

BAYA Reviews
Bay Area Young Adult Librarians

Volume 1, Issue 4

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Recommendations

- * Titles suitable for YA
- M** Mature, ages 16-20
- Y** For younger teens, 11-14
- H/L** High Interest/
Low Vocabulary books
- B/A** Borrow from adult
- R** Rejected (no reviews)

Guidelines for Reviews

www.baya.org/reviews

Book Review Chair Teresa Parham / Book Review Editor Gary Morrison

Adlington, L. J., **Diary of Pelly D.**, Greenwillow, 2005, 282p. ISBN: 0060766166, \$16.89

Rec: YA and Rec as BAYA pick.

Toni V., part of a demolition crew, isn't normally one to spend his time reading, but he is drawn into a diary he has found. It is from a young girl about his age and through it he begins to see his world's recent history in a new light. Pelly D. writes of how distinguishing people by their genetic string came about, and how Galrezi, 'the artistic ones', are the lowest of the three groups. Pelly D. and her family, excepting her father who is Atsumisi—the highest group—must leave their nice apartment and move into a smaller one. Toni V.'s job is to help clear away damage from the recent

war so the city can be rebuilt. Through Toni V.'s actions and Pelly D.'s diary, the reader comes to know their world. A planet colonized by earth that started as a utopia of peace and mutual respect became a stratified society that nearly destroyed itself. People have developed gills and water is an important part of their lives. This is an intriguing and thought-provoking look at a future world that would be a good choice for a book discussion group and could be compared to Diary of Anne Frank or other war diaries.

Teri Titus, SMCo

Anderson, Laurie Halse, **Prom**, Viking, 2005, 215p. 0670059749, \$16.99

* Best Book 7-10 graders

This story is an about face in the temperament and plot for Anderson. In *Prom*, Anderson illustrates how comfortable she is in portraying teen humor. Ashley is on the verge of dropping out of high school. Her best friend, Natalie, lives for the prom. Natalie has picked out the dress, the limo, the guy...you name it. Nat is dreaming about it. When the school finds out the prom teacher consultant has misspent all the prom money, Natalie is desperate. She is so unhappy that she convinces the prom-hating Ashley to help. Ashley is a toot and so is her clueless family, from her bus-driving and very pregnant mom to her dad who can't seem to finish any home improving project, including Ashley's new room. This warm and funny and wonderful story is perfect for 7-10 graders. There are references to sex, drugs and a few four-letter words but it would be a crime to keep this wonderful book out of the hungry-for-a-funny story teen.

Diane Casey, Redwood City Library

De La Cruz, Melissa. **Fresh Off the Boat**. Harper Collins, 2005. 243 p. 0060545402. \$16.89.

De La Cruz (author of *The Au Pairs*) tells the tale of 14 year old Vicenza Ambrullo's move from affluence in Manila to a working class lifestyle in South San Francisco. V attends expensive private all girl school Grosvenor on scholarship. At first she tries hard to fit in with the cool crowd but over the school year learns to love herself. De La Cruz includes many funny stories of V being embarrassed by her parents that all teens can relate to. May be of special interest to immigrant teens. Some mention of teen drinking.

Susy Moorhead, Oakland Public Library

Funke, Cornelia, **Inkspell**, Chicken House Press, 2005, 656p. ISBN: 0439554004, \$19.99

Rec: J and all ages

Sequel to *Inkheart*. House this 2nd in the trilogy wherever you have the first. This is one of those children's fantasies that appeal to all ages. Taking up the story one year later, Dustfinger is desperate to return to the Inkworld. He locates Orpheus who is able to help him, but Dustfinger deliberately leaves Farid and the marten Gwin behind. Farid begs Meggie to help him find Dustfinger, but Meggie also wants to see the Inkworld she has learned so much about from her mother, Resa. Finding their way into the fantasy world is easier than getting out. Fans of the first will devour this, and eagerly await the third.

Teri Titus, SMCo

Goldschmidt, Judy, **The Secret Blog of Raisin Rodriguez**. Razorbill/Penguin Group, 2005. 1595140182, \$12.99.

Y Goldschmidt tells the story of seventh grader Raisin Rodriguez who has recently moved from Berkeley to

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improve.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County

Ingold, Jeanette, **Mountain Solo**, Harcourt Books, 2003, 306 p.; 0-15-2053581; \$6.95

* Tess has grown from a child prodigy into a virtuoso violinist. So the fact that her first solo concert debut is a grand failure, throws her into a tailspin and makes her re-evaluate her life and her choices. She retreats to Montana and her father's home and family. While there she is intrigued by the history of a pioneer family whose father also played the violin. Told in chapters alternating between Tess and the pioneer, Frederik; the story folds music into two very different lives, and gives us a sense of how important music and art are to all our lives. Although an engrossing read, there is an improbable find at the end of the book gave me pause, but overall this would appeal to teens with an interest in music or history.

Charlotte Bradshaw, San Mateo County Library

Juby, Susan, **Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last**, HarperTempest, 2005. 312 p. 0060515503, \$16.89.

Juby continues nonconformist Alice's adventures (*Alice, I Think & Miss Smithers*) in telling of her seventeenth summer in *Realist at Last*. Some of the trials she has to deal with are her boyfriend leaving town for a year, her mother going to jail for two months, and having to find employment to help support her family. Alice keeps a brave face and shows us her utter faith and her sense of humor in her personal abilities. The story is told as Alice's diary interspersed with scenes from her screenplay *Of Moose and Men*. Fans of the first two books will enjoy this installment. I hope more are on the way. Some teen drinking and sexual content.

Susy Moorhead, Rockridge Library

Kantor, Melissa. **If I Have A Wicked Stepmother, Where's My Prince?** NY: Hyperion, 2005. 283p. 0-7868-0960-4, \$15.99.

* Starting high school is hard enough, but add to that, a move, a new house, a room in the unfinished basement, a new stepmother and 2 new younger stepsisters, and a father who works on the opposite coast and it all leaves Lucy Norton feeling a bit like Cinderella. The only place Lucy feels really comfortable is in art class. But when a basketball comment at lunchtime gets her noticed by the prince of the basketball team, Lucy suddenly finds herself with friends and a social standing she appreciates, but is not sure she's comfortable with. Lucy is a sympathetic character with enough humor to temper her complaints. Secondary characters are pretty stereotypical, the popular girls, the jocks...but I appreciated the layered dynamics of a blended family. This is a quick read and will find an audience in most libraries.

Charlotte Bradshaw, San Mateo County Library

Kass, Prina Moed, **Real Time**, Clarion, 2004, 186p. 0618442030, \$15.00

REC: YA & Suggest for BAYA picks list.

Thomas, 16, finds an old photo of his grandfather in a Nazi uniform. Seeking to find out more about his grandfather's role in WWII, Thomas travels from his Berlin home to a kibbutz in Israel. The story of his journey is interwoven, in 'real time', with other stories: Vera the young woman who is to meet him at the airport; Sameh, a Palestinian illegally working at a diner on the way from the airport; The Boss, Sameh's Israeli employer; Thomas's mother; Baruch Ben Tov, a Holocaust survivor; Omar a friend of Sameh's. The explosive climax is inevitable, and the short entries from various points of view propel the reader on. The issues raised in this short novel (terrorism, search for identity, poverty, illegal workers) make this a good discussion group choice.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County

McGough, Matthew, **Bat Boy: My True Life Adventures Coming of Age With the New York Yankees**, Doubleday, 2005. 240p. ISBN: 0385510209, \$22.95

YA and Rec as BAYA pick.

A devoted Yankee fan since the age of 8, then sixteen-year-old Matthew sent a hand-written note to the Yankees, followed it up with phone calls and his persistence paid off. He was hired as batboy for the 1992 season. He looks back on his two years as bat boy fondly recalling the exhilaration and camaraderie of being with his heroes, but also noting the excesses and foolishness that are part of being 17. This is an affectionate memoir that emphasizes the positive aspects of a young man realizing his dream. His parents and school are supportive, but still expect him to complete his studies. A good biography choice for teens or adults, whether baseball fans or not, this could also be a good choice for book clubs.

Teri Titus, SMCo

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Philadelphia with her newly remarried mother and her little sister in this timely formatted book. Raisin has to adjust to a new school and family. She keeps in touch with her best friends in Berkeley via her blog. There is nothing new in Raisin's efforts to fit in with the stereotyped popular crowd. Also there is no surprise when her blog is printed and passed around school. One refreshingly amusing point is when Raisin grudgingly gets her period. She says that "Margaret person" (Are You There God?) sure was nutty.

Susy Moorhead, Rockridge Library

Granado, Alberto, **Traveling With Che Guevara: The Making Of a Revolutionary**, Newmarket Press, 2004, 215p. 1557046395, \$14.95

REC: B/A This diary of a 1952 motorcycle exploration of South America by Alberto Granado and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was first published in Cuba in 1978. It is, along with *Guevara's Motorcycle Diaries*, the basis for the film of the same name. Guevara was 23 and Granado 29 in 1952 when they decided to explore their continent by motorcycle. Along the way, they see how poor much of the population is and how government policies benefit only those already in power. Although interesting from an historical perspective, this is hardly a rollicking road trip book. The style borders on the academic and there is little immediacy to the events recounted. Granado often expounds on Marxist philosophy. Few teens will be drawn to this book, but it may fill assignment needs for information on South America, and give some context to current political situations.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County

Grandits, John, **Technically, It's Not My Fault**, Clarion, 2004, 48p. 061842833X, \$15.00

* The title poem that is printed on the cover of the book exemplifies the character and spirit expressed within. The title poem is a circuitous argument attempting to absolve 11 year old Robert of any blame for concrete slabs smashing the family car. From here we begin our excursion into the world of an 11 year old boy through poem after poem expressing the adolescent experience. Words are arranged graphically in concrete poems to add to the dramatic effect. A poem about cutting grass looks like blades of grass. Grandit's poems ring true for adolescents of all ages. An enjoyable, imaginative and fun read.

Elsie Tep, Contra Costa County Library

Green, John. **Looking for Alaska**. Dutton, 2005. 221p. 0-525-47506-0, \$15.99.

Recommended for BAYA Picks.

M This exceptional first novel chronicles the life of Miles Halter before and after the death of high school junior Alaska Young. Entries such as "one hundred twenty-six days before" and "twenty-eight days after" create a foreshadowing that the savvy reader will suspect from the start, but do not undermine the tension and shock of the all-too-inevitable climax. Alaska's death is the focal point of the story, but Miles and his friends' reactions to her, alive and dead, are what keep the reader enthralled. Miles, Alaska, and their friends are all students at a private boarding school. Alaska is the center of their group, not only for her attractiveness, but also for her quirks, intelligence, humor and obvious need for help. She manipulates the boys, who all have crushes on her, but pushes them away when they try to help. But Alaska is not the only fascinating character here- all these teens have marvelous stories, interesting quirks, and are extremely clever with words, making for a rarefied treat of verbal battles. Miles' habit of collecting famous person's "last words" fits the story, and is part of the key to the puzzle, which ends it. While not for every reader, those older teens who value intelligence, dark humor and clever wordplay will find a treasure here.

Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

Harrar, George, **Not As Crazy As I Seem**, Houghton Mifflin, 2003, 202p. 0618263659, \$15.00

REC: YA While not crazy, Devon, 15, would admit that sometimes his actions are a bit weird, or as his mother says, he has 'tendencies'. Devon has OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder). He has been seeing a therapist, but now his family has moved (mom is a divorce lawyer, and dad is an embalmer) and Devon has to adjust to a new school and a new therapist. Devon's compulsive behaviors are fairly subtle, such as eating things in 4s (4 carrots, 4 quarters of a sandwich...); desire to avoid germs, which means he is careful about what he touches, but he is a bright kid, and can do well in school. He does not do well on making friends, but Tanya, who has her own food hang-ups, begins to draw him out. And fellow art class student, Ben, seeks him out and forces friendship upon Devon, even to the point of Devon taking the blame for a disturbing act of vandalism. Through these interactions and his therapist's persistence, Devon begins to understand the origin of his compulsive behavior and finally makes emotional contact with his father. A quick read, with a likable main character, this hopeful look at 'weird' behavior should give any teen who feels different (and that should be just about all teens) encouragement that life will

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Nolan, Han, **When We Were Saints**, Harcourt, 2005, 291p. 0152053220, \$6.95

REC: YA Archie often felt he disappointed his grandfather, and so his grandfather's dying words, "Young man, you are a saint!" are a surprise, and a burden. Archie feels anything but saintly; he's not even sure he understands what it is to be a saint. Then he meets Clare, a couple of years older than he is, and utterly captivating. Somehow she seems to trigger a deep response in Archie, and he accepts her pronouncements about belief and spirituality easily. When he thinks about them later, he is often troubled and doubtful, but with Clare everything is clear. Archie feels Clare is going too far, but allows her to persuade him to steal his grandfather's truck so he can drive them to New York. There they visit the Cloisters, but Clare wants to live there, and as Archie realizes how disturbed she is, and how physically ill from starvation, he finally is able to act and get help. Is Clare mentally ill or a true religious visionary (if indeed such exist)? Teens will relate to Archie's quest for understanding, although some may find he repeats the same doubts and confusion several times. There is plenty to discuss in this novel, and there are some discussion questions at the end.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *Going Going*. Greenwillow, 2005. 232p. 0-6-029366-7, \$16.89.

* 16 year old Florrie, a staunch individualist living in San Antonio, celebrates her birthday by asking her family and friends not to patronize any franchise establishments for 16 weeks. Florrie's idealism and activism drive this quick read. The issue of small businesses being eaten up by large chain stores will speak to many teens, but Nye has also written here a valentine to the vanishing San Antonio of the past. Those who have visited the city will wistfully appreciate her loving portrait, but even those who have never seen the Riverwalk will appreciate Florrie's relentless energy and driven personality, as she gets her peers and many others involved in her fight. Nye's prose does not flow as smoothly as her exquisite poetry, but the somewhat spare style suits the protagonist.

Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

Pierce, Tamora, **The Will Of The Empress**. NY: Scholastic, 2005. 539p. 0-439-44171-4, \$17.99.

Pierce has reunited all the characters from her Circle Series in her newest book that will enthrall her many fans. The 4 mages: Sandry, Tris, Daja, and Briar are all grown up with experiences all their own. The bond they'd forged as children is no longer strong, as each has secrets they want to keep hidden from the others. The mages are put to the test as they travel together to visit Sandry's Aunt, the Empress of Namorn who is intent on trapping Sandry in Namorn, keeping Sandry in her control by any means necessary. All 4 mages are courted by the Empress' people and a couple of relationships get to the bedroom, including Daja's, who finds herself in love with Rizu, the Mistress of the Wardrobe. Although this is a reunion of characters from an earlier series, it does stand on its own as a novel, although I suspect readers will want to go back and read the earlier titles. Fully developed characters and landscape, imaginative magical strengths and both subtle tricks and physical descriptions of magic will keep most readers turning the pages in this lengthy story.

Charlotte Bradshaw, San Mateo County Library

Scott, Kieran, **I Was a Non-Blonde Cheerleader**, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2005, 246 p.; 0-399-24279-1; \$15.99

* Frothy novel about a New Jersey teen who moves to a Florida town to find herself one of two brunettes in the whole school. Her first day at school is a disaster - every move she makes puts her in someone else's way, ending in her accidentally breaking the head cheerleader's nose. Despite this, she gets a chance to try out for the cheerleading squad when two girls are dismissed from the squad. In her endeavors to be part of the squad she learns that no one is who they seem and everybody has problems. Fans of Todd Strasser's, *Girl Gives Birth to Her Own Prom Date*, and the like will enjoy.

Charlotte Bradshaw, San Mateo County Library

Trondheim, Lewis, **Astronauts of the Future**, Nantier Beall Minoustchine, 2002, 96p. ISBN: 1561634077, \$14.95

Fans of the French comic strip *Asterix* may enjoy this zany science fiction graphic novel about two 11-year old geniuses who believe Earth is being taken over by robots or aliens. Larcenet's drawings have detail and energy, but the cheery primary colors may appeal more to early teens. The chaotic ending when the children are fighting off an alien invasion is quite violent, but the carnage is limited to robots blown to pieces and almost no blood. Finding an audience for this stand-alone tale may be a challenge, but you may want it as an alternative to all the manga and DC comic series.

Cynthia Rider, Foster City Library

Vail, Rachel, **If We Kiss**, HarperCollins, 2005, 272p. 006-056915-8, \$16.89

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* Recommend for 7-9th graders

Vail has caught the giddy anticipation of the first kiss in this cute but earnest story of first romance. Charley (Charlotte) was semi willingly cornered into a kiss by the handsomest kid in the school. Kevin is so handsome that even Charley's best friend Tess wants to be noticed by him. Vail details the ups and downs of intense 8th-9th grade friendships, adding wit and a little insight as the romance deteriorates into the natural confusion, manipulation and frustration of teenage years. When Charley's mom falls in love with Kevin's dad the plot thickens into an almost silly goop. But Vail delivers a satisfying story perfect for 7-9th graders looking for info on that first kiss.

Diane Casey, Redwood City Library

Vande Velde, Vivian, **Now You See It** . . ., Harcourt Children's, 2005, 288p. 0152053115, \$17.00

Y A fantasy world containing elves, crones and sock eating imps unfold to 15 year old Wendy who discovers a discarded pair of sunglasses don't block the sun but reveal a magical world. Beauty queens look like old crones and geeky boys don't look so bad anymore. The glasses reveal gates that provide entry into the world of magic. They also provide entry to different periods of time in the real world. Wendy accidentally travels 50 years back to a world where she meets her grandmother as a teenager. Together they embark on a heroic quest to save a young elven prince from his captors. The dialogue is witty and full of snappy humor that makes it fun to read. It's imaginative, light, entertaining reading. Appropriate for younger teens, but perhaps too light for the older set.

Elsie Tep, Contra Costa County Library

Yourgrau, Barry, **Nastybook**, Joanna Cotler/Harper Collins, 2005. 183 p. 006057979X (lib. bdg.), \$13.89.

R This book is suggested for grades 5 and up. I would definitely place the emphasis on fifth and sixth grade. Yourgrau includes, in his printed upside down book, 43 very short stories meant to be gruesome - most are just silly and pointless. The upside down cover and illustrations of messy fingerprints may appeal to some children. Susy Moorhead, Oakland Public Library