

<p><u>An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793</u> by Jim Murphy Clarion, 2003, 165 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>In late summer of 1793, while George Washington lived and held office in a borrowed house in Philadelphia and worried about the United States' relationship with France, a mysterious disease began to cripple the city. First afflicted were the people who lived along the docks, but as temperatures rose and humidity clogged the air, sickness spread rapidly among the bustling population of 50,000 people. Within weeks, those who could afford it, including President Washington, his cabinet, and other public servants, had fled to the countryside. This left only the poor to cope with the ravages of a disease whose source and cure were much debated but ultimately unknown until the 20th century. As the dead piled up and city services broke down, a heroic few, including members of the black community, two or three doctors, and a handful of civic leaders, emerged to handle the crisis. In prose as gripping and suspenseful as a novel, Jim Murphy recounts the story of a city in chaos saved by the superhuman efforts of a minority concerned more about others than themselves. In today's atmosphere heavy with the threat of bioterrorism, <i>An American Plague</i> will have particular resonance for young readers.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Provo, UT</p>	<p><u>The Boy Who Couldn't Die</u> by William Sleator Amulet Books, 2004, 162 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Horror ISBN: 0-8109-4824-9</p> <p>Ken doesn't want to die. Ever. Ken is a teenager who gets everything he wants from his rich parents. But after his friend, Roger, dies in a plane crash, Ken realizes what he wants most of all is to never die. Cheri Buttercup advertises "Freedom from death," and she delivers. When Ken touches a hot pan, he is not burned. When he steals the girlfriend of a bully at school, the bully cannot beat him up. He is invincible. But he is not prepared for the dreams—of being buried alive, of digging up Roger's grave.</p> <p>Ken decides he's ready for the ultimate challenge: to face death. He goes scuba diving on a little island where sharks are known to attack, but Ken comes out unscathed. A new friend, Sabine, discovers his invincible nature. Sabine educates Ken about voodoo, zombies, and the evil magic that has surrounded him. They then fight against Buttercup's evil magic.</p> <p>This book is full of zombies, danger, murder, and creepy twists Sleator is famous for. Just when you think you've solved everything, there's a twist you didn't see coming.</p> <p>Holli Keel Tucson, AZ</p>
<p><u>The Empty Mirror</u> by James Lincoln Collier Bloomsbury Press, 2004, 192 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Mystery ISBN: 1-58234-949-5</p> <p>Imagine waking up one morning feeling not quite like yourself. You take a walk by a pond and when you look in it, you have no reflection. This is the dilemma that faces 13-year-old Nick Hodges. Nick, an orphan being raised by his Uncle Jack, is also being accused of crimes around town that he knows he didn't commit. Confused and upset, Nick can only confide in his friend, Gypsy, an outcast because of her nationality. Determined to find his reflection and the person responsible for ruining his name, Nick learns more about his past and the influenza epidemic that swept his town when he was a baby.</p> <p>With innumerable suspenseful scenes, this book will leave a chill running down anyone's spine. Not only does the book deal with problems teenagers face, such as feeling like you don't fit in, but it also offers a history lesson about a serious time when illness destroyed entire towns. This book has a great story and good ending and will keep you on your toes the whole time.</p> <p>Lyra Heiser-Washington Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><u>The Fattening Hut</u> by Pat Lowery Collins Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003, 186 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Self-image ISBN: 0618309551</p> <p>In the author's notes at the end of <i>The Fattening Hut</i>, Pat Lowery Collins states that she hoped the book will "resonate throughout the human community" (p.186). I would say that she succeeded with her quest.</p> <p>Helen is a 14-year-old native girl of a mythical island now ready to spend time in the fattening hut. Girls are isolated in the hut for fattening before marriage, or in the case of Helen's sister Miduna, while nursing a baby. It is in this hut that the older women will come one night to perform the ritual ceremony of the cutting, female circumcision.</p> <p>This is a powerful tale of adolescent longings, insecurities, and desire for a better life. Hard to imagine, in our culture of thinness, a book about a culture that reveres obesity would speak so strongly. However, this is a book about self-image, self-fulfillment, and self-accomplishment, all concepts with which adolescents struggle.</p> <p>Freida Golden Manhattan, KS</p>

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

<p><i>Going for the Record</i> by Julie A. Swanson Dealing with Terminal Illness/ Soccer Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2004, 217 pp., \$8.00 ISBN: 0-8028-5273-4</p> <p>The summer before her senior year in high school, everything is coming together for Leah Weczynkowski's soccer aspirations. She makes the Olympic Developmental Program's regional team, is invited to a national camp, and is recruited by coaches at major universities. But her self-absorbed dedication to soccer is challenged when she learns her chief supporter, her father, has terminal pancreatic cancer with only three months to live. Leah and her family find themselves on a devastating path as they learn to cope with the illness. They go through fear and anger, denial, hope, bargaining, and resignation. They also have to watch as their father tries to cope with extreme pain and still maintain his sense of control and dignity.</p> <p>Swanson asks hard questions anyone facing suffering must ask. Why is this happening? How can someone deal with pain with dignity? How can people continue their lives faced by the loss of a loved one? How do we deal with the void in our hearts? This may seem to be a predictable novel, but Swanson's story leads us to empathize and to hope we might have their courage to deal with death and loss.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jeanne M. McGlimm Asheville, NC</p>	<p><i>The Golden Hour</i> by Maiya Williams Fantasy/Time Travel Amulet Books, 2004, 272 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-8109-4823-0</p> <p>Rowan and Nina Popplewell's father sends them to spend the summer with their recently deceased mother's eccentric aunts in Maine. They meet twins Xanthe and Xavier and unlock the secrets to abandoned Owatunnauk resort; it becomes a time-travel portal only in the "golden hour," the short period of time between day and night." When Nina flees her grief-filled life, the other three follow her to Paris during the French Revolution. This novel is contemporary fiction, combined with fantasy and historical adventure. The observations Rowan makes add intelligent fun in his "Top Ten Reasons My Life Stinks," which form a loose frame for the plot. Getting lost in the machinations of French intrigue in 1789 makes for rollicking, energetic action and suspense, and the adolescent characters are believable and likeable—a good choice for readers who like a challenge. A sequel is planned by the author, a writer and producer for <i>Rugrats</i> and <i>Mad TV</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Judith Hayn Chicago, IL</p>
<p><i>Hard Times for Jake Smith</i> by Aileen Kilgore Henderson Historical Fiction Milkweed Editions, 2004, 192 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1-57131-648-5</p> <p>In rural Alabama during the Depression, a 12-year-old girl named MaryJAKE soon discovers the cruelty of the financial woes of that time period, when she is left on the side of the road by her family because of their poverty. Hurt and disillusioned by their instructions for her to follow a specific path in the woods, she chooses a different path. She gives herself a new identity as a boy called Jake Smith, because she thinks boys may be treated better. She discovers a widow in need of her help with chores and begins a new life fulfilling her passion for gardening and her love for animals. She gains friendship with a neighbor girl and with a boy who has the same love for gardening. MaryJAKE also finds out secrets she never dreamed possible, resulting from her parents' initial instructions, along with a precious heirloom.</p> <p>Young readers who appreciate historical stories of the 1930s, and who may have a relative or friend who lived during that time, will appreciate the courage and love MaryJAKE possessed for family.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Vicki Boatfield Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>The Haunting of AlaiZabel Cray</i> by Chris Wooding Adventure/Horror Orchard Books, 2004, 304 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 04399546567</p> <p>The shadows and dark alleyways of London are seething with mysterious, frightening horrors that could haunt children in their dreams. The Old Quarter of London creeps with beastly creatures called wych-kin. Townspeople are aware of the unspeakable horrors that stalk London's streets at night, and most hide in their homes and close shop early to avoid inevitable death if one crosses a wych-kin's path. The only ones who can protect the public from these nightmarish creatures are wych hunters. Thaniel is a 17-year-old boy following in his father's footsteps as a legendary wych-hunter. His mentor, Cathaline, helps in his hunts for anything evil that lurks in the shadows. Their lives are changed as they meet a young girl, AlaiZabel, who seems to carry a mysterious and frightful past. Soon, the team of three band together to uncover a sinister plot by London's elite that could destroy London, turning power over to the wych-kin.</p> <p>Readers who like a bit of horror and gore along with a good mystery will enjoy this book. While the wording is sometimes overly descriptive and some terms are confusing, high school-level readers should enjoy it.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Cassandra Haggard Tempe, AZ</p>

<p><i>How I Found the Strong</i> by Margaret McMullen Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, 136 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-618-35008-X</p> <p>Eleven-year-old Shanks Russell watches in frustration as his father, Jack, and older brother, Henry, depart their tiny Mississippi farm for the battlefields of the Civil War, leaving him behind with his mother, grandparents, and their slave, Buck. Although certain that they march off to victory, Shanks isn't as certain about the cause for which they are fighting. As scant news of the war's progress trickles in, Shanks questions the justice of slavery and the South's justification for it. Circumstances become desperate for the Russells; Grandpa abandons them, and Grandma passes away. His mother gives birth to a baby girl, while their food supply dwindles away. Fortunately, Buck foregoes an opportunity to escape northward, which would have doomed the remaining Russells to starvation.</p> <p>Jack Russell returns from the war as hostility toward Negroes (now freed by the Emancipation Proclamation) escalates, and lynch mobs roam the countryside. Shanks risks his life to defend Buck from a lynch mob, inspiring his father to help Buck, too.</p> <p><i>How I Found the Strong</i> is a stomach-churning look at life during the Civil War through the eyes of a boy journeying toward manhood. It is a compelling story about a trying time in American history.</p> <p>Ann Opseth Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Jingle Boy</i> by Kieran Scott Delacorte Press, 2003, 230 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>Fiction/Christmas ISBN: 0-385-73223-2</p> <p>Paul and his family adore Christmas, with their various decorations and traditions redefining "ostentatious." This year, 17-year-old Paul's cheer sours after purchasing an expensive necklace for his girlfriend, then seeing her kissing the mall Santa in the parking lot and being summarily dumped.</p> <p>Worse, his father is injured while decorating, setting their house ablaze, and his mother loses her job. In anger, Paul joins the "Anti-Christmas Underground," all students with past negative holidays.</p> <p>The group initially engages in minor vandalism, but after escalating to planning serious criminal activities, Paul realizes his anger is from personal, not seasonal, problems. He exits the group with renewed spirits and decorates their refurbished house before his father's hospital homecoming.</p> <p>Narrated by Paul, this story begins sharply but numerous plot contrivances (Santa advises Paul, he discovers his mother's boss and mall Santa stealing, causing his rival's comeuppance and mother's promotion, etc.) turn this into a frothy read. The absence of season commercialism issues and religious diversity (possible discussion topics) further lighten the story, but those seeking an amusing Christmas novel with only happy endings will enjoy this fast, easy read.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>
<p><i>A Killing in Plymouth Colony</i> by Carol Otis Hurst and Rebecca Otis Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, 148 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Mystery/Puritanism ISBN: 0-618-27597-5</p> <p>Based on an actual murder case in Plymouth Colony in 1630, this novel explores the mystery surrounding the crime through the eyes of 11-year-old John Bradford, the son of Governor William Bradford.</p> <p>As historical fiction, the book provides an interesting view of Puritan culture. The novel explores the community's expectations of its children, gender roles, approaches to punishment, and systems of governance. And despite the historical environment, our protagonist struggles with issues contemporary adolescents should find familiar. He wants to prove himself in the eyes of the community, and he especially craves the attention and approval of his distant father. As a murder mystery, <i>A Killing in Plymouth Colony</i> contrasts the way the children and the adults identify suspects and work toward a predictable resolution.</p> <p>The novel is best suited to middle school students. It would be a good text to pair with historical studies of the Puritans and the early colonial period, perhaps even a good read-aloud choice for students exploring that time period.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Kings are Already Here</i> by Garret Freymann-Weyr Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003, 149 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Friendship/Determination ISBN: 0618263632</p> <p>Phebe, a ballet dancer, and Nikolai, a chess player, are searching for their futures. Each is talented and at the defining moment of their lives. Phebe must make a decision about dancing when she seems to have lost the passion. Nikolai is looking for Stass, a master chess player, to help him move beyond his current skill level. Both meet through Phebe's father, a diplomat in Switzerland. Phebe spends the summer to reflect on her dancing, and Nikolai has been taken in because his father has disappeared.</p> <p>Nikolai is not interested in becoming world champion, but he wants to play chess beautifully. Phebe has only been taught to crave the spotlight, not to dance for the sake of dancing well, and thus the differences make it difficult for them to become friends.</p> <p>The book moves back and forth between the two characters' stories, but it is easy to follow. As each character is drawn into the other's problem, they find friendship and a way to move on with their lives, neither finding what they originally thought they required.</p> <p>Freida Golden Manhattan, KS</p>

<p><i>The Last of the Roundup Boys</i> by Debra Seely</p> <p>Holiday House, 2004, 228 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-8234-1814-6</p> <p>A sequel to <i>Grasslands</i>, <i>The Last of the Roundup Boys</i> explores gender issues against the backdrop of the Kansas prairie in the years following the Civil War. The novel is told from two points of view: Tom, a young man transplanted to the harsh Kansas environment from a more privileged Virginia upbringing, and Evie, the daughter of the prosperous rancher for whom Tom is employed. Through the eyes of these young people we trace the development of their emerging relationship, but we also explore their resistance to the accepted gender roles of the day. While her family expects her to conform to traditional norms, Evie wants to work the ranch. And his relationship with Evie helps Tom learn to adapt his own expectations regarding gender.</p> <p><i>The Last of the Roundup Boys</i> is a nice historical novel, exploring the need for personal growth in response to the societal change.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Legacy of Gloria Russell</i> by Sheri L. Gilbert</p> <p>Random House, 2004, 224 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Adventure ISBN: 0375828230</p> <p>Set in the sleepy town of Kelseyville, Missouri, and the majestic Ozark Mountains, <i>The Legacy of Gloria Russell</i> tells of Billy James, 12, as he struggles with the sudden death of his best friend, Gloria. Questions surrounding Gloria's death plague Billy, who begins to uncover mysteries surrounding his own family. So, Billy sets off on a quest where his friendships are challenged, his family begins to break apart, and he faces the socially discarded and puzzling Josef Satan. In the end, Billy's daring voyage takes him on a journey of self discovery through the vast green wilderness of the Ozarks as he unearths, not only the answers to Gloria's death, but also the secrets Kelseyville has been keeping for decades.</p> <p>Readers will enjoy this fast-paced, heartwarming novel. By weaving the beauty and awe of nature with the meaning of friendship and family, Gilbert shows how powerful one voice can be when others are in need. Billy's search for truth brings him closer to understanding the death of someone he loved, while teaching him the importance of thinking for himself and carving his own path in life.</p> <p>Jason Corbett Tempe, AZ</p>
<p><i>Letting Go of Bobby James, Or How I Found My Self of Steam</i></p> <p>Self-discovery</p> <p>by Valerie Hobbs</p> <p>Frances Foster Books, 2004, 144 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>ISBN: 0374343845</p> <p>This is a great read! If you are not from Texas, the accent might hold you back from getting into the book. However, it doesn't take you very long before you settle in to the accent.</p> <p>The opening pages are a letter written by Jody, the main character in the book. Her full name is Sally Jo Walker, a 16-year-old newlywed who has been slapped one too many times by her husband, Bobby James Walker. The last name Walker is great symbolism for the couple. He impatiently leaves her while she is in a gas station/convenience store bathroom, but she doesn't wait around for him and takes the next bus wherever it is going.</p> <p>The last stop is Jackson Beach, Florida, where Jody finds her self of steam. She sleeps in the movie house at night and works at Theina's Cafe by day. Eventually she makes friends with the mentally challenged character Dooley and Effaline, a 15-year-old pregnant runaway. This is a coming of age sort of book that captivated me.</p> <p>Sherri Stradling Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>North of Everything</i> by Craig Crist-Evans</p> <p>Dealing with Terminal Illness/ Cycle of Rebirth</p> <p>Candlewick Press, 2004, 80 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>ISBN: 0-7636-2098-X</p> <p>Poet Crist-Evans uses sparse, but evocative, language to create an emotional response in this verse-novel about rebirth and hope. The prologue introduces this theme by describing the cycle of the seasons "north of everything" where fall turns to winter and then spring. This seasonal change is a symbol of the cycle of death, birth, and rebirth which the young narrator encounters during several years in his life when his family moves from Miami, Florida, to a farm along the banks of the Winooski in Vermont. They start over and are happy working the land and then expecting a new baby, until the father is diagnosed with cancer.</p> <p>Each person in the family deals with the reality of death in different ways, but in the end they find the courage to go on, realizing that "Dad's spirit lives/in every blade of grass,/in every tree, in all the ways/we learn to keep on breathing."</p> <p>This touching verse-novel will remind readers of several other recently published books which use poetry to tell a story, such as <i>Almost Forever</i> by Maria Testa and <i>Out of the Dust</i> and <i>Aleutian Sparrow</i> by Karen Hesse.</p> <p>Jeanne M. McClinn Asheville, NC</p>

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<p><i>Nightmare</i> by Joan Lowery Nixon Delacourte Press, 2003, 166 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Mystery ISBN: 0-385-73026-8</p> <p>With <i>Nightmare</i>, Joan Lowery Nixon delivers another fast-paced mystery. Troubled by a recurring nightmare that hints at murder, Emily Wood is a classic underachiever in a family that emphasizes success. To address her lack of motivation, her parents send Emily to Camp Excel, a summer camp developed by a famous educator to motivate adolescents to achieve to their potential.</p> <p>At Camp Excel, Emily learns that her nightmares are the result of an all-too-real event she witnessed as a child, and someone at Camp Excel was involved. Emily realizes she is in danger, but she is not sure who she can trust. Suspense mounts when another student at Camp Excel is attacked, and Emily is convinced she was the intended victim.</p> <p><i>Nightmare</i> is an enjoyable mystery, best suited to middle school students and struggling readers.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Ostrich Eye</i> by Beth Cooley Delacorte Press, 2004, 180 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Trust ISBN: 0-385-90132-1 (GLB)</p> <p>In the ninth grade, Ginger is almost six feet tall. She inherited her height from her father, whom she doesn't remember at all because he left for good when she was three.</p> <p>Ginger lives with her mother, Renee, her stepfather, Tony, and her 7-year-old half-sister Vivian who is the apple of Renee and Tony's eyes. <i>Ostrich Eye</i> tells the story of this blended family through the perspective of a responsible teen-ager searching for her own identity in her family and in her young adulthood when the tall blonde stranger begins to show up around town. Ginger begins to wonder if the man is following her and if he might possibly be the father she has not seen for so many years. Poor communication between Ginger and her mother results in disaster; the novel shows danger does not always come with a clear warning.</p> <p>This poignant novel tells a gripping story of adolescence and misplaced trust. Intended for readers aged 12 and up, it is realistic and unsettling and will keep its readers thinking well after they have put down the book.</p> <p>Susan Malarkey Mesa, AZ</p>
<p><i>Our Time on the River</i> by Don Brown Houghton Mifflin, 2003, 135 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Coming of Age/Adventure ISBN: 0-618-31116-5</p> <p>College freshman David returns home during December 1968 with shocking news: he's quit school, enlisted in the army, and wants to fight in Vietnam. This information is poorly received by his parents, and heightens David's estrangement with Steve, his 14-year-old brother. At their father's suggestion, the brothers reluctantly embark on a summer canoe trip before David ships out in September. As hoped, their shared trip experiences create a brotherly bond.</p> <p>Steve's subsequent fear for David translates into poor school performance, and after David's unit is hit, David returns with a possible hearing loss and uncertain future. Reminiscing about their trip and planning another provides hope for both boys.</p> <p>Steve narrates this slice-of-life story through short, fast-paced chapters. Still, one voice lessens character development, notably David's, as reasons for his initial disdain of Steve and enlistment are vague and contradictory. Moreover, as the canoe trip is the story's focus, Vietnam era details are sketchy, creating a setting largely devoid of this period's historical and emotional contexts.</p> <p>Middle-level boys should easily identify with these brothers who mirror themselves and their peers. Vietnam era explanations will enhance understanding of the story's setting and events.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>	<p><i>Peak Survival</i> by Pam Withers Walrus Books, 2004, 155 pp., \$6.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Adventure ISBN: 1-55285-530-9</p> <p>Visiting British Columbia during spring break, 15-year-old Peter Montpetit, a type-A personality, is stoked to be with friends Jake Evans and Moses Wilson as they embark on a ski/snowboard adventure. Eagle Heli-Ski Tours will helicopter them to a remote peak, where they will test their skills hoping to become Junior Guides. Before they begin skiing, the boys spot a rival company's helicopter and watch in horror as its rotors clip a cliff, and the aircraft makes a spiral slide down the mountain. Zooming to help rescue the passengers, they uncover two bodies and one survivor, Fiona, a teen girl from Britain, who happens to be a champion snowboarder. From this initial disaster, the four teens survive an avalanche, sit out a blizzard for two nights in a snow cave, and must escape from a plunge into an ice crevasse. Although this short book accentuates a number of death-defying scenes, the story is balanced when the teens are forced to cooperate and use their talents to survive the freezing wilderness. Teens, especially reluctant readers, will enjoy this fast-paced action novel marked by cliffhanging chapters and realistic snowboarding and skiing action.</p> <p>Rollie Welch Cleveland, OH</p>

<p><i>The Presence: A Ghost Story</i> by Eye Bunning Clarion Books, 2003, 195 pp., \$15.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mystery ISBN: 0-618-26919-3</p> <p>Catherine flies to California to spend Christmas with her grandmother, while her parents are in Europe. Her grandmother takes her to church, where the grandmother volunteers. The ancient church, with stained glass windows, feels cold, although the day is warm. As Catherine explores the gallery, someone calls her name.</p> <p>After they leave the church, a former church member, Lottie Lovelace, tells Catherine to run away from the church. When Catherine visits Miss Lovelace's home, there is a picture that looks like Catherine in the entryway. Later, another member mistakes Catherine for her missing daughter. Intrigued by the coincidences, Catherine is determined to find out the mystery of the church.</p> <p>Before you book talk <i>The Presence</i>, purchase several copies. Middle school students will love this ghost story.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>The Purple Emperor</i> by Herbie Brennan Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2004, 429 pp., \$17.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fantasy/Adventure ISBN: 1582348804</p> <p>After jumping into Brennan's series without his first installment entitled <i>Faerie Wars</i>, I was pleasantly surprised at this piece of young adult fiction. The story is fast paced yet still offers a mature and scientific view of Brennan's created fairy world. I would recommend reading the first book before diving into this one, because Brennan does not spend a lot of time filling his readers in on what happened in the last novel.</p> <p>Brennan's readers are brought back to the Realm of the Faerie right before Prince Pygrus is to take the place as Emperor. (Pygrus' father had been murdered at the end of the previous novel.) The evil faerie of the night, Lord Hairstreak, returns to cause trouble by resurrecting the old emperor's body from the dead. The Emperor returns to the palace with a document demanding his other son, Comma, to be crowned the new king and for Pygrus and his sister, Blue, to be banished from the palace and surrounding kingdom. The novel has a nice rhythm of switching between the many characters, from Henry, the young earth boy who has fallen in love with Blue, to Brimstone, an old associate of Hairstreak and faerie of the night. The many diverse characters take the reader on a fabulous journey where greed seems to be the downfall of the evil characters. Readers should be mature enough to handle issues such as death and gruesome violence.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Nicole Schrecke Tempe, AZ</p>
<p><i>Summer Boys</i> by Hailey Abbott Scholastic, 2004, 214 pp., \$8.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romance ISBN: 0-439-54020-8</p> <p>Just outside of Maine Pebble Beach became a ritual summer getaway for the Tuttle family. Extended family would come and go, but the summer truly belonged to the girls: Jamie, Ella, Keisi, and Beth were all cousins around the same age and spent most of their year looking forward to those magical seven weeks at Pebble Beach. The four cousins endure a roller coaster of emotions during their stay. Jamie suffers a broken heart</p> <p><i>Summer Boys</i> chronicles the classic coming of age tale of teenage romance that involves love, jealousy, betrayal, envy, and heartache. It demonstrates how relationships during the summer can be so fleeting and how at times even the most sensitive teen can emerge resiliently from disappointment.</p> <p>By summer's end each girl goes home a little wiser, confident, and more self aware than before. The girls each in their own way experience their first boy, first love, and first time. True romantics at heart will absolutely love this novel. It does however contain adult content and is recommended for an older reading audience.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jessica Segura Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story</i> by Pegi Deitz Shea Clarion Books, 2003, 236 pp., \$15.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Immigration ISBN: 0-618-24748-3</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Mai and her grandma were able to escape Laos following the massacre of her parents, but the Thai refugee camp where they have lived for the past 10 years has hardly been a refuge. They have endured the pangs of hunger brought on by too little food for the tens of thousands of people living there, the brutality of the soldiers who watch their every move, as well as separation from their only remaining relatives.</p> <p>But now, they are finally able to join Mai's uncle and his family in America. The adjustment to life in a foreign country, its new language, strange culture, food, and religious practices, however, threaten to break the spirit of Grandma Yang, while causing hope, excitement, and confusion for young Mai.</p> <p>Their story is preserved on the fabric of pà'ndau, the ancient Hmong art of embroidery skillfully stitched by Grandma and lovingly passed on to Mai. It serves as the common thread that sustains their memories of the past and Mai's hopes for the future.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ingrid Seitz, Manhattan, KS</p>

<p>Truck Dogs: A Novel in Four Bites by Graeme Base Adventure/Dogs//Science Fiction Amulet Books, 2004, 145 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-8109-5031-6</p> <p>A lot of ingenuity went into this book for middle readers of a world peopled by amalgams between machinery and animals. It is the hero's story about mongrel town dogs helping save the town from another town's "bad dogs." The writer is Australian; any older reader may notice almost exact duplications from the film, "The Road Warrior." In the film, a "feral child" throws a boomerang; here, our dog hero throws a "spanner" (wrench).</p> <p>Middle readers, especially those interested in art, might really enjoy this tale, with its old man with wisdom, its young hero, and color plates that show how the dogs and the vehicles are put together. The idea itself is quite original. Instead of chapters, the book has "bites," and some of the dogs are a Jack Russell, Great Dane, Irish Setter, and a Mastiff, all joined in some way to bulldozers, ore trucks, a Ford 50 pickup, a Land Rover, and a tractor, among many.</p> <p>The story takes place in the future; otherwise, this is a Mad Max/Kung Fu meets Lassie. It is worth a glance or two, and the cover is great.</p> <p>John Jacob Oak Park, IL</p>	<p>TTYL by Lauren Myracle Amulet Books, 2004, 209 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>TTYL (Instant Messaging for "talk to you later") follows the relationships of three 10th-graders—Angela (<i>SnowAngel</i>), Maddie (<i>mad maddie</i>), and Zoe (zoegirl). They've been best friends since seventh grade and are determined to weather the storms of their sophomore year together, including potential boyfriends, driver's license tests, a too-friendly English teacher, and social cliques.</p> <p>Their story is told through Instant Messages between the three girls (including emoticons, Net lingo, and even stage directions like *shoots daggers with eyes*), so dialogue essentially carries the action of the story. Fortunately, Myracle pulls off three distinct characters and voices (Angela, who always has a crush; Maddie, who wants so badly to be accepted by the in-crowd; and Zoe, the sheltered good girl who's tired of being good). Conflicts happen within and without the circle, but mutual respect and loyalty win out.</p> <p>TTYL will appeal to teenage girls who can relate to both the format and the struggles experienced by Myracle's friends. Several expletives and references to sex and anatomy, though appropriate in the context, may be a point of consideration for some libraries.</p> <p>Melissa Moore Jackson, TN</p>
<p>The Unseen by Zilpha Keatley Snyder Delacorte Press, 2004, 199 pps. \$15.95</p> <p>One day while wondering through the forest—which she is forbidden from—Alexandra "Xandra" Hobson hears gunfire, soon noticing a beautiful white bird has been shot. Before the hunters can grab it, Xandra takes the bird and runs through the forest. Though she has no idea what kind of bird it may be, Xandra takes it to her home to nurse it to health, as she has secretly done so before in the basement with other animals. The next day, however, she finds the bird is missing leaving a feather, which later becomes a "key" to the "unseen" world.</p> <p>To learn more about this "key," Xandra must talk to the "weird" girl, Belinda, whose grandfather has knowledge of such supernatural things. Xandra becomes hesitant in talking to Belinda, but the two become friends and learn much about each other, and Xandra experiences the "unseen" world, as well. Though Snyder writes few scenes in which Xandra experiences the "unseen," the story follows Xandra's experience in becoming humbler, closer to her siblings, and experiencing a life she isn't used to—Belinda's life and the "unseen."</p> <p>Felipe Baez Tempe, AZ</p>	<p>Wake Up Our Souls by Tonya Bolden Historical Nonfiction/Black American Artists Harry N. Abrams/Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2004, 128 pp., \$24.95</p> <p>More than 30 black American artists whose works span from the late 18th century to the present are profiled in this colorful and informative compilation, published in association with the Smithsonian Art Museum.</p> <p>The approximately 45 reproduced works reflect a wide range of mediums (e.g. photography, painting), styles (realism to abstraction), and subjects (people, nature, etc.), and are accompanied by extended, descriptive captions.</p> <p>The artists' artworks are distributed among three chapters, with each containing information about the profiled artists' lives and works along with the notable historical events of their eras, effectively highlighting black Americans' priceless contributions to the visual arts.</p> <p>Although the text is clearly geared toward middle-level students, older readers would also find it appealing, albeit with a longer, more comprehensive narrative. Also featured are a glossary, notes, bibliography, and reading list, each extensive and current. This interesting, focused compilation is a significant tribute to black artists and would be valuable to art, English, and social studies classes, perhaps inviting shared units of study.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>

<p><i>What a Song Can Do: 12 Riffs on the Power of Music</i> by Jennifer Armstrong Knopf, 2004, 208 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>ISBN: 0-375-84299-5</p> <p>Music</p> <p>“Theme” is a term used in literature and music; but in Jennifer Armstrong’s compilation of short stories, she conflates the two and successfully shows the universalities of music. It was most refreshing to find these stories did not all portray music as the great healer of all the world’s pains. In Ann Manheimer’s “Riffs,” she tells the story of a boy named Lee who is torn by the dilemma of playing with his band, or caring for his hospitalized mother. The ‘riff’ is not entirely internal, however; Lee’s father is adamant about him staying home.</p> <p>Naturally, there are stories about the very real, binding quality of music. In Dian Curtis Regan’s “Tangled Notes in a Watermelon,” Cora is afflicted with <i>synesthesia</i>, a condition that causes Cora and her late grandmother to see colors and objects while they hear music. This story, about mourning and also a crush, is served on a table made of surrealism.</p> <p>As with any collection, some entries are simply less palpable than others. Some are a bit flattened by instances of bland narrative voices, trite dialogue, and underhanded preachiness. With that being said, the biggest success in this book is the deliberate circumspection that Armstrong took in the compilation.</p> <p>Edward A. Wade Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Words West: Voices of Young Pioneers</i> by Ginger Wadsworth Clarion Books, 2003, 191 pp., \$18.00</p> <p>Non-fiction/Pioneer Life</p> <p>ISBN: 0-618-23475-6</p> <p><i>Words West</i> is a significant achievement in non-fiction for young adults. Wadsworth organizes her treatment of 19th century westward migration according to the concerns and hardships faced by overland pioneers, devoting chapters to issues like “chores and chow” and “life, death, and accidents.”</p> <p>Woven through her discussion of each topic is a colorful set of excerpts from the diaries, letters, and memoirs of young people making the journey. These quotations breathe life into the narrative and make it much more appealing to adolescent readers. Also, the book benefits from the generous inclusion of historical photographs.</p> <p>Wadsworth covers the full range of experience associated with this aspect of American history. Readers come away with a clear sense of the beauty, tragedy, fear, and work endured by those traveling the major westward trails.</p> <p>Ideally suited for interdisciplinary studies, <i>Words West</i> should appeal to students interested in history or the American West.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>The Young Man and the Sea</i> by Rodman Philbrick Blue Sky Press (imprint of Scholastic), 2004, 192 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Fishing/Survival ISBN: 0-439-36829-4</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Samuel “Skiff” Beaman Jr. is a determined young man trying to survive after his mother’s recent death. Skiff is forced to become an adult as he desperately tries to get his father to get back into the family fishing business.</p> <p>Skiff raises the Mary Rose after it sunk with the help of a kindly old man, Mr. Woodwell. Amos Woodwell instructs Skiff as how to raise the boat and once done, proceeds to do the necessary repairs but does not have the money to repair the diesel motor. Skiff decides to earn money trapping lobsters for the repairs on Mary Rose.</p> <p>One day he sees an amateur fisherman who caught a large tuna. Samuel makes the decision to solve his financial problems by going after tuna. Twenty-five miles out to sea, he runs into thick fog and realizes he has forgotten a fog horn. He makes the best of his situation by putting out baits for the tuna. He is ready to head home after his realizes his foolish mistakes of not taking enough bait and not being as prepared as he should have been.</p> <p>Jo Ann Yazzie Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review, send a copy of the book to:</i></p> <p>Lori Goodson 409 Chery Circle Manhattan, KS 66503</p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p>

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