilene Cooper
Religion/Family/Realistic
Scholastic, 2004, 252 pp., $15.95
ISBN: 043943967

Twelve-year-old Sam finds the month of December a bit confusing: His mother, who is Christian, and his father, who is Jewish, are divided on the issues of religion and holidays. This year, the Hanukkah Bush is knocked over by the family dog, and the family sees it as a sign for change and compromise. Both grandmothers get an invitation to a religion-neutral holiday, but the fondue does not make anyone happy.

Sam has many questions: Does he have to choose a specific religion? Will his parents and grandmothers hate him if he chooses the wrong one? Does Heather like him? No twelve-year-old can have all the answers, except Sam does find out his crush is not as wonderful as he first thought when she makes a racist comment about the Jewish religion and the Holocaust unit they are studying in school.

Cooper accurately portrays an interfaith family. This family has arguments, confusion, questions, and no easy answers. Neither does the book, which is refreshingly honest. She is also quite accurate in her portrayal of twelve-year-olds and their emotions, questions, and, almost certainly, first crushes.

Jennifer Judy
Oxford, OH

So Super Starry by Rose Wilkins
Coming of Age
ISBN: 0-8037-3049-7

In So Super Starry, Rose Wilkins delivers a unique look into the lives of London’s rich and famous. Octavia Clairbrook-Cleeve is the daughter of a director of low budget films and an American TV actress. She attends a very posh high school, Darlinham House, which only the elite attend. Her schoolmates include sons and daughters of movie and rock stars. Even though her mother and father are famous, Octavia is an outsider at her school because of her awkward height and average appearance.

Octavia finally gets her chance to receive star treatment and become popular when a high-profile boy asks her out on a date. Octavia must decide between staying true to herself and giving into the shallow superstar way to stay popular. She realizes she would rather know herself than give into the superficial ways of her peers. Now she just has to tell her parents.

So Super Starry is an intriguing and amusing coming-of-age story, best suited toward high school readers due to the content of the book and allusions to other works.

Kristine E. Tardiff
Manhattan, KS

Spilled Water by Sally Grindley
Coming of Age/Family Problems/China
Bloomsbury, 2004, 224 pp., $15.95
ISBN: 1582439371

Sold at the age of eleven by her uncle, who considers a girl child about as valuable as spilled water, Lu Si-Yan finds herself the slave/housemaid of the Chen family, who consider her to be an utter failure at her duties, but a potential future wife for their brain-damaged son. Mrs. Hong, the mother of Mr. Chen, gives Lu Si-Yan some money to escape, yet Lu Si-Yan has her money stolen and must work for a toy factory to repay the ferry fare. When she collapses at the factory after coughing up blood due to the horrible factory conditions and is sent to the hospital, she is reunited with the uncle who sold her, now regretful of his decision.

Though the writing occasionally lapses in to dragging exposition, Grindley’s work deftly demonstrates the harsh factory life, low wages, and grim reality many around the world face each day. Truly an interesting find, this novel will find a place in the hearts of those teens who care for the underdog and for those interested in modern day child labor abuses.

Jennifer Judy
Oxford, OH
Myrna Dee Marler
Laie, HI
Vegan Virgin Valentine by Carolyn Mackler
Coming of Age/Identity
ISBN: 0-7636-2155-2

Mara Valentine has it together; she is a straight-A senior, a vegan, and a perfectionist. She is in a duel-to-the-final-GPA race with her ex-boyfriend for the coveted valedictorian spot, has been accepted at Yale, and is ready to leave home and high school in glory. "The first thing V did upon ... Mara's niece through an estranged older sister, who comes to spend a semester of her junior year with the family.

That first tantalizing line in the novel spells the end of Mara's rigid control of her life as she narrates her own tale of learning more than school offers and growing up in ways she never imagined. V has spent her life without supervision; her flirting, flaunting, and flippant attitude drive Mara batty. A potential new romance with her hunky boss and doubts about her vegetarianism add to the chaos in a breezy, humorous, and revealing novel, as Mara finally gets a clue and comes to grips with the real world.

Judith Hayn
Chicago, IL

Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review, send a copy of the book to:
Lori Goodson
409 Cherry Circle
Manhattan, KS 66503
To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net