

What's New in Young Adult Literature Update, June 2014

Michael Cart

Realistic Fiction

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *The Impossible Knife of Memory*. Viking. 2014. 304 p. \$18.99. ISBN: 9780670012091. Gr. 9-12

One of our most popular YA authors has written a semi-autobiographical story about a girl named Haley, whose former soldier father after tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Unfortunately rather than getting professional help, he is self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. With her mother dead, it's squarely up to seventeen-year-old Haley to try to save him from oblivion. Fortunately she has the emotional support of her boyfriend Finn but he has family troubles of his own and the teens' respective traumas threaten to destroy their relationship. In the meantime Haley's father is threatening to destroy himself. Can Haley possibly save him? Starkly realistic and emotionally devastating this is one of Anderson's most powerful novels.

Bedford, Martin. *Never Ending*. Random/Wendy Lamb. 2014. 291 p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780385739917. Gr. 7-12

Haunted by guilt, overwhelmed by grief and blaming herself for the death of her younger brother Declan, fifteen-year-old Shiv becomes an in-patient at the Korsakoff Clinic with five other young people who, like her, have suffered loss for which they blame themselves. The story moves backward and forward in time as Shiv undergoes unconventional therapy at the Clinic and recalls her family's vacation in Greece where tragedy befell them. She also recalls the handsome Greek boy Nikos with whom both she and her brother were enamored and whose late-night motorcycle race ended in tragedy. A thoughtful and thought-provoking study in love and loss from British author Bedford.

Brown, Jennifer. *Torn Away*. Little, Brown. 2014. 288p. \$18.00. ISBN: 9780316245531. Gr. 7-12

When a tornado strikes teenage Jersey's small Missouri town, her mother and sister are killed. Unable to cope with the loss, Jersey's stepfather sends her to live with her alcoholic biological father and his horrible family. Cinderella-like she is treated badly by her cruel stepmother and – dare I say it – evil stepsisters. There is no prince with a slipper to save Jersey, however, and she flees from her unbearable home to wind up with her mother's estranged parents whom she has been raised to hate. But, of course, she hasn't had the full story. Will the truth be enough to help her start over? Brown's novel does an excellent job of dramatizing the horrors of the storm and the devastation – physical and emotional – it leaves in its wake. She also does a fine job of characterization and though the situation with the stepmother and stepsisters is a bit over the top, it will resonate with most readers.

Caletti, Deb. *The Last Forever*. S&S/Pulse. 2014. 321p. \$17.00. ISBN: 9781442450004. Gr. 8-12

Seventeen-year-old Tessa's mother has died of cancer leaving behind her an exceedingly rare plant called a pixiebell, which she had vowed would never die on her watch. But nothing lasts forever. Or does it? To recover their emotional equilibrium, Tessa's pot-smoking father decides

they should take an impromptu trip to the Grand Canyon. Tessa, of course, takes the delicate plant with her but, to her chagrin, the plant begins to die when the father essentially abandons Tessa to her paternal grandmother in Washington state. Enter Henry Lark who -- along with the staff of the local library (yay!)-- is determined to help Tessa. Will they succeed and will Henry and Tessa's friendship grow into something more meaningful? National Book Award finalist Caletti has done a superb job of providing answers and showing that there are very real possibilities not only to survive but also to flourish.

Carleson, J. C. *The Tyrant's Daughter*. Knopf. 2014. 295 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780449809976. Gr. 9-12

Fifteen-year-old Laila's father was King of an unnamed Middle Eastern country before being murdered in a coup. The girl, her mother, and her younger brother, who is now crown prince, flee into exile and take up residence in modest quarters in suburban Washington, D.C. While Laila struggles to acculturate in her new school, her mother plots and schemes to restore her young son to the throne. Politics makes strange bedfellows and Laila's mother finds unlikely allies in a group of local rebels, one of whom, a young man, befriends Laila and, of course, a romance ensues. This is a fine novel with an unusual – and timely -- premise (think Saddam Hussein and others like him). The author is a former CIA agent and she clearly knows the territory bringing verisimilitude and ripped-from-the-headlines context to her captivating story.

Combs, Sarah. *Breakfast Served Anytime*. Candlewick. 2014. 272p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780763667917. Gr. 7-10

Spending four weeks of the summer before her senior year at a Kentucky camp for gifted and talented students (familarly known as “geek camp”), Gloria struggles with the recent loss of her grandmother and familiar coming-of-age issues. She meets and bonds with three other campers (Chloe, Calvin and Mason) and together the kids face challenges and forge opportunities, enjoying the security of being themselves with each other. Combs' first novel is a well-done, character-driven novel of friendship and, yes, romance. I enjoyed it.

Dellaira, Ava. *Love Letters to the Dead*. Farrar. 2014. 327p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780374346676. Gr. 7-10

In the wake of her beloved older sister's death, high school freshman Laurel begins writing letters to famous dead people such as Kurt Cobain, Judy Garland, Heath Ledger, poets e. e. cummings and Elizabeth Bishop and more. As the letters become more intense, we learn about Laurel's deep love for her sister, her feelings of guilt at the girl's death (the cause of which is kept secret until near the end of the book), her infatuation with Sky, the mysterious new boy in school, her mother's troubling absence and more. This emotionally intense and beautifully written story is a first novel that has been getting starred reviews. I confess that while I admire the narrative conceit, I found the book slow paced and the sometimes over the top emotionality exasperating. But, then, I'm a male reader and this is quintessentially a book for female readers

Flood, C. J. *Infinite Sky*. Atheneum. 2014. 256p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781481406581. Gr. 9-12

Here is another first novel, this one from England, which provides its rural setting. Three months after thirteen-year-old Iris's mother has left the family to find herself, a caravan of Irish Travelers appears and sets up camp illegally in the paddock adjacent to Iris's family's house. The girl's heavy-drinking, irascible father plots ways to evict the travelers even as Iris meets and

secretly befriends the Traveler family's fourteen-year-old son and soon the friendship may be turning into something deeper. In the meantime, Iris's older brother Sam, who has shaved his head and begun running with a crowd of dangerous kids, begins to focus his destructive anger on the Travelers. Heavily foreshadowed tragedy ensues and prompts the haunting question, Is it possible to keep loving somebody when they kill someone you love?

Han, Jenny. *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*. S&S. 2014. 368p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781442426702. Gr. 9-12

Sixteen-year-old Lara Jean has been in the habit of writing romantic goodbye letters to boys with whom she has fallen out of love. She never mails them but then, by accident, they *are* mailed and Lara Jean has to deal with the fallout, especially that regarding her older sister's ex-boyfriend Josh, with whom Lara Jean had been in love first. To convince Josh that she's now over him (or is she?), she begins a pretend romance with Peter, another letter recipient. Peter goes along with the ruse to make his own ex-girlfriend jealous. Of course, very quickly the question becomes is it really a ruse? And who does Lara Jean really love, Josh or Peter? While there are obviously elements of romance here, the novel is also a family story. With her older sister leaving for college, Lara Jean has to assume new responsibility for her younger sister Kitty and her widower father, still bereft after the death of his wife (and the girls' mother) three years before the story starts. All of this is handled extremely well and half-Korean Lara Jean is a wonderfully offbeat, though occasionally naïve, protagonist.

Hattermer, Kate. *The Vigilante Poets of Selwyn Academy*. Knopf. 2014. 323p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780385753784. Gr. 8-11

When their school, the prestigious Selwyn Academy for the Arts, decides to host a TV reality show of dubious distinction, eleventh-grader Ethan – a self-described member of the Untalented Caste (that's c-a-s-t-e)-- three of his friends and a plucky gerbil named Baconaisse (don't ask) team up to save the school and its students from commercial exploitation. The four teens launch a subversive anti-show campaign involving the creation of an epic poem inspired by Ezra Pound's Cantos; they call their poem Contracantos and print and distribute it on the sly. All goes swimmingly until one of the four goes over to the dark side. Hattermer's first novel is a hilarious – and literary – romp with a page-turning plot, a host of bad guys, including the assistant principal (boo, hiss), and in Ethan and his buds engaging good guys, whose sensibilities are, well, impeccable.

Hubbard, Jenny. *And We Stay*. Delacorte. 2014. 240 p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780385740579. Gr. 9-12
After Emily's ex-boyfriend Paul kills himself in front of her in the school library, she is sent to a private school in Amherst, the home of another Emily, acclaimed poet Emily Dickinson – appropriately so, since our Emily is herself a gifted poet, whose poems grace and enrich the pages of the novel. Emily struggles to keep the circumstances of Paul's death a secret along with another closely guarded secret: she was pregnant with Paul's baby, which she subsequently aborted. The novel charts the course of Emily's emotional healing, fueled in large part, by the creation of her autobiographical poems, inspired by those of her idol, poet Dickinson. This is a first-rate, character-driven work of literary fiction that will captivate serious readers and, perhaps, inspire them to create poetry of their own.

Kantor, Melissa. *Maybe One Day*. HarperTeen. 2014. 386p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062279200. Gr. 8-11

When best friends Zoe and Olivia are cut from their elite New York City ballet school, they agree this is the worst thing that could possibly happen to them. Unfortunately, they're wrong, for Olivia gets leukemia and her life becomes a daily struggle for survival. Zoe is supportive even as she tries to craft a life of her own without the presence of her best friend, finding – to her distress – that she is falling for Olivia's boyfriend. Author Kantor manages this emotion-charged material without being maudlin or sentimental – though she comes close with the beatific character of Olivia, who reminded me of another Olivia – de Havilland in her signature role as Melanie in *Gone with the Wind*. Recommend this well-crafted title to fans of John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Kaufman, Sashi. *The Other Way Around*. Carolrhoda/Lab. 2014. 288p. \$17.95. ISBN: 9781467702621. Gr. 8-12

Beset and besieged at both home and at school – he's one of the few boys at a former girls' boarding school where his mother is headmistress – sixteen-year-old Andrew decides to run away from home. At the bus station he meets a group of older dumpster-diving, street busking teens who call themselves the Freegans and impulsively decides to join them on a road trip in their old beat-up van across country to New Mexico. The result is a combination of road trip and coming of age novel as Andrew comes to know his traveling companions and, yes, to fall in love with one of them, Emily, she of the blonde dreadlocks and bare midriff. Ultimately while the road may go ever on, Andrew's trip does not and, wiser and more mature, he returns home for a reconciliation with his estranged mom. Kaufman's first novel is an offbeat, intriguing coming of age story with a memorable cast of characters and non-didactic life lessons.

Kiely, Brendan. *The Gospel of Winter*. S&S/McElderry. 2014. 304 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781442484894. Gr. 9-12

Sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is the topical subject of this hard-edged novel set in Boston in 2001-2002. Sixteen-year-old Aidan's privileged family is falling apart; his philandering father is in Europe while his mother's whole life revolves around throwing the perfect party. For comfort the boy turns to Adderall abuse and his relationship with his parish priest Father Greg, who has been sexually abusing him. Aidan is overwhelmed with a sense of betrayal when he secretly observes Father Greg in an intimate moment with a younger boy. In the meantime he discovers his friend Mark, who is gay, is undergoing the same emotional crisis. Will they somehow be able to stop Father Greg's predatory behavior? Kiely's first novel is an emotionally intense cautionary tale about a situation that has generated headlines internationally. I highly recommend it.

Kuehn, Stephanie. *Complicit*. St. Martin's/Griffin. 2014. 224p. \$18.99. ISBN: 9781250044594. Gr. 9-12

After two years in jail for setting a barn on fire and severely injuring another girl, Jamie's older sister, Cate, is released, bringing back to him a flood of troubling memories about his younger life. He and Cate were adopted after their single mother was reportedly murdered. But was she? Can he find the truth in his buried memories? And how will he deal with his own emotional problems, exacerbated by Cate's prospective return? He suffers from periodic bouts of memory

loss and, worse, from something called “idiopathic cataplexy,” the total numbness of his hands. Kuehn’s first novel – this is her second – *Charm & Strange* was a winner of the William C. Morris Award and this psychological thriller is every bit its equal.

Lockhart, E. *We Were Liars*. Delacorte. 2014. 225 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780385740579. Gr. 7-12
Cadence Sinclair Eastman is the oldest granddaughter of a celebrated and wealthy family which summers on a private island off the coast of Massachusetts. There Cadence is reunited annually with her two cousins – Johnny and Mirren -- and their best friend, an Indian-American boy named Gat, the son of the boyfriend of one of Cadence’s aunts. Cadence – or Cady as she’s called – and Gat fall in love the summer they turn fifteen. But that’s also the summer that, after a mysterious accident, Cady is found in the coastal water unconscious and badly injured, suffering from migraines and memory loss. Now, two years later, she and her mother Penny return to the island and a long overdue reunion with the other kids, who – collectively – call themselves “The Liars.” The novel also explores the relationship of Penny, her two sisters and their patriarchal father (King Lear, anybody?) and interwoven throughout the narrative are fairy tale stories of a king and his three beautiful daughters. But the focus of the story is on the Liars and what happened to Cady her fifteenth summer. The truth, when it emerges, is a shocker, which I’m not going to give away. This is one of the big books of the year and it belongs in every library’s collection.

Maciel, Amanda. *Tease*. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray. 2014. 336 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781442459472. Gr. 9-12

Sara Wharton is a bully but not, she insists, a murderer. However, Emma Putnam is dead, a suicide who was, literally, bullied to death. And Sara has been criminally charged. However, Sara blames Emma herself who, she acidly thinks, got off easy. Self-pitying and not a bit sorry for what has happened, Sara is a classic antiheroine but as the story moves backward and forward in time as Sara tells readers her own story, a fuller portrait of her emerges and perhaps, in the end, she might come to terms with her actions and even find a measure of redemption. First novelist Maciel has given readers a first-rate, psychologically acute portrait of a bully whom readers may not like but whom they will come to understand. An excellent debut.

Reynolds, Jason. *When I Was the Greatest*. S&S/Atheneum. 2014. 232p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781442459472. Gr. 7-12

Here we have yet another first novel. Sixteen-year-old Ali and brothers Noodles and Needles are next-door neighbors in Bed-Stuy. Ali, our protagonist, spends his days boxing, looking after his little sister, and cleaning up his impulsive friend Noodles’ messes. Noodles’ brother Needles suffers from Tourette’s Syndrome but everyone in the neighborhood is aware and accepting of the problem. However, when the three boys go to a forbidden party, they find out that not everyone is so forgiving. Don’t expect complexity here – the plot is fairly simple and straightforward -- but, rather, urban fiction with a heart and memorable characters.

Schrefer, Eliot. *Threatened*. Scholastic. 2014. 278p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780545551434. Gr. 8-12
In Schrefer’s last novel, *Endangered*, he painted a portrait of the Congo’s bonobos. This time around his setting is Gabon and his focus is on chimpanzees and also on orphaned boys like Luc, who have lost their parents to AIDS. Luc’s life changes when he meets Professor Abdul Mohammad, who hires him as his assistant and, together, the two travel deep into the jungle to

study the chimpanzees. But then the Professors vanishes under mysterious circumstances and Luc is left to fend for himself. When humans reappear, it's obvious that the chimps are more civilized than their human counterparts. Schrefer does an excellent job of creating a lush and vivid setting and, in the chimpanzees, characters every bit as complex and interesting as the humans. A great book for animal lovers.

Smith, Jennifer E. *The Geography of You and Me*. Little Brown/Poppy. 2014. 352p. \$18.00. ISBN: 9780316254779. Gr. 8-11

Owen and Lucy meet cute when they're trapped together in a New York City power outage. It's a bonding experience but it appears that the two won't have a chance to cultivate a relationship as Lucy is off to Scotland for her father's work while Owen and his father, the building's superintendent, are headed West to try to find work and recover from the loss of Owen's mother. The narrative moves backward and forward between the two teens as they attempt to maintain an increasingly fragile, long distance relationship. Of it, Daniel Kraus in Booklist calls this "an old-fashioned swoonfest that, in another time, would be a film starring Audrey Hepburn." I can't think of a better capsule description.

Smith-Ready, Jeri. *This Side of Salvation*. S&S/Pulse. 2014. 368p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781442439481. Gr. 9-12

David and his sister Mara haven't recovered from the military death of their older brother but their parents, equally devastated, have turned to religion to heal their wounds. The father has taken to speaking entirely and exclusively in Biblical quotes, a narrative notion that succeeds but barely. He and the kids' mother have become disciples of a charismatic female preacher who predicts the Rapture will occur on May 11th at 3 a.m. That evening the two teens sneak off to a forbidden party (their parents have insisted they eschew all worldly pleasures) and return just after the appointed hour to find their parents gone. What has happened to them? Has the Rapture, in fact, occurred or has something more sinister taken place – a double suicide, perhaps? The kids set out to find the answer as the story moves back ward and forward in time, showing us the evolution or devolution, depending on your point of view, of the family and the fate of the parents. Another first novel and one that invites reflection.

Vlahos, Len. *The Scar Boys*. Egmont. 2014. 237p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781606844397. Gr. 9-12
Vlahos' first novel – yes, another one – is the story of Harbinger "Harry" Jones, who – when he was eight – was tied to a tree in a storm by neighborhood bullies. The tree was struck by lightning and Harry was badly burned. Now a teenager in the 1980s, scarred without and within, he writes of this and the rest of his life in a college admissions essay that swells to book length. Most importantly in high school he and his friend Johnny start a punk rock band called The Scar Boys. Playing in the band is the only time Harry feels normal. When he then persuades his friends to go on tour, their lives will all be changed dramatically. Vlahos himself was a guitarist – the instrument Harry plays – in a touring punk rock band, so he knows the subject of his novel intimately.

Genre Fiction

Almond, David. *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean Telt by Hisself* Candlewick. 2014. 256 p. \$17.99 ISBN: 9780763663094. Gr. 9-12

Until he is 13 years old, young Billy Dean has lived his life in secret in one small room of his mother's house. The reason? He's the illegitimate son of the local parish priest. When the priest goes away, Billy is finally brought out into the world. When it turns out that he has seemingly miraculous powers to communicate with the dead and to heal, he is regarded as something rare and wondrous, an angel child who can recreate the world. But his father has called him a monster. Which is it? Almond's latest is a brilliant exercise in imaginative fiction that, with layers of mysticism and magic, memorably examines the dramatic tension between good and evil. Almond is one of my very favorite authors and his latest is not to be missed.

Arnett, Mindee. *Avalon*. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray. 2014. 418 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062235596. Gr. 8-11

Not hard science fiction but a good old-fashioned space opera, this is the story of 17-year-old Jeth, who is chief of a renegade band of orphan mercenaries who toil for the villainous crime lord Hammer Dafoe. All Jeth wants is to protect his 13-year-old sister, earn enough money to buy his late parents' space ship, the Avalon, and escape Dafoe. But before he can do that, he is sent on a mission to retrieve a missing spaceship from a Bermuda Triangleish area of space where ships malfunction and disappear. Not surprisingly, the quest will set off a chain reaction of events that will have potentially deadly consequences. This novel is being compared to Josh Whedon's ill-fated TV series *Firefly* and is a natural read for its many fans.

Baldacci, David. *The Finisher*. Scholastic. 2014. 497p. \$17.99. ISBN: 978054565220. Gr. 7-10
This is the first YA novel from the celebrated adult mystery novelist and it's a good one. Set in the world of Wormwood, it's the story of fourteen-year-old Vega Jane, her friend Delph and her brother John. Vega's life changes the day she spies her boss, Quentin, entering the Quag, a terrifying forest that – inhabited by dangerous beats – surrounds Wormwood. What could he be doing? The plot thickens when it's discovered that he left a cryptic note behind that raises more questions than it answers. Vega, the very model of the strong female character, determines to find out. Baldacci shows his chops as a writer of suspense, ending each chapter with a cliff-hanger while keeping the action going at a brisk pace. Not surprisingly, there will be a sequel.

Block, Francesca Lia. *The Island of Excess Love*. Holt/Ottaviano. 2014. 216p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780805096316. Gr. 9-12

In this companion to her earlier novel *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, Block returns to its postapocalyptic setting. Just as the earlier novel was loosely based on Homer's *Odyssey*, so this one is based on Vergil's *Aeneid*. The protagonist Pen, her little brother Venice and her lover Hex along with their friends Ez and Ash flee a giant aboard a ghost ship that delivers them to the Island of Excess Love, where its antler-headed king pronounces Pen his Queen. But this is only the beginning of their voyage which takes them next to the Island of Shades where they descend into the Underworld from which there may be no escape. Block's latest is a mesmerizingly magical and mysterious tale of love and loss told in the author's signature lyrical voice.

Burgess, Melvin. *The Hit*. Scholastic/Chicken House. 2014. 304 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780545556996. Gr. 9-12

Burgess' dystopian novel posits a near future world in which the gap between rich and poor has grown to be an unbridgeable chasm. Despairing, more and more have-nots are taking a new drug called Death that offers seven days of perfect bliss followed by the oblivion of death. His life falling apart, seventeen-year-old Adam impulsively takes the drug. Then what? If he repents, it's too late, for there's no antidote for Death – or is there? As this question is addressed, Adam's society is on the brink of revolution and the identity of one of the revolutionaries comes as a shocking surprise to the boy and his girlfriend Lizzie, both of whom have been sucked into the orbit of a sinister drug lord and his psychopathic son. Burgess' latest is a white-knuckle novel of suspense with philosophical underpinnings, which makes it a good novel for discussion.

Cosimano, Elle. *Nearly Gone*. Penguin/Kathy Dawson. 2014. 400p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780803739260. Gr. 9-12

Here's a first novel, a mystery starring Nearly Boswell, (yes, that's her name), who has a stripper mom and an absent father. She's a smart kid but can she win a scholarship that'll save her from her straitened circumstances (did I mention she lives in a trailer park?)? In the meantime Nearly reads the weekly personal ads in the local paper religiously, hoping to find clues to her absent father's whereabouts. She finds clues, all right, enigmatic ones, but not the ones she wants, for when she finally puzzles them out – I said she was smart – she discovers they have to do with vicious – and fatal -- attacks on her fellow high school students. It soon becomes apparent that unless she discovers the identity of the serial killer – with the help of the local bad boy who has been hired by the police to investigate her (she has the ability to “taste” the emotion of others) – she may be the next victim.

Engle, Margarita. *Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal*. Houghton. 2014. 272p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780544109414. Gr. 7-12

The year is 1906 and, desperate to leave his Cuban home, fourteen-year-old Mateo lies about his age to secure a job digging the Panama Canal. But he finds he's gone from the figurative frying pan into the fire for Panama, the land of many butterflies, is also the land of rain, mud, and rock. Engel tells her stirring novel in verse in many voices, even including the imagined voices of local flora and fauna (President Theodore Roosevelt makes a cameo appearance as well). She gives special attention to the forgotten system of segregation that separated dark-skinned Islanders and olive-skinned southern Europeans from light-skinned Americans and northern Europeans. The former were paid in silver (hence the title) and the latter, in gold. Another excellent book for classroom use and discussion.

Fishman, Seth. *The Well's End*. Putnam. 2014. 352p. \$17.99. 9780399159909. Gr. 9-12

Here's a fast paced science fiction adventure story. When she was four, Mia fell into a well and was rescued to a great media fanfare. Now sixteen going on seventeen, she has a profound fear of darkness, confined spaces, and water which may or may not come to the fore when her fellow students at her exclusive school begin contracting a mysterious illness that ages and kills them overnight. Not surprisingly, Mia and her friends embark on a search for answers leading to a cure. But first they must escape from their school which has been quarantined and is surrounded by the military. Their destination is the high tech cave where Mia's father works, ostensibly for the government. Will they reach their destination and will they find the answers they seek? The answer is that there's a planned sequel to this, yes, open-ended novel.

Green, Sally. *Half Bad*. Viking. 2014. 416p. \$18.99. ISBN: 9780670016785. Gr. 9-12
Nathan is what is called a Half-Code, born of the union of a white witch mother and a black witch father, Marcus, the most hated and feared of all the black witches. Now 16, Nathan is being held captive in a cage where he is routinely beaten, apparently to toughen him up for his seventeenth birthday when, it is planned, he will find his father and kill him. The problem is that on his birthday, he must receive three gifts from a blood relative or die. Before that can happen, Nathan escapes his captivity and heads off in search of Marcus. This is a dandy dark fantasy – the first volume of (sigh) a planned trilogy – but its scenes of violence and torture may make it unfit for the faint of heart.

Kephart, Beth. *Going Over*. Chronicle. 2014. 272p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781452124575. Gr. 8-12
The setting is Berlin in 1983. Pink-haired graffiti artist Ada is in love with Stefan but the Berlin Wall separates the two, Ada on the west side, Stefan, on the oppressive east. This beautifully written historical novel is more than a romance, it's a vividly realized evocation of a time when Berlin and, indeed, all of Germany were divided. Ada and Stefan epitomize that division. The novel's somber tone is a perfect match for the seriousness of Kephart's story and her theme of the possibly fatal struggle for freedom. Character-driven, *Going Over* is a work of literary fiction that repays careful reading and reflection.

Klise, James. *The Art of Secrets*. Algonquin. 2014. 272p. \$17.95. ISBN: 9781616201951. Gr. 7-10
Here's another fast-paced mystery. When Saba Khan's apartment burns, her tony Chicago school decides to hold an auction to benefit her family. Surprisingly, one of the items gathered for sale turns out to be an original ten-page illustrated story by the famous artist Henry Darger. It's worth a cool half-million bucks. How did it wind up in the auction and when it is stolen, whodunit? And who, for that matter, torched the Pakistani-American Khan family's apartment? The nontraditional narrative, awash in suspicions, murky motivations, and clues, is told, intriguingly, in documents, interviews, journal entries, and text messages. An excellent title to recommend to your resident mystery buffs.

Lucier, Makiia. *A Death-Struck Year*. Houghton Harcourt. 2014. 276p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780544164505. Gr. 7-10
Here's another first effort, an historical novel this time, set in 1918, the year of the Spanish flu pandemic. When the plague reaches Portland, home to seventeen-year-old Cleo, her boarding school is quarantined. Cleo manages to sneak out but then volunteers as a de facto Red Cross nurse, doing the dangerous work of ministering to those who are infected. Her up close and personal encounters with illness and death soon spell an end to her innocence and the beginnings of a new maturity even as readers wonder if Cleo will be the next to be infected. Lucier does a good job of providing context for Cleo's story and provides an afterword with more factual information.

MacColl, Michaela. *Always Emily*. Chronicle. 2014. 280p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9781452111742. Gr. 7-10
The Emily of the title is no less than opinionated, fearless Emily Bronte who co-stars in this historical mystery with her more conservative sister Charlotte. Together the two set off to solve a

clutch of mysteries including the identities of a mysterious man on the moors and a hysterical, possibly insane woman and – closer to home – their own brother Branwell’s nefarious doings. MacColl integrates real life information about the Brontes with her fast-paced, imaginative, novelized version. She also appends a long author’s note explaining the connections and, to her credit, encouraging her readers to discover the Brontes’ own work.

Miller, Lauren. *Free to Fall*. HarperTeen. 2014. 488p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062199805. 9-12
A science fiction mystery. Sixteen-year-old Rory is thrilled when she is accepted to the super-prestigious and exclusive Theden Academy; indeed, she doesn’t even have to consult Lux, her decision-making app, to know that she’s chosen wisely. But once at the Academy, she discovers that her mother was once a student there who dropped out. This is worrying but so is the Doubt that begins to plague her. The Doubt (capital D) is any inner voice like intuition, say, which in this future world is deemed to be a sign of insanity. As Rory begins pursuing clues to her mother’s relationship with Theden, she meets and falls in love with a counterculture townie hacker named North and a good thing, too, since she begins to wonder if her life is in danger thanks to the connections she begins to find between her mother and the dread Lux.

Sedgwick, Marcus. *She Is Not Invisible*. Roaring Brook. 2014. 218p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9781596438019. Gr. 7-11

Here’s the latest from this year’s Printz Award-winner (don’t miss the Friday evening award ceremony if you’re going to Annual in Las Vegas). A fast-paced thriller this is the story of teenage Laureth and her seven-year-old brother, Benjamin, who, together, head off to New York from their London home to find their missing father, a best-selling novelist, who has vanished. The quest is made more difficult by the fact that Laureth is blind and Sedgwick does a superb job of presenting the action from her first-person point of view. Like her father, the girl is interested in coincidence, a subject that is explored near obsessively in her father’s notebook which is discovered in New York. Then coincidences start to impact the kids’ quest, accompanied by a new sense of danger leading one to wonder exactly what her father might have discovered. Has he dared to disturb the universe? Read the book and find out.

Smith, Andrew. *Grasshopper Jungle*. Dutton. 2014. 432 p. \$18.99. ISBN: 9780525426035. Gr. 9-12

This is probably my favorite book of the year, thus far, a wildly imaginative, briskly written horror story about six foot-tall praying mantises who are, well, preying on human beings whom they like to dismember and eat. They also like to have, uh, sex. Lots of it. It is best friends Austin and Robby who have accidentally visited this plague on their small Iowa town and it may be up to them to end it. If they can . . .

Author Smith has created a wonderful narrative voice for Austin, funny, occasionally vulgar, but always honest and consistent in tone. One of the interesting things about Austin is that he’s bisexual and bewildered by the fact that he’s in love with both his girlfriend Shann, whose late chemist uncle has a great deal to do with the plague of praying mantises, and his friend Robby. How is his confused heart supposed to pick one over the other? In the meantime the mantises are a growing menace to society and to the kids! How will Smith resolve this dilemma? Well, again, read the book and find out.

Smith, Lindsay. *Sekret*. Roaring Brook. 2014. 341 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781596438927. Gr. 7-12

Here's a paranormal spy story and another first novel. It's 1963 in the Soviet Union, the height of the Cold War, and seventeen-year-old Yulia has been captured by the KGB which wants to capitalize on her ability to divine the history and emotions of people she touches. The goal is to turn her – and six other young people with similar powers -- into psychic spies with the mission of revealing dissidents and American spies. She must cooperate or her family, with whom she longs to be reunited, will be placed in peril. But will she, instead, wind up the victim of a powerful American spy who can scrub a brain raw? Novelist Smith has given us a readable story with an interesting setting and an unusual protagonist. An open ending promises a sequel.

Templeman, McCormick. *The Glass Casket*. Delacorte. 336 p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780385743457. Gr. 9-12

Here's a fantasy with witches, monsters, and magic. Rowan's hometown of Nag's End is a quiet peaceful backwater until five soldiers of the king arrive and are brutally massacred by something Other, something evil. Then Rowan's cousin Fiona arrives, attracting the eye of Rowan's friend Tom. Rowan's scholar father warns her not to fall prey to the superstitions of the townspeople but that is increasingly hard to do when Fiona is discovered with her heart torn out. She is placed in a glass casket (hence the title) by her grieving father and then more deaths ensue. Who or what is to blame? Rowan and Tom are determined to find out. As is the reader, for that matter! Expect lots of dark surprises in this excellent horror novel.

Waller, Sharon Biggs. *A Mad, Wicked Folly*. Viking. 2014. 448p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780670014682. Gr. 7-12

And now we have an historical romance, another first novel, this one set in the early nineteenth century. It's the year 1909 and seventeen-year-old Victoria Darling scandalizes society when she poses in the altogether for her fellow students in their life drawing class. Her parents quickly bring her home to England from her French finishing school and attempt to arrange a marriage with a wealthy young man. But Vicky is not about to give up her dream of becoming an artist and she secretly enrolls in the Royal College of Art. Keenly aware of society's restrictive attitude toward women, she also becomes a Suffragette, a champion of women's rights which Queen Victoria had dismissed as a mad wicked folly. Readers will applaud as Vicky becomes a strong, independent woman in her own right.

Walton, Leslye. *The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender*, Candlewick. 2014. 301p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780763665661. Gr. 9-12

Sixteen-year-old Ava Lavender is an ordinary teenager except for one thing: she was born with wings and a twin brother who refuses to speak. Her story includes her family's multigenerational past, which is one of doomed relationships. Will that be Ava's fate as well? After all, she has fallen in love with her best friend Cardigan's brother Rowe. In the meantime, however, she has met an intriguing man who turns out to be a religious fanatic (is Ava an angel, he wonders). The near apocalyptic ending of this novel of magical realism is a study in ambiguity but I, for one, insist it is meant to be a happy one but you may have a different opinion.

Whaley, John Corey. *Noggin*. Simon & Schuster/Atheneum. 2014. 352p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781442458727. Gr. 9-12

Travis Coates has lost his head – literally. As he dies from leukemia, his head is surgically removed and cryogenically frozen. Five years pass and, thanks to unexpected advances in

medical science, it becomes possible to reanimate his noggin and attach it to a donor body. And so, presto, Travis is alive again, still 16, but his family and all his friends are five years older. And to his dismay, he discovers his girlfriend Cate is engaged to be married. He also discovers that his best friend Kyle, who came out to Travis then on his deathbed, has gone back in the closet. A stubborn Travis decides to rectify both situations but is he in over his, as it were, head? Printz Award-winning Whaley has written a tour de force of imagination and empathy that is both compulsively readable and thought-provoking and it doesn't get any better than that.

Wooding, Chris. *Silver*. Scholastic. 2014. 313p. \$17.99. 9780545603928. Gr. 7-12

Here's the latest atmospheric thriller from British horrormeister Wooding. Following the death of his parents, Paul arrives at the prestigious Mortingham Boarding Academy to find a plague of strange silver beetles, whose scratches are causing human beings to morph into silver, zombie-like beings. As the infection spreads, the beings begin to develop a group consciousness and intelligence making them impossibly dangerous and the surviving, uninfected students retreat to the science block which they barricade in hopes of staving off the Infected. But can they? The fate of the world may hang on the answer.

Nonfiction and Graphic Novels

Dillon, Patrick. *The Story of Buildings*. Candlewick. 2014. 96p. \$19.99. ISBN: 9780763669904. Gr. 5-8

I've said this is for grades 5 to 8 but, in fact, it's really for anyone of any age who is interested in buildings and architecture. The author, Dillon, is himself an English architect who clearly knows his way around the field as he profiles sixteen significant buildings such as the Taj Mahal, the Chrysler Building, and the Sidney Opera House, all constructed from ancient to modern times. Each building profile consists of several pages of text and a double-page spread with a gatefold page. The colored pencil art is by the celebrated illustrator Stephen Biesty, who is famous for his cross section drawings that are used to good effect here. It's a fascinating – and beautiful – book.

Fleming, Candace. *The Family Romanov. Murder, Rebellion and the Fall of Imperial Russia*.

Random House/Schwartz & Wade. 2014. 304 p. \$18.99. ISBN: 9780375867828. Gr. 9-12

History comes to vivid life in Fleming's sweeping story of the dramatic decline and fall of the Russian house of Romanov. Her terrific book provides not only intimate portraits of Tsar Nicholas, his wife Alexandra and their five children but also a beautifully realized examination of the context of their lives, a Russia in a state of increasing social unrest and turmoil.

Compulsively readable, Fleming's artful work of narrative history is beautifully researched and documented. For readers who think history is dull, here's proof positive that it's not.

Kuklin, Susan. *Beyond Magenta*. Candlewick. 2014. 192p. \$22.99. ISBN: 9780763656119. Gr. 8-12

Kuklin's book profiles six transgender teens in both their own words and the author's artful photographs. The result is an in-depth examination of the sometimes clinical complexities of being transgender even as Kuklin's photos put human faces on the experience. The profiles are evenly divided between male to female and female to male teens. Also included are an intersex teen and one who is pansexual. This important new book brings welcome clarity to a subject that

has too long been obscure and gives faces –literally and metaphorically – to a segment of the teen population that has too long been invisible.

Marrin, Albert. *A Volcano beneath the Snow: John Brown's War against Slavery*. Knopf. 2014. 256p. \$19.99. ISBN: 9780307981523. Gr. 8-12

Historian Marrin regards Brown, the nineteenth century abolitionist and zealot, as being the father of American terrorism, a man who would use any means to effect what he believed was his God-given mission: to eradicate slavery in the U.S. In pursuit of his mission, the volcanic Brown didn't draw the line at violence or even murder. However, it's his failed attempt to capture the federal armory at Harper's Ferry for which he is perhaps best remembered. His failure, Marrin argues, was in fact a triumph, since it turned him into a martyr, an inspiration for Abolitionists and a catalyst for the ensuing Civil War. The well-researched book (there are 20 pages of endnotes) is further enhanced by a generous selection of period photographs and drawings. This is a terrific book for both classroom use and independent reading.

Nelson, Marilyn. *How I Discovered Poetry*. Dial. 2014. 103p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780803733046. Gr. 7-12

The gifted poet Nelson, a two-time Printz Honor Award winner, here offers us a fictionalized memoir in the form of fifty unrhymed sonnets that recount her life and development as a reader and writer during the decade of the 1950s as her military family moved from base to base, eleven locations in ten years. The poems include not only the details of her own life but of the larger world that provides its context. She learns, for example, of the Cold War, of Emmett Till, Rosa Parks and Little Rock, events that will illuminate her later life and work. Her book *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, for example, is a Printz Honor Award title. Her words are resonant and memorable.

Novgodoroff, Danica. *The Undertaking of Lily Chen*. First Second. 2014. 430 p. \$29.99. ISBN: 9781596435865. Gr. 9-12

And now for a graphic novel with an unusual plot. In contemporary China, Deshi is accidentally responsible for the death of his brother Wei. Deshi's parents, holding him responsible, demand he find a female corpse to be married to Wei so the young man won't have to enter the underworld alone. So Deshi sets off on a quest to find a corpse bride with no success until he meets Lily Chen, who would make a perfect bride except for the fact that she is very much alive! Will he kill her or will he, instead, fall in love with her? What do you think? The story is darkly humorous and matched by art which is a mixture of cartoonish figures and beautifully rendered traditional Chinese art. It's definitely a keeper.

Quinn, Jason. *Gandhi: My Life Is My Message*. Campfire. 2014. 212p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9783980741222. Gr. 7-12

And here's another graphic novel, a lightly fictionalized biography of the great Indian leader and inspiration for Martin Luther King. Gandhi tells readers his own story from his childhood to his 1948 assassination and martyrdom, including his long stint in South Africa and, of course, his indispensable role in winning India independence from England. Large blocks of text – dialogue and exposition – are deftly handled and don't comprise the success of the art. The usefulness of this biography/memoir for the classroom is obvious but I'd recommend it for independent reading as well.

Rubin, Susan Goldman. *Everybody Paints! The Lives and Art of the Wyeth Family*. Chronicle. 2014. 112p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780811869843. Gr. 6-10

Rubin has undertaken a collective biography of three generations of the famous family of artists, beginning with celebrated illustrator N. C. Wyeth, continuing with his even more celebrated son Andrew and concluding with Andrew's son Jamie. Clearly written and beautifully designed and illustrated, this is the first book about the Wyeths for young readers in more than twenty years and is, accordingly, an indispensable purchase for most libraries.

Shanower, Eric. *Betrayal, Part 2: Age of Bronze*. Image. 2013. 176 p. \$28.99. ISBN: 9781607067573. Gr. 9-12

Gifted graphic novelist Shanower continues his epic retelling of the Trojan War. The volume begins with Achilles and his Myrmidons invading the beach of Troy and concludes with Troilus' breakdown during a bloody skirmish with a squad of Achaeans. As always with Shanower, the book is painstakingly researched and the black and white art is simply gorgeous. Jesse Karp in his Booklist review says, "Seldom has a work shined so brightly on every page with its creator's commitment or contained such vibrant, intricate, and endlessly enthralling life." What more is there to say except "Amen to that."

Adult Fiction

Cart, Michael. *Cart's Top 200 Adult Books for Young Adults. Two Decades in Review*. ALA Editions. 2013. 126 p. ISBN: 9780838911587

Beckett, Chris. *Dark Eden*. Broadway Books. 2014. 400p. \$15.00. ISBN: 9780804138680. Gr. 9-12

Imagine a world called Eden populated by a mere 532 inhabitants, all descended from two common ancestors, Tommy and Angela, who came to the planet 163 years earlier from earth and stayed to populate a world. Imagine this and you have the setting for British author Chris Beckett's superb novel of speculative fiction. Its protagonist is fifteen-year-old John Redlantern, whose act of rebellion will defy sacred tradition and change his world forever. As a result, he is banished from his rudimentary hunter-gatherer community, to be joined by three young friends, who set off with him on a dangerous journey of survival and discovery. The result is a page-turning novel of adventure that is a terrific exercise in entertainment.

Johansen, Erika. *The Queen of the Tearling*. Harper. 2014. 434 p. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780062290366. Gr. 8-12

Kelsea, heir to the throne, has been raised in secret by her foster parents, hidden from her evil uncle, the Regent, who wishes her dead. But now she is 19 and it's time to claim her rightful place as Queen. But her uncle isn't the only one who wishes her dead; there is also the evil Red Queen of the neighboring kingdom of Mortmesne, whose army is poised to invade. With danger and treachery everywhere, how will Kelsea survive? Johansen's novel, the first in a proposed series, is a richly imagined fantasy adventure that is compulsively readable, filled with action and suspense. It's also a perfect example of the crossover novel that appeals to both older teens and adults.

Lautner, Robert. *Road to Reckoning*. Touchstone. 2014. 256 p. \$24.99. ISBN: 9781476731636. Gr. 9-12

It's 1837 and 12-year-old Thomas and his widower father are on their way west to sell the newly invented Colt Improved Revolving Gun on commission. They get no farther than Pennsylvania, however, before they are ambushed and the father is killed. That's when the boy meets Henry Stands, a former Indiana ranger who reluctantly takes him under his wing. "He had a great belly," Thomas says of Stands, "and broad limbs that looked like they could carry anything he cared to." He is, in short, a good man to have at your back, especially when you're twelve and your father's killers are in hot pursuit. If this sounds a little bit like Charles Portis' True Grit, it is -- another tale of guns and, well, grit. Happily, young Thomas is a worthy successor to Portis's Mattie Ross.

Stilling, Jessica. *Betwixt and Between*. Ig. 2013. 370 p. \$16.95. ISBN: 9781935439844. Gr. 9-12

After 10-year-old Preston is murdered, he wakes up to find himself in Neverland – yes, that Neverland, for he quickly meets Peter Pan, the leader of the Lost Boys. Soon it becomes apparent that Neverland is a kind of limbo and the lost boys are children who have died in the real world and are waiting to go to a place called After. But then something happens to prove the wrong person has been convicted of murdering Preston and the boy desperately tries to return to the world of Before to right the wrong. But can anyone leave Neverland? At turns happy and unbearably sad, *Betwixt and Between* is a beautiful reimagining of a classic story that will enchant readers just as the original did.

Want more from Michael? Check out his twice-monthly podcasts for Infopeople:

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