

BOOKS FOR BOYS (AND ADVENTUROUS GIRLS) PART TWO: 34 - 67

Finding good books for boys can be challenging--without a little help, that is. Compiled with the help of the folks on NESCBWI Yahoo list, here are a few great books to get your boys, girls, and maybe even yourself, reading.

* book may be hard to find.

34. SURF MULES, Greg Neri

When Logan goes searching for the Perfect Monster Wave, he doesn't expect his former best friend to be killed by it. Add to this a deadbeat dad who bankrupted his family and the possibility of college going down the drain, and Logan is suddenly in a tailspin. So when small-time dealer Broza offers Logan and his dropout pal, Z-boy, a summer job that could make them rich, it seems his problems might be solved. But between Z-boy's constant screwups, a band of Nazi surfers out for blood, and a mysterious stranger on their tail, Logan is starting to have some serious doubts about hauling contraband across country, and hopes just to make it home alive.--*Amazon*

35. LOCKDOWN: ESCAPE FROM FURNACE, Alexander Gordon Smith

Furnace Penitentiary: the world's most secure prison for young offenders, buried a mile beneath the earth's surface. Convicted of a murder he didn't commit, sentenced to life without parole, "new fish" Alex Sawyer knows he has two choices: find a way out, or resign himself to a death behind bars, in the darkness at the bottom of the world. Except in Furnace, death is the least of his worries. Soon Alex discovers that the prison is a place of pure evil, where inhuman creatures in gas masks stalk the corridors at night, where giants in black suits drag screaming inmates into the shadows, where deformed beasts can be heard howling from the blood-drenched tunnels below. And behind everything is the mysterious, all-powerful warden, a man as cruel and dangerous as the devil himself, whose unthinkable acts have consequences that stretch far beyond the walls of the prison. Together with a bunch of inmates—some innocent kids who have been framed, others cold-blooded killers—Alex plans an escape. But as he starts to uncover the

truth about Furnace's deeper, darker purpose, Alex's actions grow ever more dangerous, and he must risk everything to expose this nightmare that's hidden from the eyes of the world.--*Amazon*

36. SPANKING SHAKESPEARE, Jake Wizner

Shakespeare has always hated his name. His parents bestowed it on him as some kind of sick joke when he was born, and his life has gone downhill from there, one embarrassing incident after another. Entering his senior year of high school, Shakespeare has never had a girlfriend, his younger brother is cooler than he is, and his best friend's favorite topic of conversation is his bowel movements. But Shakespeare will have the last laugh. He is chronicling every mortifying detail in his memoir, the writing project each senior at Shakespeare's high school must complete. And he is doing it brilliantly. And, just maybe, a prize-winning memoir will bring him respect, admiration, and a girlfriend . . . or at least a prom date.--*Back cover*

37. I AM THE MESSENGER, Marcus Zusak

Ed is a 19-year-old loser only marginally connected to the world; he's the son that not even his mother loves. But his life begins to change after he acts heroically during a robbery. Perhaps it's the notoriety he receives that leads to his receiving playing cards in the mail. Ed instinctively understands that the scrawled words on the aces are clues to be followed, which lead him to people he will help (including some he'll have to hurt first). But as much as he changes those who come into his life, he changes himself more. Two particular elements will keep readers enthralled: the panoply of characters who stream in and out of the story, and the mystery of the person sending Ed on the life-altering missions. Concerning the former, Zusak succeeds brilliantly. Ed's voice is assured and unmistakable, and other characters, although seen through Ed's eyes, are realistically and memorably evoked (readers will almost smell Ed's odoriferous dog when it ambles across the pages). As for the ending, however, Zusak is too clever by half. He offers too few nuts-and-bolts details before wrapping things up with an unexpected, somewhat unsatisfying recasting of the narrative. Happily, that doesn't diminish the life-affirming intricacies that come before.--*Ilene Cooper for Booklist, grades 9 & up*

38. BIG SLICK, (& others), Eric Luper

All in all, sixteen-year-old Andrew Lang has been dealt a pretty good hand in life. Sure, he has to spend his afternoons slaving away in the hellhole that is his dad's dry-cleaning business, but even that's not so bad with Jasmine, the seriously hot Goth-chick senior, working right beside him. So what if she's got a boyfriend? Plus, Andrew's got an ace up his sleeve – he's good at poker. Very good. Unfortunately, all it takes is one bad bet at Shushie's illegal poker club to turn Andrew's bankroll from huge to nonexistent. And Andrew's pretty sure that sooner or later his dad's going to notice that \$600 he “borrowed” from the register. Andrew thinks he may know how to get the money back, but it's a little bit crazy, and a little bit dangerous . . . In this breakneck-paced novel about gambling and growing up, the stakes are high, and Andrew must ask himself: What does going all in really mean?--*Amazon*

39. THE KNIFE OF NEVER LETTING GO, (Chaos Walking series), Patrick Ness

Chased by a madman preacher and possibly the rest of his townfolk as well, young Todd Hewitt flees his settlement on a planet where war with the natives has killed all the women and infected the men with a germ that broadcasts their thoughts aloud for all to hear. This cacophonous thought-cloud is known as Noise and is rendered with startling effectiveness on the page. The first of many secrets is revealed when Todd discovers an unsettling hole in the Noise, and quickly realizes that he lives in a much different world than the one he thought he did. Some of the central conceits of the drama can be hard to swallow, but the pure inventiveness and excitement of the telling more than make up for it. Narrated in a sort of pidgin English with crack dramatic and comic timing by Todd and featuring one of the finest talking-dog characters anywhere, this troubling, unforgettable opener to the Chaos Walking trilogy is a penetrating look at the ways in which we reveal ourselves to one another, and what it takes to be a man in a society gone horribly wrong. The cliffhanger ending is as effective as a shot to the gut. --*Ian Chipman for Booklist, grades 8-12*

40. THE WEDNESDAY WARS, Gary Schmidt

On Wednesday afternoons, while his Catholic and Jewish schoolmates attend religious instruction, Holling Hoodhood, the only Presbyterian in his seventh grade, is alone in the classroom with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, who Holling is convinced hates his guts. He feels more certain after Mrs. Baker assigns Shakespeare's plays for Holling to discuss during their shared afternoons. Each month in Holling's tumultuous seventh-grade year is a chapter in this quietly powerful coming-of-age novel set in suburban Long Island during the late '60s. The slow start may deter some readers, and Mrs. Baker is too good to be true: she arranges a meeting between Holling and the New York Yankees, brokers a deal to save a student's father's architectural firm, and, after revealing her past as an Olympic runner, coaches Holling to the varsity cross-country team. However, Schmidt, whose *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (2005) was named both a Printz and a Newbery Honor Book, makes the implausible believable and the everyday momentous. Seamlessly, he knits together the story's themes: the cultural uproar of the '60s, the internal uproar of early adolescence, and the timeless wisdom of Shakespeare's words. Holling's unwavering, distinctive voice offers a gentle, hopeful, moving story of a boy who, with the right help, learns to stretch beyond the limitations of his family, his violent times, and his fear, as he leaps into his future with his eyes and his heart wide open.--*Gillian Engberg for Booklist*

41. BOY TOY, Barry Lyga

When Josh was a 12-year-old seventh grader, he was sexually abused by his history teacher, the young, beautiful (and married) Eve, who manipulated him into believing they were in love. Carefully crafting a narrative structure, Lyga flashes between that traumatic time and the present, when Josh, now a senior (at the school where *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl* took place), learns that Eve is being paroled. The author handles heavy material with honesty and sensitivity, capturing both the young Josh's excitement and his realization that his pleasure brought its own sort of guilt. Years later, he still struggles: he flies into rages (he punches a baseball coach in an opening scene), and he experiences flickers, brief moments which feel like actual immersions in the past. Josh also has trouble pursuing Rachel, who seems like a perfect match, because he cannot trust his physical instincts; he is, as his psychologist puts it,

afraid to do anything at all because it might be the wrong thing. Details like Josh's obsession with calculating baseball statistics round out his character; the statistics speak to his intelligence and, more tellingly, to his attempts to control his world. Even his inevitable face-off with Eve proves a revelation. Readers may find the ending too neat, given the extent of Josh's problems, but in their richness and credibility the cast—Eve included—surpasses that of the much-admired *Fanboy*. --*PW*, ages 16 & up

42. THE ASTONISHING LIFE OF OCTAVIAN NOTHING, (series), M.T. Anderson

In this fascinating and eye-opening Revolution-era novel, Octavian, a black youth raised in a Boston household of radical philosophers, is given an excellent classical education. He and his mother, an African princess, are kept isolated on the estate, and only as he grows older does he realize that while he is well dressed and well fed, he is indeed a captive being used by his guardians as part of an experiment to determine the intellectual acuity of Africans. As the fortunes of the Novanglian College of Lucidity change, so do the nature and conduct of their experiments. [...] Readers will have to wait for the second volume to find out the protagonist's fate. The novel is written in 18th-century language from Octavian's point of view and in letters written by a soldier who befriends him. Despite the challenging style, this powerful novel will resonate with contemporary readers. The issues of slavery and human rights, racism, free will, the causes of war, and one person's struggle to define himself are just as relevant today.

Anderson's use of factual information to convey the time and place is powerfully done.—*Sharon Rawlins, NJ Library for the Blind and Handicapped, Trenton for School Library Journal, grade 9 & up*

43. THE PENALTY, Mal Peet

This companion novel to *Keeper* (2005) picks up the story of South American sports journalist Paul Faustino, who is drawn into a wild, esoteric mystery after a young soccer prodigy disappears. Although Peet's decision to set the story in a generalized fictional South American country may spark controversy, once again, he tells a fascinating, complex tale that incorporates sports, the occult, and South American history and culture. "For me time is folded, like cloth,"

says one character, and the same is true of Peet's experimental narrative, which leaps between Faustino's contemporary viewpoint and the historical voice of an African man who survived the Middle Passage and the graphic brutality of slave life. Jerky transitions between story lines and some clichéd language distract from the frequent lyricism, vivid magic, and rich, unsettling themes. The surface mystery will intrigue readers, but it's the deeper questions about religious belief, salvation, and how best to confront the past's shocking inhumanity that will linger. For another novel that blends twentieth-century life with African history and voodoo, suggest Susan Vaught's *Stormwitch* (2005).--*Gillian Engberg for Booklist*

44. WHEN THE WHISTLE BLOWS, Fran Cannon Slayton

Slayton's sweet and nostalgic debut novel tells the story of seven consecutive Halloweens, starting in 1943, in the life of teenage Jimmy Cannon. He wants nothing but to follow in the footsteps of his father and older brothers and work for the railroad, which runs through his hometown of Rowlesburg, W. Va. His dad, however, believes that the railroads are dying, and that Jimmy's future is elsewhere. As each year passes, readers get glimpses of Jimmy's small-town life: a late-night wake for a favorite uncle, a prank gone awry, a robbery with nearly disastrous consequences, etc. Slayton takes a few wrong turns, notably the chapters featuring the football championship and the boorish school principal who opposes hunting season, both of which have clichéd resolutions. Though the nature of the book--devoid of Jimmy's growth over the 364 days between each chapter--can feel disjointed, Jimmy, his father and the townsfolk have unique, compelling voices that nicely convey the sense of small-town America during and after World War II.--*PW, ages 10 & up.*

45. BULL RIDER, Suzanne Morgan Williams

Cam O'Mara, 14, is a champion skateboarder, and when he is not helping out on the family desert ranch, he is practicing his moves with his friends in his small Nevada town. But when his older brother, Ben, comes home from the Iraq War severely injured and depressed, everything changes. Ben was a champion bull-rider, and Cam makes a pact with his brother to continue the family tradition: if Cam rides the bull to win, Ben will not give up hope that he can rebuild his

life. That connection is a bit of a stretch, but the mix of wild macho action with family anguish and tenderness will grab teens. Driven by his brother's pain, Cam is determined to prove himself in the dangerous bull ring, even if it means faking his identity and lying to his family. Told in a clipped, first-person narrative, this first novel makes the sports details of skateboarding and bull-riding part of the powerful contemporary story of family, community, and work. --*Hazel Rochman for Booklist, grades 7-10*

46. HEART OF A SHEPHERD, Rosanne Parry

In Parry's debut novel, 11-year-old Brother (his given name is Ignatius: "Guess they ran out of all the good saints by the time they got to me") helps manage his family's Oregon ranch. With his father in Iraq, his four older brothers at school or in the military, and his mother painting abroad, caring for family's livestock falls to Brother, his grandparents and some hired help. Though he is eager to prove to his siblings, grandparents and most importantly, his father, that he can handle it, Brother nonetheless struggles with the rigors of the job, his father's and brothers' absence and the stress of war ("I could never do it.... I could never take those salutes and the 'yes, sirs' and then take moms and dads into danger"). Slowly, Brother fills the shoes of his elders and realizes his own calling when he is literally tested by fire. Brother's spiritual growth and gentle but strong nature, in tandem with details of ranch life and the backdrop of war, add up to a powerful, unique coming-of-age story. --*PW, ages 8-12.*

47. THE BODY OF CHRISTOPHER CREED, Carol Plum-Ucci

First-novelist Plum-Ucci wraps a well-crafted mystery around a topical issue: the effect teenage intolerance can have on misfits. When class freak Chris Creed suddenly disappears, his fellow students are not so much worried but abuzz with speculation: Is he a runaway, a suicide, a crime victim? Through a complicated but believable turn of events, narrator Torey Adams, a popular 16-year-old, starts to feel some concern and resolves to find the truth. His unlikely allies are two kids of dubious social status: Ali, who is Chris's neighbor, and Ali's boyfriend, Bo, a "boon" (shorthand for boondocks) with a juvenile record. Convinced Chris's mother is to blame for Chris's disappearance, they plan to break into his house to steal his hidden diary in hopes of

finding evidence. The plan backfires: Bo is caught, Torey is implicated and all three are the subject of malicious gossip that proves to have dangerous consequences. Told as a flashback, the novel drags slightly at the beginning. Plum-Ucci, however, picks up the pace and builds to a fever pitch near the conclusion, vividly describing Torey's late-night hunt for Chris's body in a nearby Indian burial ground. Readers will likely be enthralled by the mystery, and, even more, they will be moved by Torey's hard-won realization that everyone deserves compassion. --*PW, ages 12 & up.*

48. RATS SAW GOD, Rob Thomas

In order to pass English class and graduate, 18-year-old Steve York has to write a 100- page essay about his life. What sounds like a run-of-the-mill writing assignment, however, becomes an excuse for Steve to reflect on the last four years (from Texas freshman to California senior), and figure out where it all went wrong. Maybe it was when he discovered that he really couldn't relate to his father, the Famous Astronaut. Or it could be because his "heart had been run through frappé, puree, and liquefy on a love blender" by his ex-girlfriend, Wanda "Dub" Varner. No matter where the finger of blame ends up pointing, it's a wild ride of self-enlightenment as Steve discovers that not all relationships are permanent, and that some--like the one with his dad--can be mended with a little work. With Steve, author [Rob Thomas](#) has taken a teenage outsider and given him a funny, intelligent voice: "There are those males who merely fill ear holes with tiny studs hardly big enough to offend a Marine. Not me. Most days I wear big hoops. When I combine the look with a doo rag, I'm a regular pirate." As with his other novels--[Doing Time](#) and [Slave Day](#)--Thomas proves his thorough grasp of young adult issues and emotions. Teens will appreciate the author's empathy and humor, and teachers and parents will examine his work for clues to the mystery of adolescence. --*Jennifer Hubert for Amazon, ages 13 & up*

49. THE BRONZE BOW, Elizabeth George Speare

Eighteen-year-old Daniel bar Jamin lives with a band of zealots in Galilee, Daniel's home. This group hopes to fight the Romans, who have conquered their country. Daniel has another reason to despise the Romans: They crucified his father as an example to the village. Daniel's hatred is the only thing he lives for; he also is trying to escape a cruel master. When Daniel learns that this cruel master has died, Daniel can now return home. Upon his arrival, Daniel realizes that he must

stay to help his frail grandmother, his distraught sister, Leah, and their impoverished home. Daniel hears Jesus talking; Daniel wonders if Jesus could help defeat the Romans. However Jesus confuses Daniel because of talk about repentance and compassion rather than violence and hatred in preparation for the upcoming kingdom. Daniel befriends Joel, the son of a Jewish leader, and together they try to aide the zealots. When Joel is captured and the zealots refuse to help, Daniel realizes he must look elsewhere to avenge the Romans. As Leah's health worsens, Daniel sends word to Thacia, Joel's sister. Thacia comes and brings Jesus with her; Jesus heals Leah. Jesus also heals Daniel of his all-consuming hatred. Speare's novel received the 1962 Newbery award but the story still presents a compelling message forty-five years later. If a reader can tolerate Daniel's black mood for most of the novel and mention of Jesus, this can be a very rewarding read for advanced middle school and high school readers.--*Barnes & Noble*

50. HAVEN, Beverly Patt

Fourteen year old Latonya Dennison needs a home and, as luck would have it, Rudy Morris s home is available. However, because Latonya is black and Rudy s family is white, the foster care system is unwilling to make the placement. When Latonya, Rudy and Rudy s goofball friend, Stark, take matters into their own hands, each discovers a unique definition of family, as well as a few surprises along the road.--*Barnes & Noble*

51. CRASH INTO ME, Albert Borriss

Introverted Owen, brash confabulator Audrey, struggling lesbian Jin-Ae, and alcoholic Frank don't seem to have much in common, but they bond online over a shared interest: to commit suicide. Some of them have already made repeated attempts, and now they make a pact. They take a cross-country road trip from New Jersey, visiting the graves of famous people who have killed themselves, that will culminate at Death Valley. There, they will take their own lives—no backing down, no changes of heart. But as they crisscross the states, these isolated, unhappy teens begin to connect over more than just their desire to die; as they share their darkest secrets and most cherished wishes, real friendship and even romantic love develop. As the end of their trip grows closer, the time comes to decide: Is life worth living in spite of the pain, or do they keep their deadly promise? Borriss's understanding of the emotional lives of teenagers shines through in his nuanced, well-developed portrayals of the protagonists, particularly Owen, the

narrator, who emerges as a wry and wise observer of his companions. The action never feels pat or predetermined, and the author's depiction of the complexities of depression and suicide is compassionate, nonjudgmental, and ultimately hopeful. This first novel is a gripping addition to YA collections.—*Meredith Robbins, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis High School, New York City for School Library Journal, grades 9 & up*

52. SECRETS OF THE CHEESE SYNDICATE, Donna St. Cyr

Robert Montasio did not think his day could get any worse until his sister drinks a bizarre soda that causes her to start shrinking. Robert's only hope is a mysterious organization known as the Secret Cheese Syndicate. Unfortunately, they cannot help without a special cheese that has been lost for years. Now, with a tiny little sister in his pocket, Robert has to travel the world to find the Mystic Cheese of Eliki and, perhaps, discover secrets from his family's past.--*Amazon*

53. OPERATION REDWOOD, S. Terrell French

When Julian Carter-Li, 12, becomes ill, he is sent by his school to the office of his wealthy, bullying uncle with whom he lives. There he sees email from a Robin Elder degrading the man for being a moron and world class jerk, and he quickly becomes fascinated with this spirited person. Through their exchanges, Julian learns that homeschooled Robin lives next to a grove of redwood trees that his uncle's company plans to harvest, and Julian ditches math camp to see the trees for himself. Drawn to both the forest and Robin's family, Julian embarks on a campaign to save the trees, and the children take up residence in the Elder family's tree house. With his friend Danny and Robin, he faces down his uncle to save the forest. Fast paced and full of fun, the story captures the excitement and satisfaction of defeating a large corporation. Situations are sometimes resolved too easily, and character development is spotty, but the story motivates readers to turn the pages regardless. Julian's relationship with his younger cousin is well done, balancing the tension of a favored kid with genuine affection. Teachers will be able to use this novel for Earth Day discussions and can foster conversations on environmental activism of all types. The resolution reminds readers that everyone, no matter how large or small, can take action on issues that are important to them.—*Chris Shoemaker, New York Public Library for School Library Journal, grades 4-7*

54. FREAKED, J.T. Dutton

Stuck in an elite Connecticut boys' boarding school in 1993, sophomore Scotty is struggling and his G.P.A. sucks. The kids call him Loveletter, since his mom is a famous sex therapist who writes about oral and anal sex. The only way Scotty can cope is to smoke more dope and take more drugs, and acid is his bridge over troubled water. His hero is Jerry Garcia, and Scotty takes off with his drug-dealing roommate on a New York trip to a Grateful Dead concert. More situation than story, this debut novel is much too long and repetitive. What is great is the fast, wry first-person commentary, whether about Mom ("I personally would like to see her in an apron, rather than nothing at all"), meaning ("Who really has the luxury of life with a purpose?"), or fighting back ("My survival skills amounted to the fetal position"). As for the acid, the trips are hard and sad. --*Hazel Rochman for Booklist, grades 11-12*

55. CATCHER IN THE RYE, J.D. Salinger

The hero-narrator of THE CATCHER IN THE RYE is an ancient child of sixteen, a native New Yorker named Holden Caulfield. Through circumstances that tend to preclude adult, secondhand description, he leaves his prep school in Pennsylvania and goes underground in New York City for three days. The boy himself is at once too simple and too complex for us to make any final comment about him or his story. Perhaps the safest thing we can say about Holden is that he was born in the world not just strongly attracted to beauty but, almost, hopelessly impaled on it. There are many voices in this novel: children's voices, adult voices, underground voices-but Holden's voice is the most eloquent of all. Transcending his own vernacular, yet remaining marvelously faithful to it, he issues a perfectly articulated cry of mixed pain and pleasure. However, like most lovers and clowns and poets of the higher orders, he keeps most of the pain to, and for, himself. The pleasure he gives away, or sets aside, with all his heart. It is there for the reader who can handle it to keep.--*Barnes and Noble, ages 15 & up*

56. GEOGRAPHY CLUB, (& others), Brent Hartinger

Russel Middlebrook is a sophomore at Goodkind High School. He has a secret crush on a baseball jock, Kevin Land, and soon discovers that Kevin is also gay. The boys become friendly outside of school and set up the "Geography Club" with three other gay students, one of whom is Russel's closest friend, Min. The club members relish the opportunity to discuss their lives and to

relate to one another openly and honestly. Eventually, however, intense peer pressure and insecurity take their toll. Russel's relationship with Kevin ends, but the "Geography Club" becomes the "Goodkind High School Gay-Straight-Bisexual Alliance," and the protagonist gains new insight into himself and his place in the world. Hartinger has written a compelling look at the high school scene and the serious consequences of being "different." The plot never falters. Dialogue flows smoothly and is always completely believable, and the occasional use of profanity adds to the realism of the story. Characterization is excellent, with all of the teens emerging as likable but flawed individuals caught in a situation that few young adults could handle with maturity. This author has something to say here, and his message is potent and effective in its delivery. Many teens, both gay and straight, should find this novel intriguing.--
Robert Gray, East Central Regional Library, Cambridge, MN for School Library Journal, grades 10 & up

57. FRINDLE, Andrew Clements and Brian Selznick

Ten-year-old Nick Allen has a reputation for devising clever, time-wasting schemes guaranteed to distract even the most conscientious teacher. His diversions backfire in Mrs. Granger's fifth-grade class, however, resulting in Nick being assigned an extra report on how new entries are added to the dictionary. Surprisingly, the research provides Nick with his best idea ever, and he decides to coin his own new word. Mrs. Granger has a passion for vocabulary, but Nick's (and soon the rest of the school's) insistence on referring to pens as "frindles" annoys her greatly. The war of words escalates--resulting in after-school punishments, a home visit from the principal, national publicity, economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs, and, eventually, inclusion of *frindle* in the dictionary. Slightly reminiscent of Avi's *Nothing but the Truth* (1991), this is a kinder, gentler story in which the two sides eventually come to a private meeting of the minds and the power of language triumphs over both. Sure to be popular with a wide range of readers, this will make a great read-aloud as well. --*Kay Weisman for Booklist, grades 3-6*

58. THE TIGER RISING, Kate DiCamillo

Kate DiCamillo's first novel *Because of Winn-Dixie* won a Newbery Honor in 2000 for the nonsense charm and wisdom of its down-home young heroine, Opal. Also set in Florida, *The*

Tiger Rising is more of a short story in scope, the tale of 12-year-old Rob Horton who finds a caged tiger in the woods behind the Kentucky Star Motel where he lives with his dad. The tiger is so incongruous in this setting, Rob views the apparition as some sort of magic trick. Indeed, the tiger triggers all sorts of magic in Rob's life--for one thing, it takes his mind off his recently deceased mother and the itchy red blisters on his legs that the wise motel housekeeper, Willie May, says is a manifestation of the sadness that Rob keeps "down low." Something else for Rob to think about is Sistine (as in the chapel), a new city girl with fierce black eyes who challenges him to be honest with her and himself. Spurred by the tiger, events collide to break Rob out of his silent introspection, to form a new friendship with Sistine, a new understanding with his father, and most important, to lighten his heart. This novel is about cages--the consequences of escape as well as imprisonment. The story and symbolism are clear as a bell, and the emotions ring true. (Ages 9 and older) --*Karin Snelson for Amazon, ages 8 & up*

59. FIREGIRL, Tony Abbott

Tom, a seventh grader, tells about the arrival of Jessica, a new student who was badly burned in a fire and is attending St. Catherine's while she gets treatments at a local hospital. The students in Tom's class are afraid of her because of her appearance but little by little he develops a friendship with her that changes his life. Through realistic settings and dialogue, and believable characters, readers will be able to relate to the social dynamics of these adolescents who are trying to handle a difficult situation. The students who shy away from Jessica are at a loss as to what to say. Tom begins to look beyond her exterior and realizes that his life will not be the same after she leaves, just three weeks later. The theme of acceptance is presented in a touching story of friendship that is easy to read yet hard to forget.--*Denise Moore, O'Gorman Junior High School, Sioux Falls, SD for School Library Journal, grades 5-7*

60. BUD, NOT BUDDY, (& others), Christopher Paul Curtis

As in his Newbery Honor-winning debut, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (1963), Curtis draws on a remarkable and disarming mix of comedy and pathos, this time to describe the travails and adventures of a 10-year-old African-American orphan in Depression-era Michigan. Bud is fed up

with the cruel treatment he has received at various foster homes, and after being locked up for the night in a shed with a swarm of angry hornets, he decides to run away. His goal: to reach the man heAon the flimsiest of evidenceAbelieves to be his father, jazz musician Herman E. Calloway. Relying on his own ingenuity and good luck, Bud makes it to Grand Rapids, where his "father" owns a club. Calloway, who is much older and grouchier than Bud imagined, is none too thrilled to meet a boy claiming to be his long-lost son. It is the other members of his bandASteady Eddie, Mr. Jimmy, Doug the Thug, Doo-Doo Bug Cross, Dirty Deed Breed and motherly Miss ThomasAwho make Bud feel like he has finally arrived home. While the grim conditions of the times and the harshness of Bud's circumstances are authentically depicted, Curtis shines on them an aura of hope and optimism. And even when he sets up a daunting scenario, he makes readers laughAfor example, mopping floors for the rejecting Calloway, Bud pretends the mop is "that underwater boat in the book Momma read to me, Twenty Thousand Leaks Under the Sea." Bud's journey, punctuated by Dickensian twists in plot and enlivened by a host of memorable personalities, will keep readers engrossed from first page to last. --*PW*, ages 9-12.

61. HOLES, (& others), Louis Sachar

As further evidence of his family's bad fortune, which they attribute to a curse on a distant relative, Stanley Yelnats is sent to a hellish boys' juvenile detention center in the Texas desert. As punishment, the boys here must each dig a hole every day, five feet deep and five feet across. Ultimately, Stanley "digs up the truth" -- and through his experience, finds his first real friend, a treasure, and a new sense of himself. Winner of the 1998 National Book Award for young people's literature, here is a wildly inventive, darkly humorous tale of crime and punishment -- and redemption.--*Barnes & Noble*

62. MONSTER, (& others), Walter Dean Myers

Steve Harmon, 16, is accused of serving as a lookout for a robbery of a Harlem drugstore. The owner was shot and killed, and now Steve is in prison awaiting trial for murder. From there, he tells about his case and his incarceration. Many elements of this story are familiar, but Myers

keeps it fresh and alive by telling it from an unusual perspective. Steve, an amateur filmmaker, recounts his experiences in the form of a movie screenplay. His striking scene-by-scene narrative of how his life has dramatically changed is riveting. Interspersed within the script are diary entries in which the teen vividly describes the nightmarish conditions of his confinement. Myers expertly presents the many facets of his protagonist's character and readers will find themselves feeling both sympathy and repugnance for him. Steve searches deep within his soul to prove to himself that he is not the "monster" the prosecutor presented him as to the jury. Ultimately, he reconnects with his humanity and regains a moral awareness that he had lost. Christopher Myers's superfluous black-and-white drawings are less successful. Their grainy, unfocused look complements the cinematic quality of the text, but they do little to enhance the story. *Monster* will challenge readers with difficult questions, to which there are no definitive answers. In some respects, the novel is reminiscent of Virginia Walter's *Making Up Megaboy* (DK Ink, 1998), another book enriched by its ambiguity. Like it, *Monster* lends itself well to classroom or group discussion. It's an emotionally charged story that readers will find compelling and disturbing.--
Edward Sullivan, New York Public Library for School Library Journal, grades 7 & up

63. MILLION DOLLAR THROW, (& others), Mike Lupica

Lupica delivers another smooth, well-paced, character-driven novel. Thirteen-year-old Nate Brodie's life would seem to be the stuff of adolescent boys' dreams: he is the star quarterback of his school football team and has a great relationship with his best friend and soulmate, Abby McCall. However, all is not smooth sailing. The Brodies are in danger of losing their home in the economic downturn, and Abby's eyesight is failing due to a rare congenital disease. Nate thinks he may have the opportunity to solve all of his problems when he wins the chance to make a million dollars by throwing a football through a small target during halftime at a pro football game. Unfortunately, his quarterbacking skills suddenly and mysteriously desert him just as he is preparing for his big moment. With the support of his family and friends, he fights his way back and regains the confidence he needs to face the challenges in his life. While the serious issues raised about the effects of economic uncertainty on families are resolved a tad too easily, youngsters are likely to accept this as just a good, entertaining read.—*Richard Luzer, Fair Haven Union High School, VT for School Library Journal, grades 6-8*

64. ANGRY MANAGEMENT, (& others), Chris Crutcher

Crutcher's fans will relish the reunion with some familiar characters in this collection of three stories set in the Pacific Northwest and thematically united around anger. "Kyle Manard and the Craggy Face of the Moon" takes Angus Bethune (*Athletic Shorts*, 1991) and Sarah Byrnes (*Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, 1993) on a road trip to Reno to confront the mother who abandoned her years before. In "Montana Wild," student journalist Montana West (*The Sledding Hill*, 2005) defends her article on medicinal marijuana in a very public shouting match with the right-wing school-board president, who also happens to be her father. "Meet Me at the Gates, Marcus James" unexpectedly binds gay Marcus James, sole black student at his high school, with complexly devout Christian Matt Miller (*Deadline*, 2007) and sympathetic teacher John Simet (*Whale Talk*, 2001), when racist football players hang a pink noose on Marcus's locker. Subthemes packed into the mix include foster care, sexual awakening, body image, and hope, played out through lively plot and dialogue. Too many stereotypical characters weaken the stories' impact, including blindly bureaucratic school administrators and knee-jerk conservative Christians. The unnecessary conceit that all the characters attend an anger management course led by Mr. Nak (*Ironman*, 1995, all HarperCollins) remains undeveloped, and the stories end too abruptly. Despite these flaws, readers will encounter colorful characters and thought-provoking subject matter in a quick read.—*Joyce Adams Burner, National Archives at Kansas City, MO for School Library Journal, grade 9 & up*

65. GODLESS, (& others), Pete Hautman

Starred Review. Hautman knows how to project a voice. In *Sweetblood*, (2003), the voice was that of a diabetic who felt a kinship with vampires. Here, the voice belongs to a disaffected 16-year-old, Jason Block, who decides to invent a new religion with a new god--the town's water tower. Finding converts is surprisingly easy. His small group includes his twitchy friend Shin, a self-styled scribe who is writing the new testament (snippets enticingly appear at the beginning of each chapter), and Henry, a bully who undergoes changes when he is named high priest of the "Chutengodians." In a smartly structured narrative that is by turns funny, worried, and questioning, Jason watches as his once-cohesive little congregation starts wanting to "worship" in its own ways, some of them deadly. Not everything works here. Shin's meltdown doesn't seem

real, even though it has been thoroughly foreshadowed. But most scenes are honest and true to the bone, such as the one in which Jason and Harry agree that their dangerous stunts are worth their weight in memories. Anyone who has questioned his or her religion, especially as a teenager, will respond to Jason's struggles with belief. Many individuals, upon reading this, will consider their own questions once more. *Ilene Cooper for Booklist, grades 7-10*

66. DEADVILLE, (& others), Ron Koertge

Ryan, a high school sophomore, is mourning the death of his younger sister, Molly, by smoking dope, semipermanently connecting to his iPod and disconnecting from his parents. When Charlotte, a popular schoolmate, falls from her horse and into a coma, Ryan is drawn to the hospital to talk to her. During his many visits, he meets the young patient next door who claims he can go to "Deadville" and talk to people in that limbo between life and death, including Charlotte. This prompts Ryan to begin to face his grief and explore the meaning of death. While the teen's introspection slows the pace of the story, Koertge masterfully maintains reader interest with rich, right-on dialogue and details about teen life, attitudes, and relationships. Some of the scenes in which Ryan and his friends get high are funny while others show the problematic consequences of each and every joint. Ryan's metamorphosis is clearly illustrated through changes in his choice of clothes and friends without being trite or clichéd. His choice of music goes from "What's Got Me Down?" by U.S. Mail Band to a Celtic folk song that, when shared with his dad, symbolically bridges the gap between them. *Deadville* provides some realistic, thought-provoking ideas about dealing with the death of a loved one. Readers who enjoyed John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (Dutton, 2005) will find another Miles Pudge Halter in Ryan as he eventually concludes that there are no simple answers about death and accepts that ambiguity.—
Sue Lloyd, Franklin High School Library, Livonia, MI for School Library Journal, grades 10 & up

67. A KISS IN TIME, (& others), Alex Flinn

In the same vein as Flinn's *Beastly*, this clever and humorous retelling of "Sleeping Beauty" follows an aimless American boy who awakens a princess who has been slumbering for 300 years. Jack is on a European tour mandated by his parents ("What they don't tell you about

Europe is how completely lame it is") when he breaks an ancient curse by kissing the slumbering Princess Talia. Instead of rejoicing, she and other awakened members of their magical kingdom are confused and perturbed to find themselves in the 21st century. In order to escape the wrath of her father, who blames her for causing the curse, Talia flees with Jack to his home in Florida. While acclimating to the modern world-cell phones, television, Jell-o shots-the princess manages to charm everyone she meets and help Jack sort out his life. Alternating between the teenagers' distinctive points of view, Flinn skillfully delineates how their upbringings set them apart while drawing parallels between their family conflicts. Fans of happily-ever-after endings will delight in the upbeat resolution, which confirms the notion that "love conquers all." --*Amazon, ages 12 & up.*