



Why Aren't We Laughing?

When the Oscars are given out, very few comedies win the Best Picture award. Doesn't it take significant talent to make an audience laugh?

When books are "lighter" in tone, readers have mixed reactions. Isn't it normal to recognize that each person has a different "funny bone"? One that gets tickled in its own way to produce a smile or laughter? Some people laughed out loud at the Three Stooges, and others were not amused at all. Some enjoy *Two and a Half Men* on TV, and others are turned off. So a person who writes humor has a most "interesting" task. Consider the various techniques and styles in books by Mark Twain, Woody Allen, Erma Bombeck, Dorothy Parker, James Thurber, to name just a few.

In discussing this genre with teachers, they tell me if some students comment, "This isn't funny," they consider the lesson is not going very well or this might be a waste of time. One teacher stated, "There is not much to teach when students read funny stuff." She went on to describe how much easier it is to teach when one reads about a character who is seri-

ously ill or is dying or is suffering physical or emotional abuse. High drama? Another teacher stated that there is not much you can talk about after reading an Ogden Nash poem. Can't one just have fun? In a Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert age, can't laughter be its own reward?

I don't always agree with critics who review plays, movies, TV shows, or books. I enjoy forming my own opinions and respect the rights of others to do the same. (Read Daniel Pennac's *The Rights of the Reader*, Candlewick, 2008. Fun and somewhat provocative.) Humor can make one laugh at absurdity one moment and stimulate critical thinking about an issue the next. As I grow older, I realize how much enjoyment I've gained through humorous writings.

Here are just a few books by children's and young adult authors that have enriched my life:

Choldenko, Gennifer. *Al Capone Shines My Shoes*. Dial, 2009.
 Dahl, Roald. *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke*. Puffin, 1993.
 Danziger, Paula. *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*. PaperStar, 1998.
 Kinney, Jeff. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*:

The Last Straw. Amulet, 2009.
 Korman, Gordon. *No More Dead Dogs*. Hyperion, 2002.
 Prelutsky, Jack. *My Dog May Be a Genius*. Greenwillow, 2008.
 Scieszka, Jon. *Knucklehead*. Viking, 2008.
 Silverstein, Shel. *A Light in the Attic: Special Edition*. Harper, 2009.
 Spinelli, Jerry. *Space Station Seventh Grade*. Little, Brown, 1982.
 van de Ruit, John. *Spud*. Razorbill, 2007.

The More the Merrier

When I visit schools or meet with teachers and/or librarians, they tell me about the many students who can't read, won't read, don't read. When I talked with some of their students, I got some interesting information. A number of students could read better than they let on. In fact, some admitted they enjoyed being in special reading classes because not much was expected of them or they got out of reading boring books.

At one point in my career, I was assigned to visit all of the high schools in New York City and to look at the records of students who were likely to drop out. I met with

a number of such students and listened to their stories. They were *not* critical of their teachers. They were extremely critical of the curriculum and the books they had to read. These did not seem relevant to them.

Many of these students could read very well. Some read magazines and often read what their friends recommended. Wouldn't it be a good idea to print out a quarterly journal with reviews by students, teachers, librarians? Why not give credit for such participation and recognize that whatever students read is a big step in promoting literacy?

With that in mind, here are a few suggestions in various categories. I welcome hearing the suggestions of others.

Beyond Here and Now

- Brennan, Herbie. *The Shadow Project*. Balzer & Bray, 2010.
- Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. Scholastic, 2009.
- de Fombelle, Timothee. *Toby Alone*. Candlewick, 2009.
- Farmer, Nancy. *The Islands of the Blessed*. Atheneum, 2009.
- Jones, Carrie. *Captivate*. Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Mahy, Margaret. *The Magician of Hoad*. McElderry, 2009.
- Yep, Laurence. *City of Fire*. Starscape, 2009.

Beyond the Twilight series

- Harvey, Alyxandra. *Hearts at Stake*. Walker, 2010.
- Jenkins, A. M. *Night Road*. Harper, 2008.
- Jinks, Catherine. *The Reformed Vampire Support Group*. Harcourt, 2009.

- Jones, Patrick. *The Tear Collector*. Walker, 2009.
- Lake, Nick. *Blood Ninja*. Simon & Schuster, 2009.
- Nayeri, Daniel and Dina. *Another Faust*. Candlewick, 2009.
- Smith, L. J. *Night World*. Simon Pulse, 2009.

Family Relationships

- Bauman, Beth Ann. *Rosie and Skate*. Wendy Lamb, 2009.
- Doyle, Eugenie. *According to Kit*. Front Street, 2009.
- Golding, Theresa Martin. *Niner*. Front Street, 2008.
- Korman, Gordon. *Pop*. Balzer & Bray, 2009.
- Sheth, Kashmira. *Boys without Names*. Balzer & Bray, 2010.
- Sweeney, Joyce. *The Guardian*. Holt, 2009.
- Weiss, M. Jerry, and Helen S. Weiss, Eds. *This Family Is Driving Me Crazy*. Putnam, 2009.

Historical Fiction

- Barell, John. *Surviving Erebus: An Antarctic Adventure*. Royal Fireworks, 2008.
- Cadnum, Michael. *Peril on the Sea*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.
- Davies, Jacqueline. *Lost*. Marshall Cavendish, 2009.
- Elliott, Patricia. *The Pale Assassin*. Holiday House, 2009.
- McKernan, Victoria. *The Devil's Paintbox*. Knopf, 2009.
- Spillebeen, Geert (Terese Edelstein, Trans.). *Age 14*. Houghton Mifflin, 2009.
- Towell, Ann. *Grease Town*. Tundra, 2010.

A Matter of Life and Death

- Bray, Libba. *Going Bovine*. Delacorte, 2009.

- Frost, Helen. *Crossing Stones*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.
- LaCour, Nina. *Hold Still*. Dutton, 2009.
- McCormick, Patricia. *Purple Heart*. Balzer & Bray, 2009.
- Nelson, Andy. *The Sky Is Everywhere*. Dial, 2010.
- Scrimger, Richard. *Me and Death*. Tundra, 2010.
- Strasser, Todd. *If I Grow Up*. Simon & Schuster, 2009.

Mystery and Suspense

- Abrahams, Peter. *Reality Check*. Harper, 2009.
- Chadda, Sarwat. *Devil's Kiss*. Hyperion, 2009.
- Ferguson, Alane. *The Dying Breath*. Viking, 2009.
- Peacock, Shane. *Up in the Air*. Tundra, 2009.
- Sorrells, Walter. *Whiteout*. Dutton, 2009.
- Suma, Nova Ren. *Dani Noir*. Aladdin, 2009.
- Wilson, F. Paul. *Jack: Secret Circles*. Tor, 2010.

Nonfiction

- Flannery, Tim, adapted by Sally M. Walker. *We Are the Weather Makers*. Candlewick, 2009.
- Giblin, James Cross. *The Rise and Fall of Senator Joe McCarthy*. Clarion, 2009.
- Ginsberg, Blaze. *Episodes: My Life as I See It*. Roaring Brook, 2009.
- Heiligman, Deborah. *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith*. Holt, 2009.
- O'Brien, Anne Sibley, and Perry Edmond O'Brien. *After Gandhi: One Hundred Years of Nonviolent Resistance*. Charlesbridge, 2009.

- Osborne, Linda Barrett. *Traveling the Freedom Road: From Slavery and the Civil War through Reconstruction*. Abrams, 2009.
- Reef, Catherine. *Ernest Hemingway: A Writer's Life*. Clarion, 2009.

School Life: Friends and Foes

- Anholt, Ariela. *Freefall*. Harcourt, 2010.
- Baratz-Logsted, Lauren. *Crazy Beautiful*. Houghton Mifflin, 2009.
- Franco, Betsy. *Metamorphosis Junior Year*. Candlewick, 2009.
- Hyde, Catherine Ryan. *Diary of a Witness*. Knopf, 2009.
- Northrop, Michael. *Gentlemen*. Scholastic, 2009.
- Pearson, Mary E. *The Miles Between*. Holt, 2009.
- Woods, Brenda. *A Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame*. Putnam, 2010.

Sporting Events

- Cochrane, Mick. *The Girl Who Threw Butterflies*. Knopf, 2009.
- Jones, V.M. *Out of Reach*. Marshall Cavendish, 2008.
- Martino, Alfred C. *Over the End Line*. Harcourt, 2009.
- Murdock, Catherine Gilbert. *Front and Center*. Houghton Mifflin, 2009.
- Peet, Mel. *Exposure*. Candlewick, 2009.
- Scaletta, Kurtis. *Mudville*. Knopf, 2009.
- Weaver, Will. *Super Stock Rookie*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

Too Good to Miss

- Alvarez, Julia. *Return to Sender*. Knopf, 2009.
- Chaikin, Andrew, and Alan Bean. *Mission Control, This Is Apollo*. Viking, 2009.
- Erskine, Kathryn. *Mockingbird*. Philomel, 2010.

- Kohler, Dean Ellis with Susan VanHecke. *Rock 'n' Roll Soldier: A Memoir*. Harper Collins, 2009.
- Metselaar, Menno, and Ruud van der Rol. *Anne Frank: Her Life in Words and Pictures*. Roaring Brook, 2009.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Lockdown*. Amistad, 2010.
- Partridge, Elizabeth. *Marching for Freedom*. Viking, 2009.

Special for the Teacher

- Adoff, Arnold, and Kacy Cook, eds. *Virginia Hamilton: Speeches, Essays, and Conversations*. Blue Sky, 2010.
- Mortenson, Greg. *Stones into Schools*. Viking, 2009.
- Nilsen, Alleen Pace, and Kenneth L. Donelson. *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (8th ed.). Allyn and Bacon, 2009.