The 1999-2004 Honor Lists

2004

Airborn


Even though Oppel’s story goes on for nearly 400 pages, it’s basically a simple adventure story about a boy and the airship he loves and calls home and some adventures he shares with a young passenger on the airship. The novel begins quietly and romantically enough with the musings of fifteen-year-old Matt Cruse and then continues with the appearance of a hot air balloon.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s—when airplanes and airships were new—dozens of such stories were written and printed in pulp magazines and as boys books featuring an airplane under attack by pirates. Now thanks to Kenneth Oppel, a new generation can share in this kind of excitement.

Andy Warhol, Prince of Pop


Starting with the flat-black cover decorated by eight identical--except for their vibrant colors--silk screens that Andy Warhol made of his own face and hair, this is one classy book. The writing is smooth and sophisticated. While not shying away from Warhol’s controversial life, Greenberg and Jordan walk a fine line between sensationalism and worshipfulness. The 21 chapters each deal with a chronological period in Warhol’s life.
They run between four and ten pages long and the spacious opening pages are decorated with Warhol quotes. The one that starts the book is “I never wanted to be a painter. I wanted to be a tap dancer. The book is as much a history of American popular culture as it is of Andy Warhol. Even young readers not particularly interested in art may be fascinated by this slice of American life that was so real to their grandparents’ generation. A bonus mentioned by many reviewers, and heartily endorsed by this reviewer, is that the book also makes fascinating reading for adults.

Chanda’s Secrets


Chanda’s Secrets tells a depressing story about a sixteen-year-old girl whose baby sister has just died. Readers catch on before Chanda does that the baby has died of AIDS and that it is AIDS that makes Chanda’s mother so sick. The father of the baby committed suicide before people found out that he too was dying from AIDS. Chanda’s mother concocts a ruse for returning for a visit to her far-away, but unwelcoming, family hoping to spare her remaining children the disgrace of having the neighbors know that their mother is dying from AIDS. The Annick Press provided a complimentary teacher’s guide--really a 31-page mini-unit. Go to www.annickpress.com and click on “For Teachers.”

Godless

In Pete Hautman’s National Book Award winner, sixteen-year-old Jason Bock is bullied, threatened, coerced, degraded, ridiculed, manipulated and generally pinballed through life. The local tough guy, Henry Stagg, “scares the crap out of” him, while his mother schedules endless doctor’s appointments insisting he has one imagined disease after another. Jason’s father is an attorney and a “borderline religious fanatic.” When he finds one of Jason’s nude cartoon drawings of “Bustella, the Sirian Goddess of Techno War,” he is convinced that Jason’s soul is in jeopardy and so he forces Jason to attend Teen Power Outreach (TPO), “a weekly brainwashing session for teenagers held every Thursday night in the church basement” (p. 16). TPO quickly exterminates whatever connection Jason had felt for the Catholic Church.

The answer to Jason’s need to take charge of his world comes by accident when he mockingly tells the TPO group that instead of being a practicing Catholic he actually worships the town water tower. In this frivolous moment, a new religion is born, and Jason has a moment in the sun as its founder, but Jason soon ends up on everybody’s blacklist. An absence of obscenity, violence or sex, make Godless accessible to fairly young teens, but its content will make the most sense to teens mature enough to have begun wondering about the kinds of questions that even by the end of the book Jason still struggles with.

How I Live Now
This winner of the Printz Award is set at an unspecified time in the future when fifteen-year-old Daisy comes of age during a war whose cause and specifics are as unclear to readers as they are to her. Daisy’s father has sent her from New York to England to live with her Aunt Penn, and three cousins, while Daisy’s new stepmother, Davina the Diabolical, as Daisy calls her, suffers through pregnancy. As deeply as Daisy feels unwanted by her father, she soon feels loved by her Aunt and cousins, especially fourteen-year-old Edmond, whose sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of others approaches psychic ability. Very much like William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Meg Rosoff’s *How I Live Now* does not focus on the particulars of war itself, but instead, keeps them intentionally vague. And also like Golding, Rosoff uses the war as a means for putting the characters in a situation of total disorder to discover how they respond. The absence of graphic sex or violence (it’s implied, but the specifics must be supplied by the reader’s imagination) makes this book appropriate for younger readers, but it will be most meaningful to those old enough to understand the horrible things that war and tragedy do to people. This would be an excellent book for students simultaneously studying World War II.

**Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy**

At the turn of the last century, two preacher’s kids--black, rag-tag Lizzie Bright Griffin and white, thoroughly starched Turner Buckminster--are the young teens at the heart of
this story, which is based on a true event in Maine history. Lizzie has been raised by her grandfather, the preacher and apparent leader of a group of some 50 outcasts whose ancestors settled on Malaga Island some 125 years earlier. Their island community is an eyesore and a constant irritation to the upwardly mobile citizens of mainland Phippsburg. Turner has been raised and educated in Boston and when he and his mother and father move to Phippsburg, it takes Turner only a few hours to decide that he would have preferred for his father to have become the town’s new minister somewhere else—preferably “out west.”

**Private Peaceful**


In another war story set in England, nightmare images swarm through the mind of British soldier Private Thomas (or Tommo) Peaceful as he guards a World War I battlefield. He cannot fall asleep, for while sleep sounds delicious, falling asleep can lead to Peaceful’s sentence of death at a court-martial hearing. The horrors and pointlessness of trench warfare, the constant fear of gas attacks, the deaths of long-time (or new) friends, all these are mixed with images out of Thomas’s past—a dead crow, reminders of Molly (his first love), lacing up his father’s boots, his father’s death, enlisting in the British Army, and cruel and repeated memories of the Colonel who controls Tomas’s mother now that his father is dead. It’s a jumbled mess, all centered around death and blood, and the fact that between 1914 and 1918 over 290 British soldiers were executed for desertion or cowardice, sometimes judged only by the fact that they fell asleep on watch
duty. *Private Peaceful* is one of a number of powerful books about war—not the glories nor the noble deeds but of what we do to each other. We can only hope that knowing about the cruelties of a war almost one hundred years ago will do some good in overturning the stupidities and continuing cruelties of today's wars. Morpurgo is also the author of the book made into the recently popular film, *War Horse*.

2003

**An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793**


Murphy tells the story of America's first major health crisis, the 1793 Yellow Fever epidemic in Philadelphia that wiped out thousands of people and caused half the population to flee in panic. He describes what the dying went through in their last moments and what those who survived faced in dealing with victims. As the fever raged, villains and heroes emerged. Among the villains were landlords who raised rents whenever possible and thus increased the number of indigents who became more likely victims of the fever. Heroes also appeared, most notably Dr. Rush, who made his share of blunders, but was also brave and caring and always at the center of the struggle against the fever. Nurses and other workers from the Free African Society worked tirelessly to go wherever they were needed. Perhaps the real heroes were the resilient citizens who stayed and endured. Murphy's work is impressive, dramatic, and detailed. The greatest proof that Murphy is a real historian comes in the last paragraph of the brief section of
acknowledgements. He had gone to the Library Company of Philadelphia for help in locating materials. The curator of its Afro-American collection handed Murphy the actual copy of a book donated to the Library by the Free Africa Society in 1794. Murphy wrote that "a chill ran through me . . . Reading about our nation's history is one thing; actually holding it in your hands is something altogether different."

The Canning Season


Two unwanted thirteen-year-old girls-Ratchet and Harper—find themselves living in an old Victorian mansion in the backwoods of Maine with two eccentric old women named Tilly and Penpen. The girls are as different in personalities as are Tilly and Penpen, but in spite of it all, the four of them "manage." Harper's foster mother comes back for her, but it is only a temporary reprieve and after a couple of weeks she brings back a very depressed Harper. In an attempt to pull Harper out of her funk, Penpen shares the macabre story of how the twins' mother committed suicide when the twins were thirteen. Readers find the story more fascinating than Harper does, but then Harper comes back to her old self when she decides to make the world a better place by getting "that thing" (a terrible birthmark) taken off from Ratchet's shoulder.

It turns out that indeed Dr. Richardson can remove the birthmark. After all, he's used to removing the mangled toes, fingers, and even legs of the loggers who work in the nearby forests. And at the same time he doles out physical remedies, he's pretty good with the
psychological help. Readers will set this book down with a smile on their faces and a jolt of hopefulness for the future of their world.

**Fat Kid Rules the World**


Everyone would love to have a friend who is not only famous and influential, but who also provides unconditional love and inspiration. Curt McRae, local punk rock legend, vaults into just that kind of friendship with Troy Billings, a 296 pound high school outcast, who is treated with contempt even by his own little brother. Troy's self-concept is so low that he punctuates each experience with a news release head line: FAT KID HALLUCINATES ABOUT COOL FRIEND," or "FAT KID DREAMS OF BEING IN A BAND." As Troy contemplates suicide on the subway rails, an apparent vagrant (the sometimes homeless, errant, punk rock star, Curt McRae) talks him out of it only to begin a strange friendship based on the wild and eccentric Curt's faith in Troy as a friend and potential punk rocker. Something about Troy's total lack of pretense makes Curt think Troy can become the best punk rock drummer in history if they will just team up-and if Troy will learn to play the drums. Going's novel has a rapid-pace and staccato rhythm that gets the reader racing through the pages. Told in first person as filtered through Troy's cynical eye, there is a dark humor which gives over to compassion as the novel races to its conclusion. Troy is a very funny narrator, and Curt is as likable as he is unpredictable. Readers who have felt the self-consciousness of a less than perfect physique will relate to Troy's self-deprecation, and anyone who follows popular music
will recognize the idiosyncrasies of fads and the absurdity of their origins. The book is appropriate for all readers, middle school and up.

The First Part Last


When Nia and Bobby, two middle-class, black teenagers in Brooklyn, New York, find that Nia is pregnant, they look through information brochures showing happily adopted children living in houses and they decide to give the baby up for adoption. But then a medical aberration causes Nia to go into a permanent coma, and Bobby decides to keep their baby daughter. However, the emotional force that drives Bobby is offset by the unpleasant reality of being a single parent. Suddenly Bobby's life follows a new set of rules. Johnson's 2004 Printz Award winning book is hard to put down. The story flows like a fast moving stream. Beyond the events of the plot, Johnson's language is believable and engaging. The wording is poetic, with nothing superfluous, and yet it sounds exactly as we can imagine the young protagonist talking. Near the end of the book as Bobby tries to find a way to rise above the distractions of his neighborhood and to not rely so much on his and Nia's parents, he decides to move to Heaven, Ohio. His brother Paul lives there and convinces Bobby that it is an excellent place to raise a family. Bobby's decision comes just as the book ends and does not include a detailed explanation. In fact, it reads a little like a "To Be Continued" notice, so maybe there will be a sequel.

Getting Away with Murder
In this nonfiction companion to his young adult novel *Mississippi Trial, 1955*, Chris Crowe provides historical information surrounding the tragic death of Emmett Till, an event so horrendous that it is often identified as the igniting spark for the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Fourteen-year-old African American Emmett Till, a resident of Chicago, Illinois, was visiting relatives in rural Mississippi near the small town of Money. He entered Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market and was alone for a few moments with white store owner, Carolyn Bryant. She later claimed that the young visitor made inappropriate remarks to her, remarks which according to interviews with Look magazine would lead to Emmett Till's brutal torture and murder at the hands of Bryant's husband Roy and Roy's half-brother J.W. Milam. Although overwhelming evidence pointed to the guilt of the two men, a jury in Sumner, Mississippi, unanimously found the two men not guilty after little more than an hour of deliberation. The South was in cultural chaos after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision outlawed segregated schools. But regardless of the outcome of the trial, it was a watershed event in that it was the first time in Mississippi that a white man was charged and put on trial for killing a black man. Nonfiction can be difficult to write so as to engage readers, but *Getting Away with Murder* treats the story of Emmett Till with enough pathos balanced with objectivity to make for a good read. Chris Crowe has successfully walked a fine line with this award-winning book.

A Northern Light is based in part of the sensational true story of the murder of Grace Brown whose body is found in Big Moose Lake in the Adirondack Mountains. It is not the center of Donnelly's novel, but is always there, lurking in the background. The case is better known to most adult readers as the basis for Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy (1925). The center of Donnelly's book is sixteen-year-old Mattie Gokey who in 1906 lives a life of near poverty. To help get more money, Mattie takes a job at Glemore, a resort on Big Moose Lake, as a waitress. She meets Grace Brown, one of the resort's guests who loves Carl Graham. Before she goes out boating again, Grace gives Mattie a packet of letters and asks Mattie to burn them if Grace does not return. Grace does return, but only as a corpse pulled from the lake near the overturned boat. Mattie is torn by her promise to burn the letters, yet ultimately she decides to read them and in the process learns what real love-or passion or frustration or loneliness--can do to a human being. Mattie discovers through the letters that Grace was actually murdered by her lover. Donnelly deserves full credit for creating a characters readers will care about and will remember especially if they have heard the story on its well-recorded audio version.

The River Between Us


We all know that Richard Peck is a wonderful writer of historical fiction, but readers will be disappointed if they pick up this Civil War Story hoping to get the light-hearted humor that is in his Blossom Culp ghost stories on in the books about Grandma Dowdel (A Year
*Down Yonder* and *A Long Way from Chicago*). To hook readers, Peck starts the story in 1916 when fifteen-year-old Howard Leland Hutchings and his younger twin brothers are going on a car trip to get acquainted with his father's family and to see the family home. The fact that his mother declines to go is the first clue that there is something different about the southern Illinois family that they are going to visit. After these beginning pages, Peck does a flashback to the town of Grand Tower, Illinois in 1861. The Civil War is just beginning, and river travel up the Mississippi is irregular at best. Two intriguing young women get off a boat that has unexpectedly come to the end of its voyage upriver from New Orleans. The older and fairer girl is Delphine Duval, who readers later learn is the daughter of a rich and powerful Frenchman and his half-black mistress. Delphine is really Howard’s grandmother, although to be on the safe side, everyone was always told that his father was the child of Tilly and the doctor she married rather than of Delphine and Tilly's brother Noah. This is Howard's coming-of-age story as he hears what the Civil War did to their family and to women who weren't Scarlet O'Hara. Teachers may need to offer encouragement and a little background to help readers ease their way from its beginning in 1916 back to the main story which takes place in 1861.

**True Confessions of a Heartless Girl**


Noreen, the girl in Brooks' *True Confessions of a Heartless Girl*, infects and changes the lives of several "cold hearted" people in the small Canadian prairie town of Pembina Lake. She lands in the community when a storm forces her to pull off the highway as
she's running away in the pickup truck that, along with a pocketful of money, she stole from her boyfriend. But instead of being an even-dispositioned and happy child or even the kind of high spirited and impetuous girl as was Rebecca, Anne, or Pollyanna, 17-year-old Noreen is a one-woman disaster zone. She isn't cruel; she's just ego-centric and completely unaccustomed to thinking about the consequences of her behavior. She is taken in by a single mother who used to teach high school but is now running a small café in hopes of making a life for herself and her five-year-old son. On Noreen's first night, she nearly kills the family dog by thoughtlessly tossing him a chicken bone. Then in the restaurant, she impulsively pulls on a swath of loose wallpaper and down comes great hunks of water-damaged drywall. And finally, when she gets invited to stay in the summer cottage that Danny, a single man in his 50s, had lovingly crafted as a memorial to his drowned brother, she accidentally sets it on fire. The fact that Noreen is pregnant is almost incidental to the rest of the story. In Canada, the book won the 2002 Governor General's Literary Award, and here in the U. S. it was a favorite of the editors of Hornbook, Booklist, and School Library Journal editors. In ways it is a tongue-in-cheek modernization of the literary observation that on the title page Brooks attributes to John Gardner and William Least Heat-Moon: "There are, really, only two plot lines: a stranger rides into town, and a stranger rides out of town."

2002

**Big Mouth and Ugly Girl**

Ursula Riggs is the ugly girl with few friends and a most unsportsman-like attitude towards the one thing she does well, which is play basketball. Then something happens at Rocky River High School that seems to have nothing to do with Ursula Riggs. Matt Donaghy is quietly removed from school, not so quietly taken to police headquarters, and accused of threatening to "bomb the school." Other students believe what they hear. Ursula emails Matt to tell him that she will be a witness in his behalf. Matt is cleared, but when a column by him is turned down by the newspaper staff, Matt's anger explodes. That, coupled with the decision of Matt's parents to sue the school for mental distress, makes him even more unpopular. But it also draws Matt and Ursula together. They come together believably, maybe even permanently. Ursula says about Matt, "the more you got to know him, the more complex he was." And all that leads slowly to the first kiss-on appropriately enough—the last page where Ursula observes, "The first kiss didn't work out too well, I guess. We'd be trying others."

**Feed**


Imagine a time when if people think of something they want to know the information immediately comes to them. How will this be possible? In M.T. Anderson's futuristic *Feed*, nearly all young people and most adults have Internet "feeds" implanted into their brains. Every citizen's consciousness is flooded nonstop with consumer ads, instant messaging, and social guidance from an anonymous corporate entity that is more puppet-master than government. The significance of all this has been lost on the
protagonist, Titus, and his friends and family, until Violet enters the scene. Violet's father has a feed that is an external unit; he can put it on and take it off. Father and daughter are passive/aggressive resistors of the consumer culture foisted on society by the feed, or actually by the corporations that control the feed. Anderson does a lot with slang and fashion trends that are as authentic as the lingo and styles seen in after-school hours at a mega-mall. His knack for imitating nuances of social behavior is entertaining, but the book can hardly be described as lighthearted. Instead, it is true to its dystopian genre and the author's desire to present a cautionary tale portraying a dark future that grows out of human foibles manifested in the present.

**Hole in My Life**


Writing about an experience that is seared into his brain is the key to the success of Gantos's *Hole in My Life*, which is the story of the 15 months that he spent in a federal prison between high school and college. This somber story is so polished and so well written, that it is obvious that Gantos has written and rewritten it—if not on paper, at least in his mind—over the past 25 years. He first it when he was in prison where journals were not allowed. He borrowed the biggest book he could find in the prison library, Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and recorded his thoughts in the margins and between the lines. When Gantos came to ASU and spoke to our YA literature students, he granted that the book was a cautionary tale, but not so much for young readers as for adults. Gantos offers his own story as living proof that with a little bit of help and
encouragement, along with a healthy portion of luck, it is quite possible that teenagers who find themselves in deep trouble can find their way out and go on to have productive lives.

**The House of the Scorpion**


People who bought this book after the January season of prize-giving could hardly appreciate the cover design because it was plastered over with so many medals of honor: The National Book Award, a Printz Honor Book, and a Newbery Honor Book. We were surprised about the Newbery Award, not because the book is unworthy, but because we judged it to be for young adults rather than for children. In fact, before you introduce *The House of the Scorpion* to high school students, you might want to remind them of Ray Bradbury's statement that he writes science fiction not to predict the future, but to prevent it. Farmer's grim, futuristic novel is set along the Southwest border between the United States and Mexico, most of it on an opium farm. Readers meet Matt, the protagonist, when he is six-years-old. Matt's life is on a speeded-up scale because he is a clone designed to provide replacement parts for the wealthy and elderly Patron—the man who owns and manages a huge opium farm. The ending is almost too happy to be believed, but readers who have suffered through over 360 pages of a basically grim story, probably won't object to the change in Matt's fortune and what it portends for the whole region.

**The Kite Rider**

The first half of The Kite Rider is one of the most action-packed books young readers are likely to find. The setting is Thirteenth Century China after the Mongols have conquered China, and hatred and distrust between Chinese and Mongols permeates the land. When twelve-year-old Haoyou's father takes his son to see his ship, the boy is thrilled until the first-mate takes offense when the father insults the Khan's wife. The mate kicks Haoyou off the ship, and worse yet, attaches the father to a kite hoisted over the ship to determine whether the winds are likely to be kind and augur a profitable voyage for the ship and the crew. Even though the second half of the book is slower moving than the first half, the book is still worth almost any reader's time.

My Heartbeat

Ellen, the fourteen-year-old protagonist of My Heartbeat often thinks of one of her father's favorite sayings: "Geeky people often have that which is most valuable in this life . . . A mind with its own heartbeat." Ellen has suddenly vaulted to 5'10" and evolved from an introverted elementary school student with "an unwillingness to form any firm social attachments," into a young woman with a mind of her own and a worldly understanding of what defines the boundaries of each individual person's identity. Link, however, is the real problem for their father. Link's sexual identity remains grounds for struggle throughout the whole novel, not just for their father, but also for Link, and everyone
involved. Freymann-Weyr creates a marvelous protagonist in Ellen, who serves as a constant throughout the novel's conflict and its resolution. Freymann-Weyr has successfully created a story that addresses the intersection of many issues faced by young people: Conforming versus rebelling, exploring issues of identity and sex, dealing with contradictions from family and friends, and finding an acceptable life path.

**Postcards from No Man's Land**


In Chamber's story, told in two voices alternating between 1944 and 1995, the significance of the title is not revealed until the story's end, and neither is the secret upon which the plot is based. One-half century after his namesake's death in World War II, seventeen-year-old Jacob Todd travels to Holland for the 51st anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem to pay tribute at his grandfather's grave and to pay an invited visit to Geertrui Wesseling, the last surviving person to see his grandfather alive. What should be a simple and polite, if boring, visit turns into a complicated experience for Jacob as the real reason for the invitation slowly unfolds. Transitions between the past and the present are easily made, and the reader will find it interesting to read about residents of 1995 Holland and Britain paying tribute to those who gave their lives for freedom in 1944. At the same time young Jacob's experiences in trying to navigate the complicated social and sexual culture of Amsterdam provide an appropriate backdrop for the complications of two families and their history that all began with Geertrui and Jacob's grandfather, 51 years earlier. Once readers get into the story, Chambers' book accelerates nicely to its conclusion. Although
never graphic, there is a sexual subtext, both heterosexual and homosexual, that probably makes the book more appropriate for older readers.

**19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East**


This beautiful little book of poems was a finalist for the National Book Award. Naomi Shihab Nye is an Arab American, who writes, “I was born in the United States, but my father stared back toward the Middle East whenever he stood outside. Our kitchen smelled like the Middle East—garlic and pine nuts sizzled in olive oil, fried eggplant, hot pita bread...He had been happy as a boy in the Old City of Jerusalem with his Palestinian and Greek and Jewish and Armenian neighbors.” When Nye was growing up as an American teenager, her father would ask her if she knew how lucky she was, "and of course I didn't." In explaining why she put this book together, Nye writes about her Palestinian grandmother, who lived to be 106, and now after September 11 has swarmed into her granddaughter's "consciousness, poking my sleep, saying, 'It's your job. Speak for me too. Say how much I hate it. Say this is not who we are'" (p. xviii). Nye's free-verse poems were not written specifically for young readers, and several of them have been previously published. The advantage of the collection is that together they present a composite picture that isn't there in any single poem.

2001

**Damage**
Outwardly, Austin Reid seems to have the world on a string. But he has a secret that no one knows; Austin is clinically depressed. Unlike the narration in most stories told from the protagonist's point of view, Austin does not tell his story using first person pronouns and past tense verbs; instead, he tells the whole story in present tense, replacing I and me with the pronoun you: "You undo your chin strap but don't take off your helmet. Instead, you just stand there, staring out at the world framed by rigid plastic edges." Austin's abnormal sense of self tells the story as much as do the events in the plot. Austin's condition is both assuaged and exacerbated by his relationship with Heather, a beautiful girl whose aloof behavior has been misinterpreted as a superiority complex by her peers. Twenty pages into this book the reader will be hard pressed to put it down. What opens as another football hero and beautiful girlfriend story turns out to be something quite different. Although anorexia and the effects of abuse have been common topics in YA lit, depression, which is also a very real mental illness, has not.

**The Land**


Based on her own family history, Mildred Taylor's 2002 Coretta Scott King Award-winning novel is a prequel to Song of the Trees; Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry; Let the Circle Be Unbroken; and The Road to Memphis, a series chronicling the generations of the Logan family, African American land owners near Vicksburg, Mississippi. The book opens in post-Civil War Georgia when Paul-Edward Logan is about to leave his
childhood behind. He is the son of a white plantation owner and a former slave of African American and Native American heritage, and he is confused by his station in society. Paul-Edward learns that his rights as a free individual are unconditionally subject to the whims and cruelties of white men. This novel is a worthy addition to the Logan series. Although the characters and the events are based on family stories passed down since the 1800s, the events have the feel of good fiction, not dry history.

**Lord of the Deep**

Graham Salisbury. Delacorte, 2001. 184 pp. $15.95. Grades 7-10. ISBN 0-385-72918-9. *Shark Bait* and *Jungle Dogs* proved that Salisbury could write first-rate adventure, and young people who enjoyed those books will find excitement packed into *Lord of the Deep*. Thirteen-year-old Mikey Donovan idolizes his stepfather, Bill, and works as a deckhand on Bill's charter fishing boat, the Crystal-C on Hawaii's Kona coast. Things are tough for the family. Mikey's mother is dependent on Bill, but so is Mikey's half-brother, three-year-old Billy-Jay, who weighed only three pounds at birth and who needs expensive medical care. Sometime in life we will all be faced with determining which position we will choose in a moral dilemma—flexibility and caring for the welfare of others or rigidity and playing God. *Lord of the Deep* asks the question but provides no easy answer, and that in itself makes the book worth the trip.

**The Rag and Bone Shop**

When seven-year-old Alicia Bartlett is found murdered only a few hundred yards from home, the local police have no physical evidence and no suspects. The only lead they have is the last person known to have seen Alicia alive, twelve-year-old Jason Dorrant. Jason was truly the last known person to see Alicia before her murder, and there are a few clues that he may be socially deviant and even violent. Like any shy twelve-year-old, Jason is impressionable, easily manipulated, and completely unprepared for the psychological assault of special interrogator Mr. Trent. The reader will be anguished by Jason's emotional turmoil and disgusted by Trent's dishonest coercion. Cormier's novels often reveal the dark side of human nature, and this one, published posthumously, is no different.

Seek


Rob (Robert A. Radkovitz) is given an assignment to write his autobiography for his senior English thesis and advised to "think of your autobiography as a letter addressed to your future self." Rob begins, "I grew up in a house built of voices." Radio becomes important to Rob, as it always has been to his family—opera, baseball, Spanish drama and soap operas, and music—particularly music because Rob learns that his long-absent father played the accordion and often worked on radio. Rob vows to set out on a mission—to find and maybe even get to know his father. Seek starts slowly, but it picks up as Rob begins high school. The book is written almost like a script, and Fleischman ends with performance notes for a readers' theater production. The notes are sensible and
helpful, and a class might have as much fun doing a production as they did reading his Newbery Award-winning *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* (HarperCollins, 1988).

**The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants**  

The book is a coming-of-age story in four parts. Lena, Tibby, Bridget, and Carmen have been "best friends" ever since their mothers took the same aerobics class for pregnant women. Carmen had bought a pair of jeans at a thrift shop, and as the girls gather to help Carmen pack (she's the first to leave, going to South Carolina to spend the summer with her divorced father) each of the girls playfully tries on the pants. Even though the four friends have different body builds, they are happily surprised to find that the pants fit, and in fact, they make each girl feel beautiful. Now everybody wants them, and so the girls come up with the idea of taking turns. Part of the charm of the book is Brashare's writing, which lends credibility and interest to the four stories, but what is more important is the wish-fulfilling aspects of the supportive friendship.

**True Believer**  

Fifteen-year-old LaVaughn knows that a man can ruin a young woman's future very quickly if she isn't careful, but when her close childhood friend Jody returns to live in her apartment building, she finds herself fantasizing about being held and kissed by a
boyfriend. She eventually finds that real life seldom plays out like the fantasies in her head. Narrated in free verse and second in a trilogy that began with Make Lemonade, True Believer finds LaVaughn one year later, still living in an inner-city apartment with her widowed mother. The story is largely about adapting to the myriad uncontrollable and unpredictable events of a life. Her mother's blossoming relationship with a man and LaVaughn's own personal relationships, both new and old, are confusing. But as the book progresses, LaVaughn's ability to deal with conflicts and mixed emotions about people and situations improves almost as much as her vocabulary and grammar. The ending is uplifting and full of hope.

Zazoo


Zazoo has lived eleven of her thirteen years with her French "Grandfather" in an old stone mill between a river and a canal. Grand-Pierre (as everyone calls the man who adopted her and brought her home to France after her Vietnamese parents were killed in the Vietnam War) is the lock-keeper of Canal Lock #43. Zazoo spends her days as a typical French schoolgirl, in spire of her obviously Asian looks. Then, one summer day, sixteen-year-old Marius comes into Zazoo's life. In a dream-come-true for teenagers, Zazoo and Marius manage to rekindle loving relationships among several adults who never should have been separated in the first place.

2000
The Amber Spyglass, The Golden Compass, and The Subtle Knife


Series books rarely can be treated separately and this is particularly true with Pullmans' interwoven trilogy, which mixes fantasy and derring-do adventure into the conflict between good and evil and into the dilemma of learning how to determine which is which and why. Pullman's characters breathe real life, notably Lyra and Will and Mrs. Coulter. Things impossible to believe are easily accepted under Pullman's magic words. Polar bears wear battle armor, witches exist, demons are everywhere, and Lyra has a tool, looking vaguely like a compass, which answers all she needs to know. The books are powerful and masterful and moving and frightening. Even better, they are honest and real. We predict that they will be with us for many years to come. A plus for English teachers is Pullman's fondness for Milton and how he uses Milton so well.

The Beet Fields: Memories of a Sixteenth Summer


Paulsen says in his "Author's Note" that this autobiographical story is "as real as I can write it, and as real as I can remember it happening." The story begins with a sixteen-year-old boy who is so disgusted with his drunken parents that he lights out for the beet fields of North Dakota, where he learns fast enough that he can't keep up with the Mexican migrants as they go up and down the fields weeding out excess beets. He gets a chance to drive a tractor, but is jailed by a crooked cop. Later he joins a carnival and learns there are some people who are genuinely kind, but that doesn't mean he's "home
free." A couple of scenes may trouble censors because of the way they illustrate the incredibly large part that lust plays in the lives of young men.

**Homeless Bird**


In this winner of the National Book Award, Koly is a thirteen-year-old girl in India whose family scrapes together a dowry so that she can marry into a "good" family; however, it isn't a marriage at all. The sixteen-year-old groom is dying of tuberculosis and his family thinks up the marriage scheme to get money to take him on a pilgrimage to bathe in the Ganges River in hopes that he will be healed. Instead of recovering, the boy dies, and Koly is left a widow to be cared for by the boy's father and his embittered mother. Koly finds a friend in her former husband's sister, but then the sister marries and moves away. Koly's father-in-law, an increasingly despondent and ineffective school teacher, fortunately takes it upon himself to teach Koly to read. After two years, he dies and Koly is left to the mercy of a hostile and selfish mother-in-law who through trickery abandons Koly in a city where the monks are known to give charity to widows. Readers cheer for Koly who within a couple of years manages to "make it" without charity.

**Hope Was Here**


Bauer is a wonderfully funny writer, who has noticed a mismatch in how many teenagers have jobs and how few authors have explored the world of teenage work. She set out to
make a start at redressing the balance with her story of sixteen-year-old Hope and her Aunt Addie leaving New York City for promised jobs in Wisconsin--Addie as a cook and Hope as a waitress. They had just been cheated by Addie's partner in a diner and they are equally bitter as they load the cardboard boxes filled with their lives into Addie's old Buick with the U-Haul trailer chained to the back. By the end of the book, Hope is eighteen and working her last day at the Welcome Stairways diner before leaving for college. She has had a world of experience in the two-plus years that she and Addie have lived in the apartment above the diner and she still finds "in-the-weeds [rush-hour] waitressing" a fantastic adrenaline pumper because she never knows if she's going to be waiting "on a maniac or a guy passing out twenties."

**Kit's Wilderness**


Almond's new book is a marvelous story about death and art and aging and forgiving. It begins at the end of the book with three young people emerging into the shining valley and the snow as townspeople cheer and all is well. Then the story begins. Kit Watson's family has recently moved back to a once-prosperous mining town, Stoneygate. Kit's grandfather luxuriates in a return to his youth, the best thing that has happened to him since grandmother died. Kit is less pleased to be here. He wants to be friends, but the locals have their friends divided up. One boy his own age most intrigues Kit--John Askew, dirty and from an alcoholic family. Kit and John instinctively know that they are
doomed to play out some important event. And that important event is what this original and surreal story is about.

**Many Stones**


*Many Stones* connects many stories, each one pressing down on Berry like the stones she places on her chest each night, one at a time, to calm her troubled mind. The main story follows Berry and her father as they travel to South Africa to attend a memorial service for Berry's older sister, Laura, who was killed at the Cape Town church school where she worked to right some of the wrongs of apartheid. Berry thinks that her sister was everything she isn't: brilliant, successful, socially adept, and politically active. Berry's father thinks the trip will help Berry cope with the tragedy, but initially it only stirs up bad memories of her parents' divorce, her failed relationship with her father, her sister's death, and the downward spiral of her life. But as Berry moves closer to the memorial service where she is to present a check for funds raised in memory of Laura, Berry does take her first steps on the path to healing.

**Stuck in Neutral**


Fourteen-year-old Shawn McDaniel thinks his father is planning to kill him, a suspicion the reader gradually grows to share in Terry Trueman's successful first novel. Strangely enough, Shawn's father seems to think this would be a courageous act of charity. Piling
irony upon irony, *Stuck in Neutral* unfolds as a list of good news/bad news paradoxes. Born with cerebral palsy so profound he cannot control even the smallest part of his body, Shawn has been incorrectly assessed as having a mental age of three months. In truth he is cognitively gifted. According to the "Author's Note," Trueman's book asks questions he asks himself about his own son, Sheehan, also the victim of a severe physical disability: "Is Sheehan a secret genius, like Shawn in the story? Does he like potato chips and rock and roll? Inside himself is he witty and funny and wise?"

**The Wanderer**


Ever since Sharon Creech won the Newbery award for *Walk Two Moons*, she has continued to explore the archetypal journal. She brings the form close to perfection in *The Wanderer*, which is the name of the 45-foot sailboat in which a contemporary "family" crosses the Atlantic. The passengers, who double as the crew, are three adult brothers and three teenagers. The teenagers are Brian, Cody, and Sophie. It's mainly Sophie's story, even though once the trip gets going, the chapters alternate between Sophie and Cody. Cody tells us things about Sophie that she can't or won't tell. As adults know and young readers are learning, even the best laid plans often go awry. But what lifts *The Wanderer* above a simple adventure tale is the subtle way that Creech develops the mystery of Sophie's past and the reason that her reluctant parents viewed this voyage as one of those things that Sophie "just had to do."
A Year Down Yonder


Richard Peck's 2000 Newbery Medal winner had a long way to go to equal its precursor, A Long Way from Chicago, but Peck's second effort is even funnier and maybe a little deeper. Once again, he is adept at portraying small-town Illinois during the Great Depression and at developing the character of an admirable but eccentric grandmother. While Mary Alice is a delightful heroine, it is Grandma Dowdel who stands out as an unusual and memorable character, especially when viewed in relations to other older women portrayed in the pop culture. Grandma Dowdel is resourceful, cunning, fearless, self-reliant and independent. No one gets the best of her, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, teenage boys who try to turn over her privy on Halloween, or a horse-thieving bully who tries to extort money from Mary Alice on her first day at the new school.

Anna of Byzantium


Barrett is a scholar whose writing of Anna of Byzantium was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. She dedicates her novel to the “forgotten women writers” of the Middle Ages, who like Anna Comnena were actually as literate as were the men in comparable social positions. Princess Anna is the true-life author of The Alexiad, an 11-volume story of her father’s reign over the Byzantine Empire centered in
Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) from 1083 to 1118. Barrett explains in an author’s note that she had to “make-up” many of the details of Anna’s personal life. Readers probably won’t mind simply because they will be so grateful for a story that shows readers how much they have in common with a girl who lived nearly a thousand years ago.

**Frenchtown Summer**


Cormier does not claim that this book of 30 poems is autobiographical. In fact, the protagonist is named Eugene, but anyone acquainted with Cormier will assume that he is telling his own experience. He has undoubtedly lived each of the emotions and probably most of the actual experiences. Readers who know Cormier’s other books will also be more in tune with the sense of mystery and foreboding that comes into the poems. He tells about a boy who got Saint Vitus’ dance and was forever after shunned, about a retarded man who one day “simply wasn’t there anymore,” about an uncle who committed suicide, and about his own dark suspicions that are too awful to even be voiced.

**Hard Love**


Zines (homemade magazines) are at the heart of Wittlinger’s offbeat romance, and the pages are enlivened by excerpts from *Bananafish*, the zine put out by shy 16-year-old
John, and *Escape Velocity*, the zine put out by far-from-shy Marisol, who describes herself as “Puerto Rican Cuban Yankee Cambridge, Massachusetts, rich spoiled lesbian private-school gifted-and-talented writer virgin looking for love.

**Monster**


Myer’s book has two distinctive qualities. One is its unusual format. There are no pages of plain print; instead, the story is told through a typed script for a movie written by Steve Harmon, a young African American on trial as an accused accessory to murder. The second distinctive aspect is the strong moral message. Steve was arrested essentially for “doing nothing,” and as he waits for the trial he has lots of time to ponder whether this makes him a “monster,” as claimed by the prosecution.

**Never Trust a Dead Man**


In this strange medieval tale, there’s lots of humor mixed with the supernatural, mixed with horror, mixed with a bit of thwarted love. Seventeen-year-old Selwyn loves Anora, who prefers the richer Farold. The two boys fight for her favors. Then Farold is found dead, stabbed in the back with Selwyn’s knife, and Selwyn is found guilty by public acclaim and sentenced to death. But because their world is full of superstitions about
what to do with dead bodies and murderers, the populace decides to entomb Selwyn with Farold’s decomposing body until Selwyn dies – or whatever.

**Safe at Second**


*Safe at Second* is an unconventional sports book, but despite what the dust jacket suggests, it is not really so much about Todd Bannister as about his friend Paulie, who tells Todd’s tragic story. Todd was the high school baseball pitcher, hurler of no-hitters, strikeout king, a boy usually surrounded by pro scouts and college coaches – an all-round nice guy who was the fitting subject of a feature story in *Sports Illustrated*. Then a batter drives a fast ball directly back at Todd and Todd loses one eye. While, of course, this is a traumatic change for Todd, it is also a change for Paulie, who never had a goal other than to be Todd’s friend and assistant.

**The Smugglers**


*The Smugglers* is fast reading, in part because there’s constant danger and violence, in part because strange things follow John. The last of the book is taken up with a literally foggy sea on which a wondrously enjoyable battle is fought between smugglers and English revenue officials. Lawrence’s prose has the same marvelous ring as Leon Garfield’s books, and the chapters describing a wild coach ride in Garfield’s *The Sound of Coaches* (1974) and in Lawrence’s *The Smugglers* are equally effective and

**When Zachary Beaver Came to Town**


When Holt was 13, she went to the Louisiana State Fair and paid $2.00 to see “The Fattest Boy in the World.” This wonderful initiation story has been percolating in her mind ever since. It is the summer of 1971, and thirteen-year-old Toby and his friend Cal live in Antler, Texas, where they are sure nothing of any consequence ever happens. The whole town is in the midst of the summer doldrums, but then 643-pound Zachary Beaver arrives and is left by his guardian in a trailer parked in the Dairy Maid lot. By the end of the summer, Toby has learned that Antler, Texas, is very much a part of the world. And when Zachary’s guardian returns to take him to the next spot, Toby realizes that whether Zachary Beaver ever returns, Antler and Toby and Cal will be at the heart of Zachary’s being, just as he is a part of them.