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| <p><i>The Black Diamond Detective Agency</i> by Eddie Campbell First Second Books, 2007, 144 pp., \$16.95</p> <p><i>The Black Diamond Detective Agency</i> is a visually stunning graphic novel that tells the story of a Missouri farmer named John Hardin, who is framed for a train bombing and betrayed by those closest to him. The novel follows John in his quest to prove his innocence and save his kidnapped wife. Posing as a detective, Hardin is able to uncover the truth about the bombing, while at the same time, revealing disturbing truths concerning his own past.</p> <p>Adapted from a screenplay, the book is extremely entertaining, with a plot that unfolds like scenes from a movie. The story is relatively easy to follow and is filled with action. The artwork is detailed and realistic. Older teenage readers will find this to be a very enjoyable read. Due to some graphic violence and strong language, teachers and parents should preview this to judge the appropriateness for each reader.</p> <p>Jordin Brown Rogers, AR</p> | <p><i>Bounce</i> by Natasha Friend Scholastic Press, 2007, 192 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Evyn's world is turned upside down by her dad's announcement that he is marrying a woman he barely knows and moving the family to Boston. She struggles to accept this transition, but it turns out that fitting in with her new family and making friends in a new school is not easy. Evyn experiences scorn from the popular clique at school, unrequited crushes, and growing distance from the friends she left behind. However, as Evyn's resistance to change gradually breaks down, she finds that her newfound surroundings may not be as terrible as she once imagined.</p> <p><i>Bounce</i> effectively addresses the universally relevant issues of remarriage, adjustment, and a desire for acceptance. Friend's writing is simultaneously honest and refreshingly lighthearted, and by providing access to Evyn's internal dialogue, her readers will find themselves empathizing with this young girl's struggle to find her own identity and accept who she truly is.</p> <p>Sarah Applegate Fayetteville, AR</p> |
| <p><i>Chase</i> by Jessie Haas Greenwillow Books, 2007, 250 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Phin Chase witnesses the murder of his friend Engelbreit by Ned Plume, a member of a notorious group, the Sleepers. Phin narrowly escapes with his life, and the knowledge that Plume intends to blame Engelbreit's murder on Phin.</p> <p>Phin finds himself tracked by a secretive man with a horse for a bloodhound. Phin doesn't know if the man is part of the Sleepers, a Pinkerton agent, or a friend. The only thing Phin can trust is a collection of Emerson's poems that he has memorized and that may just save his life.</p> <p><i>Chase</i> is set against the backdrop of the labor disputes between mine owners and the workers after the Civil War. Haas introduces the reader to the ethnic conflict that existed at the time, especially in the case of the Irish. Phin's story is one not only of survival, but also of finding his place within the world. While readers will definitely sympathize with Phin, the best part of the book is definitely the horse.</p> <p>Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p> | <p><i>The Curse of the Romanovs</i> by Staton Rabin Margaret K. McElderry, 2007, 288 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Are you obsessed with the rich and famous? Ever wondered what life would be like if you became one of the most powerful people in the world? Rabin's innovative creation takes the reader inside the secret lives of the Romanov family.</p> <p>The heart-wrenching story of the royal family is creatively retold through the eyes of the 12-year-old future tsar of Russia, Alexei Romanov. From his point of view, the reader gets an unexpected and surprising look at the events that led up to the murders of the Tsar and his family. Alexei tells of his struggles with hemophilia and describes his fears and excitement at becoming the future leader of Russia.</p> <p>While at times the bizarre plot and abundance of difficult language was distracting, Rabin succeeds in entertaining the reader by modernizing history. This book is a challenging historical read which younger adolescents would enjoy.</p> <p>Lauren Marston Fayetteville, AR</p> |

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| <p><i>Elijah of Buxton</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis Scholastic Press, 2007, 342 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Occasionally a book comes along that has us laughing one second and swallowing the lump in our throats the next; that brands haunting images into our brains, through the fresh voice of an irrepressible character. That would be 11-year-old Elijah, the first child born free in Buxton, Canada, across the border from Detroit. Mischievous Elijah, famous for once throwing up on Frederick Douglass, is the heart of Buxton. Now he yearns to be “growned up,” which – thanks to a skillful author — happens both gradually and suddenly, when Elijah embarks on a dangerous odyssey into America.</p> <p>This is Curtis’s most fully realized novel, about family, human connections, and the passion for freedom. Though written in modified dialect, the language flows and rolls off the page like poetry. Incidentally, Buxton truly was a safe-haven colony, yet Americans know little about where runaways settled when they reached Canada. Recommended for ages 9 and up, this is a humdinger of a tale that twists and turns and breaks our hearts, before catapulting us to the sad, yet triumphant ending.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lois Ruby Albuquerque, NM</p> | <p><i>A Friendship for Today</i> by Patricia McKissack Scholastic, 2007, 240 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>A brood of neighborhood enemies and parents on the brink of divorce should be the bulk of 12-year-old Rosemary Patterson’s worries. But there is one more thing looming: sixth grade at one of the nation’s first racially integrated schools. Loosely based on author Patricia McKissack’s own childhood experience growing up during the monumental moments of the Civil Rights era, <i>A Friendship for Today</i> is about the tenacity of a young trailblazer and the ability of friendship to overcome obstacles.</p> <p>Compounding Rosemary’s troubles, her best friend J.J. is stricken with polio just before school begins, leaving Rosemary as the only black student in her class at a resistant elementary school. Then, walking into room 123 on the first day, Rosemary is face-to-face with Grace the Tasteless, her sworn enemy and a known racist. However, though it takes a series of incidents to bond the girls, eventually they form a friendship stronger than the forces that threaten to pull it apart.</p> <p><i>Friendship</i> is an artfully told story that brings the brimming tension of the 1950s to life.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jennifer Funk Raleigh, NC</p> |
| <p><i>Gregor and the Code of the Claw</i> by Suzanne Collins Scholastic, 2007, 412 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>After backstabbing, infighting, and lying, the Underland is finally at war with each species, sizing up what side to take—side with the humans and Gregor, their warrior, or side with the rats and their leader, the Bane. If Gregor had spared the Bane’s life as a pup, would the war still come? Would another leader make a difference? So much hate and distrust between the species was bound to erupt in war. Collins is a master of writing an authentic battle, not everyone survives. Nor should they. But it isn’t necessarily the warrior that saves the day. His sister has an important role to play in putting the Underworld back together again.</p> <p>This is the last book in a sophisticated series that should be required reading. Collins deals with prophecies like poetry, logic, echolocation, and politics. It would fit in all subjects in middle grades content area classrooms.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p> | <p><i>Gym Candy</i> by Carl Deuker Houghton Mifflin, 2007, 313 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>With <i>Gym Candy</i>, Carl Deuker presents a young athlete’s journey through abuse of performance enhancing drugs. Mick Johnson’s father was a failure as a professional football player, and he puts enormous pressure on his son to succeed in the sport. Held back a year from starting kindergarten so he would be bigger than the other boys, Mick struggles to find his own identity as something other than a football player. Eventually he connects with a personal trainer who gets him started taking steroids. While the effects are positive at first, eventually the drugs cause his behavior to become increasingly erratic as he sinks into despair. The book ends on a positive note, but the ending recognizes the on-going struggle confronting those recovering from substance abuse.</p> <p>Given the on-going interest in the use of performance-enhancing drugs by professional athletes, <i>Gym Candy</i> should hold strong appeal to sports fans (particularly middle school and high school boys), and the book’s simple, uncluttered prose should be accessible to non-readers and struggling readers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p> |

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| <p>Harmiless by Dana Reinhardt Wendy Lamb Books (Random House), 2007, 229 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Honesty/Dishonesty ISBN: 978-0-385-74699-1</p> <p>Sometimes trying to fit into others' expectations leads to unexpected consequences. Ask Mariah, whose "coolness" portrayed her as something she was not. Ask Anna, who desperately wanted to fit into the high school social life. And ask Emma, who made one mistake that snowballed into an event that affected their entire community.</p> <p>Told in the alternating voices of the three girls, <i>Harmiless</i> explores how one lie can transform the lives of not only the liars, but also of those they've never even met. Who will have the strength to step forward and try to fix the damage that has been done?</p> <p>Why did each girl commit to the story that was told? The answer is different for each girl, creating a novel that serves as a springboard for exploring individual motivation and the importance of honesty. Mariah, Emma, and Anna will have a lasting effect on all, regardless of age, who read their story.</p> <p>Robyn Seglem Olathe, KS</p> | <p>Hold Up by Terri Fields Roaring Book Press, 2007, 163 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Realistic Adventure ISBN: 978-1-59643-219-2</p> <p>Told through alternating perspectives of victims and criminals, the voices of 10 characters tell the tale of a frightful night at Burger Heaven, where a group of teenagers, of various character flaws and conflicts, work. On this particular night, a long-time criminal and his first-time lackey rob Burger Heaven. But, this is the first night when the only adult supervisor is suddenly called away — only the teens are closing the store. The robber is botched. The police arrive. A shot is fired. Do the robbers escape? Does anyone die?</p> <p>While the chapters alter in perspective, the characters are so descriptive, you instantly know who is narrating without having to check the chapter name. Interspersed throughout the narrative are late-breaking news updates. The end of the book finds the victims a year later, and they talk about their experiences and how they have and have not changed.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p> |
| <p>Kissing the Bee by Kathe Koja Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 128 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Love/ Friendship ISBN: 978-0-374-39938-2</p> <p>As the end of their senior year approaches, Dana, her best friend Avra, and Avra's boyfriend Emil are faced with what will happen in May. But, before school ends there is a lot to think about, like prom and Dana's big biology project on bees. As Dana works on her project, she becomes mesmerized by the intricate behaviors of these insects, and she realizes her life is more closely related to theirs than she would have ever thought. She also realizes she may no longer be able to ignore her feelings for Emil and what they will do to her friendship.</p> <p>This novel about love, friendship, and truth is told through intricately woven metaphors and honest language. The heroine Koja has given us is truly special, and her journey into her adult life is beautifully and gracefully taken. Readers will float through the story, never wanting it to end.</p> <p>Sarah de Verges Fayetteville, AR</p> | <p>The Missing Girl by Norma Fox Mazer HarperCollins, 2008, 291 pp., \$17.89</p> <p>Psychological Thriller/Realistic Fiction ISBN: 978-0-06-6237763</p> <p>Five sisters—Beauty, Mim, Stevie, Fancy, and Autumn—live seemingly ordinarily lives. They argue and laugh together, worry about their family finances, and dream about boys. Unbeknownst to them, a man watches them walk to school daily and obsesses over which girl he likes most. When one sister, upset that her sister is being “shipped off” to live with an aunt for financial reasons, ventures onto the man’s property by mistake, the man makes his choice, and the stage is set for a nightmare.</p> <p>The story alternates among the voices of the five sisters and the stalker. Mazer does an outstanding job building tension. From the onset the reader knows one girl will be taken, but the reader must follow Mazer’s clues to determine which girl. In a unique twist, Mazer delivers one girl’s perspective from second person point of view—a brilliant move, for the reader steps into the shoes of the predator’s prey. This is a horrifying, yet realistic story that ends on a note of tenderness.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p> |

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| <p><i>November Blues</i> by Sharon M. Draper Atheneum, 2007, 316 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Teen Pregnancy/Death ISBN-13: 978-1-4169-0698-8</p> <p><i>November Blues</i> is the sequel to Draper's <i>The Battle of Jericho</i>. Josh's death has affected so many of his friends and family. Jericho, his cousin, has given up his first love—playing trumpet. November, his girlfriend, grapples with his disappearance and the new addition he has left behind—his unborn daughter. Jericho tries to deal with his grief by trying out for the football team. November tries to hide her pregnancy for as long as she can. Josh's parents segregate themselves from everyone until they find out about the pregnancy. They see the baby as a way to have a piece of Josh in their lives and hire a lawyer to create documents to allow them to adopt November's baby. November is at a crossroads. Is giving the baby up the right thing to do?</p> <p>This book is recommended for middle and high school students. There are no instances of profanity or sexual scenes. Draper has written another fine book that addresses the choices adolescents must make and their consequences.</p> <p>Anjeanette C. Alexander-Smith Tallahassee, FLA</p> | <p><i>Off-Color</i> by Janet McDonald Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 163 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Race/Identity ISBN: 978-0-374-37196-8</p> <p>Safe and comfortable in her middle-class neighborhood, feisty 15-year-old Cameron faces typical challenges—dealing with her single mother, avoiding schoolwork, and finding time to text message friends. Her life takes an unexpected turn when her mother loses her job and they are forced to move to a public housing project.</p> <p>McDonald's novel takes a turn when Cameron uncovers a photo of her father and discovers she is bi-racial. Cameron works through the process, then, of straddling two worlds and figuring out how her new sense of ethnicity might allow her to fit into both her old life and her new neighborhood. The issue of race permeates this book, infusing every element of Cameron's family life, friendships, and even school assignments. The novel's title not only alludes to the focus on the complicated issue of race, but it also occasionally serves as an apt description of the book's frank dialogue.</p> <p>McDonald's novel sheds light on one girl's journey toward understanding her own racial identity while prompting readers to consider the meaning of ethnicity.</p> <p>Kevin Kienholz Emporia, KS</p> |
| <p><i>Outside Rules: Short Stories about Nonconformist Youth</i> edited by Claire Robson Persea Books, 2007, 178 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>Short Stories ISBN-13: 978-0-89255-316-7</p> <p>This collection of 14 short stories explores the world of young protagonists who might be considered nonconformists, though it could be read more broadly as a literary exploration of the concept of <i>difference</i>. Since almost everyone feels like an outsider at some point, young readers will not only be able to empathize when the protagonists in these stories struggle, but they will also share in the joy of occasional triumphs.</p> <p>Robson's collection of stories grants the readers a unique glimpse into characters trying to find their courage, voices, and – ultimately – their places in the world, no matter how far from the margins they may find themselves. On just a few occasions, some of the language may be considered a bit indelicate for younger readers, and not all of these stories end on a hopeful note.</p> <p>As with any collection, the quality of the stories varies, but as a whole, the book deals seriously with the idea of valuing individuality more than conformity.</p> <p>Kevin Kienholz Emporia, KS</p> | <p><i>Pushing Pause</i> by Celeste O. Norfleet Kimani TRU, 2007, 248 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>True to Life/Family Secrets ISBN-13: 978-0-373-83085-5</p> <p>Kenisha Lewis is a 15-year-old girl who is spoiled by her parents. She holds her head high above others. Why shouldn't she? Kenisha and her girls, Jalisa, Chiliti, and Diamond, have the hottest moves in dance class. She also has the finest, NBA-bound boyfriend in the palm of her hand, or so she thinks. But behind the glamorous lifestyle, events threaten to rip apart Kenisha's life. Her father decides to move her and her mother out of the house so his pregnant girlfriend will have a place to stay. She and her mother move in with her grandmother and cousin, Jade, who resents Kenisha's presence. Chiliti breaks the bond of friendship by going out with Kenisha's boyfriend. While this drama ensues, it only gets worse for her.</p> <p>Her mother dies and, as a result of her death, Kenisha's grandmother tells her the truth. Jade is her half-sister, not her cousin. Kenisha contemplates suicide as she mentally wrestles with her problems. This novel will make a great read for any high school classroom.</p> <p>Anjeanette C. Alexander-Smith Tallahassee, FLA</p> |

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| <p>Rat Life by Ted Arnold Sleuth Dial, 2007, 200 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Todd is a secret writer. Mostly he writes gross stories to impress his friends. The worse thing happens when his English teacher confiscates his writing notebook. His latest story ends with her being zapped into a tornado of dust by an alien death-ray. The same day, Todd finds a stray puppy and meets Rat, a boy not much older than himself, and learns a body was found floating in the river.</p> <p>Todd starts to learn more about the mysterious and secretive Rat. Perhaps most surprisingly, Rat has recently returned from serving in Vietnam. As Todd struggles to learn about himself as a writer, and Rat as a person, his entire world will be turned upside down. And, as Todd points out repeatedly, it's all because of that stupid puppy.</p> <p>Arnold's most powerful writing comes through his descriptions of Vietnam veterans Todd meets. Arnold manages to deal with the pain the veterans feel without being preachy or political. And you have to love a book that opens with the narrator groping for the best opening line.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p> | <p>The Real Benedict Arnold by Jim Murphy Clarion Books, 2007, 264 pp., \$20.00</p> <p><i>The Real Benedict Arnold</i> is a serious attempt to dispassionately tell the story of one of the most controversial figures in American history. Murphy goes to considerable lengths to convince us he is not an apologist, trying to revise history or make Arnold something less than a traitor. Murphy does, however, debunk as folklore a number of anecdotes about Arnold that serve to show him as a simplistic villain. Rather, it presents Arnold's life story in an attempt to understand and explain the man and his choices. For the most part, value judgments are left to the reader.</p> <p>This book is a serious biography. It is carefully crafted and rich in cultural and even genealogical detail regarding Arnold's life. As such, it is most appropriate for high school students with the interest and patience to dig beneath simple portrayals of good and evil in historical figures. The book is suitable for inclusion on a supplementary reading list for an American history course, and Advanced Placement teachers might want to consider it as a required reading.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p> |
| <p>The Restless Dead: Ten Original Stories of the Supernatural by Deborah Noyes Candlewick Press, 2007, 253 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Deborah Noyes has expertly collected a broad range of stories sure to interest and terrify a teenage audience.</p> <p>While <i>dealing with the dead</i> remains the connecting theme throughout the 10 stories, plot lines, characters, themes, and settings vary from a teenage heroin who seduces vampires in order to kill them and avenge her sister's death in Annette Curtis Klause's "Kissing Dead Boys," to Marcus Sedgwick's "The Heart of Another," a story of a Poe fan and heart transplant patient who unwillingly kills her donor's murderer. Each suspenseful tale is expertly told creating a collection of short stories much greater than the sum of its parts.</p> <p>Readers from ninth grade and up will enjoy these haunting tales. <i>The Restless Dead</i> works best for individual readers with an interest in similar themes. A must for any Poe fan, this collection is not recommended for the faint or weak hearted.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Chris Goering Fayetteville, AR</p> | <p>Resurrection Men by T.K. Welsh Dutton, 2007, 214 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Young Victor seems destined to be in a coffin long before his time.</p> <p>After watching his parents murdered by Austrian troops, he is sold to a harsh life as a cabin boy aboard ship. Trying to escape a man molesting him, he falls from the rigging and shatters a leg. He is thrown overboard to drown. Amazingly, he makes it to the coast of Britain, and his life is spared one more time. However, his benefactor nurses him to health only to sell him once more.</p> <p>Victor is transported to London, sharing a coffin with a corpse. He is sold again to work as a beggar child. He joins the ranks of homeless children in 1830s London for a life of filth, hunger, sickness, and danger. He discovers the grisly secret to his disappearing friends conducted under the guise of scientific research. Can he save them and himself?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Diana Costello Marion, KS</p> |

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| <p><i>The Rules for Hearts</i> by Sara Ryan Viking, 2007, 224 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Theater/Gay-lesbian Issues ISBN: 978-0-670-05906-5</p> <p>Battle Davies is headed to college. She has talked her parents into letting her go for the summer to get familiar with the area before classes start. What she doesn't tell them is that she will be living with the brother who ran away from home years earlier.</p> <p>Like most teenagers, Battle has a lot to learn. Her brother has changed from the guy always willing to let her tag along to a man who rarely puts the needs of others above his own. Battle is exploring her creative side and sexual tendencies.</p> <p>Between her part in <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> and the daily drama of her room-mates, Battle has to determine her role in her own life. <i>The Rules for Hearts</i> is an interesting look at coming of age.</p> <p>Diana Costello Marion, KS</p> | <p><i>Saturday Night Dirt</i> by Will Weaver Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008, 163 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Sports/Racing/Series novels ISBN: 978-0-374-35060-4</p> <p>A group of car racing-fanatic teens and adults live for Saturday night racing in this new series. Mel and her father, a disabled race car driver, own a financially strapped, small-town dirt track. Mel doesn't know the history behind her father's tragic accident. Trace, his father, Don, and their mechanic, Larry, can't get their act together. Is Trace a bad driver, or does Larry not want him to win? Then there's Patrick, the teen who parks cars and has a crush on Mel; Maurice, the 59-year-old Navy vet, Headwaters Speedway's flagman, and Beau, Amber, and Sonny who are out to beat one another on the track.</p> <p>This book builds slowly. The first third of the book introduces 10 key characters and other minor ones in short chapters. For that reason, it may not be a favorite for teens who enjoy making deep connections with characters; however, racing fans and teens who prefer action over character development may consider this book a sure winner.</p> <p>Pam B. Cole Kennesaw, GA</p> |
| <p><i>Snitch</i> by Allison van Diepen Simon Pulse, 2007, 304 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Gangs ISBN-10: 978-1-4169-5030-1</p> <p>"Snitches get stitches" is a popular phrase on the streets and one that Julia is familiar with in her gang-infested Brooklyn high school. Julia is a top student, has a close circle of friends, and has avoided all of the gang drama that's been going on around her for years, so why would she be interested in joining the Crips?</p> <p>In this fast-paced book, van Diepen explores the gang culture that plagues many of our inner-city schools and the reasons so many teens find themselves attracted to the gang lifestyle. If you liked <i>Street Phlam</i>, you won't want to miss this one.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p> | <p><i>Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You</i> by Peter Cameron</p> <p>Growing Up/Relationships ISBN: 978-0-374-30989-3</p> <p>Frances Foster Books/Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007, 229 pp., \$16.00</p> <p><i>Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You</i> is the story of James Sveck, a young man who is caught in the transitional summer between high school and college. The problem is that he finds himself drawn away from college, because, as he says, "I don't like people in general and people my age in particular, and people my age are the ones who go to college" (p. 39). Comparisons between James and Holden Caulfield are not unreasonable: James is charming, witty, and able to point out what is wrong with everything under the stars. James is an engaging narrator and, even when he does some pretty bad stuff, you still find yourself hoping everything turns out okay for him. <i>Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You</i> is equal parts comical and heartrending, but entirely entertaining.</p> <p>Luke Davis Fayetteville, AR</p> |

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| <p><i>Suckerpunch</i> by David Hernandez Harper Teen, 2008, 224 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fiction/Family Problems/Friendship ISBN: 978-0-06-117330-1</p> <p>Marcus, the main character of the book, and his younger brother Enrique are glad when their abusive father suddenly moves out. While the boys try to return to a “normal life,” Marcus is plagued by questions: Why did his father only beat Enrique? And why didn’t Marcus ever step in to help Enrique? After their mother says that Dad will be moving back home soon, the boys decide to confront their father, who is living in California.</p> <p>Told using realistic language and scenarios, this book may be suited for older readers, due to language and content, which includes recreational drug use. Readers will be able to connect with Marcus and Enrique, as they learn to stand on their own two feet as men, instead of boys.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p> | <p><i>Sweethearts</i> by Sara Zarr Little Brown & Co., 2008, 217 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Family/Relationships/Self-Discovery ISBN: 978-0-316-01455-7</p> <p>Alternating between present-day life and flashbacks to a tragic and momentous day in her childhood, <i>Sweethearts</i> tells the story of Jenna Vaughn, a 17-year-old who reinvents herself from Jennifer Harris, the chubby, picked-on little girl, into a popular high school girl with friends and “the” boyfriend. But when her best and only friend from childhood, Cameron Quick, reappears, her life is thrown out of balance.</p> <p>Sara Zarr captures the feelings of Jenna who, inside, is still the chubby little girl who secretly ate food to fill her emptiness, whose mother wasn’t there for her, and whose only friend was a boy with an abusive home life. When Cameron returns, her insecurities return in full force. If he was alive, why didn’t he contact her? And what does he want from her now?</p> <p><i>Sweethearts</i> is a book that is impossible to put down and that compels one to read until the bittersweet end.</p> <p>Melanie Koss Chicago, IL</p> |
| <p><i>They Came from Below</i> by Blake Nelson Tom Doherty, 2007, 299 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Girls/Environmental Issues/Science Fiction ISBN: 978-0-7653-1423-9</p> <p>Summer on Cape Cod is the highlight of the year for Reese and Emily. The long-distance friends look forward to endless days of sun, surf, and finding the perfect summer boyfriend, but the disappearance of a nuclear missile off the East Coast starts a strange chain of events. From the mysterious blob that washes up on the beach to the two odd but gorgeous boys who have an urgent message for Emily’s marine biologist father, the girls find out that this summer may be more than they could have imagined.</p> <p>Some far-fetched science fiction and a character’s supernatural senses make for a few laughable moments. However, the environmental twist and cliffhanger ending set this novel apart from other teens-at-the-beach plots.</p> <p>Nicole Avery Fayetteville, AR</p> | <p><i>Thirteen Reasons Why</i> by Jay Asher Razorbill, 2007, 304 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Suicide ISBN: 978-1-59514-171-2</p> <p>Clay receives a mysterious brown-wrapped package in the mail. When he opens it, he finds a handful of cassette tapes. After finding a cassette player (because, heck, it is 2007, who uses cassette players anymore?) he pops in cassette No. 1 and is shocked to find that his classmate, Hannah, is speaking on the tapes. . . . Hannah had killed herself just weeks before the package’s arrival.</p> <p>As Clay listens, he finds that anyone who receives the package is one of the 13 reasons Hannah committed suicide. This page-turner will keep you up all night, as Clay pops in cassette after cassette, to find out what his role is exactly in Hannah’s death. Could he really be somewhat responsible? You won’t regret reading this book, and it won’t take you very long. It is a fast read and will keep you on the edge of your seat, as you read on to find out more about the circumstances surrounding Hannah’s death.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p> |

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| <p><i>This Is Push</i> edited by David Levithan Scholastic, 2007, 232 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Contemporary Controversial Issues ISBN: 978-0-439-89028-1</p> <p>This is a collection of short stories, poetry, and plays by young writers. Every selection seems to push the limits of what we, as a society, feel is appropriate for young adults to read.</p> <p>Topics include drugs, parents in prison, sex, moving away from home, cultural division, drug dealing, violence, suicide, eating disorders, and homosexuality. It is told in a straightforward, authentic voice, to which young adults ages 17 and beyond can relate.</p> <p>Reading this book was an enjoyable, page-turning experience. Each story tackles one of the more prevalent and oftentimes saddening issues of today. It would make a perfect springboard for creative writers, especially upperclassmen, to write their own true-life tales.</p> <p>Angela McCutcheon Fayetteville, AR</p> | <p><i>The Unmaking of Duncan Veerick</i> by Betty Levin Front Street, 2007, 212 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Mystery ISBN: 978-1-932425-96-3</p> <p>Duncan Veerick's life is complicated enough. Between school, his sister, and his irritating neighbor, he has more than enough trouble. When his eccentric neighbor has a stroke, Duncan tries everything in his power to get out of taking care of her hyper dog. After Astrid Valentine returns from the hospital, Duncan finds himself at her beckon call.</p> <p>Astrid asks Duncan to hide some junk that engulfs her house from her prying nephew, starting a chain of events that could literally ruin Duncan's life. Duncan finds himself accused of murder and arson. It's a race against time as Duncan tries to find the real criminal and clear his name.</p> <p><i>The Unmaking of Duncan Veerick</i> is a classic case of "no good deed will go unpunished." The characters are rich and surprising. Levin does an excellent job of tricking the reader into caring about them, especially Astrid Valentine. Middle school readers will surely sympathize with Duncan's plight, as well as with his annoyance at his sister.</p> <p>Karolinde Young Manhattan, KS</p> |
| <p><i>Who Was First? Discovering the Americas</i> by Russell Freedman Clarion Books, 2007, 88 pp., \$19.00</p> <p>History ISBN-13: 978-0-618-66391-0</p> <p>Freedman's brief history of exploration and immigration of the Americas provides an accessible overview of what is and is not known about the subject. Taking care to distinguish established facts from speculative theory, <i>Who Was First</i> begins with Columbus and subsequent Spanish explorers of Central and South America. The text then moves to a more speculative chapter devoted to the evidence of Chinese contact with the "New World." Following a chapter devoted to Leif Eriksson and Viking explorers and possible settlers, the text turns to a discussion of the likely immigration patterns of those who would become Native Americans.</p> <p>While most everything covered in the book is available in history textbooks, <i>Who Was First</i> does provide an interesting summary of issues surrounding the "discovery" of the Americas. The book is especially appropriate for middle school students, although it is a source that could possibly interest reluctant high school readers. The book refuses to take sides on the implications of this discussion, so it would be an ideal jumping-off point for class discussions and/or debates.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p> | <p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i></p> <p>Lori Goodson 409 Cherry Circle Manhattan, KS 66503</p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p> |