



Abrahams, Peter. Reality Check. HarperTeen, 2009. 330 p. 9780061227660, \$16.99. *

Good grades don't come easy to 16-year old Cody, but he has football to carry him through. That and his girlfriend Clea make up for his difficulties with school and his Dad. Clea is the smartest girl in school, and one of the richest in their small town of Little Bend, CO. Still, it comes as a shock when Clea's Dad packs her off to an elite boarding school in Vermont - and Clea actually wants to go. One torn ACL later and Cody is back down to nothing. When Clea goes missing after a fall from her horse on school grounds, Cody drops out, then sets out, to help with the search. Author Abrahams has crafted a true page turner, with compelling characters in Cody and Clea. Cody is a very relatable character, bright but surrounded by difficult circumstances which make his actions seem believable. The plot is brisk but engaging, and the chilly setting adds to the suspense. This is a solid choice for teen readers looking for a mystery.

- Kelly Keefer, San Leandro Main Library

Anderson, M.T., et al. No Such Thing as the Real World: Stories about growing up and getting a life. HarperTeen, 2009. 247p. 9780061470585. \$16.99. M

In six original stories, prominent YA authors explore milestones such as high school graduation, a best friend's death, or moving away from home. This solid collection will appeal most to the patient, proficient reader. While the sequencing of the stories makes thematic sense, it also places the less accessible and slower-paced pieces near the beginning, which might cause difficulties hooking some readers. Subsequent entries include Chris Lynch's funny, conversational story about a 19-year-old who inherits his father's pawnshop, patronized by colorful characters. Stories by An Na and Jacqueline Woodson enhance the collection's cultural diversity.

- Joy Shiohita, Berkeley Public Library

Chaltas, Thalia. Because I am Furniture. Viking Juvenile, 2009. 368 p. 9780670062980. \$16.99. M*

Because I am Furniture is a chilling but effective and ultimately empowering verse novel about abuse and the courage required to find your voice. The book is presented as a series of poems written by a 14 year-old girl named Anke whose father is an abusive monster, though not to her. While her older brother and sister are regularly the victims of his verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, he mostly ignores Anke causing her to feel invisible and, disturbingly, unloved. Anke feels powerless to help her family -- merely watching as her mother and siblings languish silently under the

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 review)

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sameness of her father's abuse. When she becomes involved with the school volleyball team, Anke learns about being close to others and gradually develops the strength she needs to speak up against her father's cruelty.

I'd never read a novel in verse before, and was impressed with Chaltas' ability to weave a coherent story out of a series of short, mostly very spare poems. We get a good sense of Anke's personality through her writing and, more importantly, the device of the poetry lets readers know her feelings about her situation at home while sparing them most of the grisly details. It makes this gripping book easier to stomach while keeping the reader emotionally engaged. A moving book about a difficult issue, suitable for grades 7 and up.

- Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Ed. Datlow, Ellen & Windling, Terri. *Troll's Eye View: A Book of Villainous Tales*. Viking, 2009. 200 p. 9780670061419 \$16.99. *

This collection is filled with takeoffs on fairy tale themes. Fifteen authors including Jane Yolen, Neil Gaiman, Nancy Farmer, Garth Nix and Holly Black, retell Jack the Giant Killer, Rumpelstiltskin, the Goose Girl, and other well known tales from the villain's point of view. Each tale is followed by information about each author and their thoughts about their story.

Lovers of fairy tales will enjoy this bunch of imaginative speculations on how the villains might tell the tales familiar to so many of us. Some authors like Catherynne M. Valente in "A Delicate Architecture" created histories for villains, in this case, the witch in Hansel and Gretel. Midori Snyder's "Molly" questions our view of who we label as villains in her tale of trolls trying to live peacefully among humans. Not all the tales have a message, some are pure fun and in the end we must remember that it is all fantasy. Although not a prerequisite, knowledge of the more common versions of the fairy tales involved would certainly add to the enjoyment of this book. Much license is taken with the traditional versions of fairy tales. A fascinating read for anyone interested in stretching the imagination and looking at these tales from a different perspective.

- Elsie Tep, Contra Costa County Library

Day, Susie. *serafina67* *urgently requires life*. Scholastic Press. 2008. 240 p. 9780545073301. \$16.99. *

Serafina67 is the screen name for British teen blogger, Sera. Sera blogs on ULife, a fictional MySpace-like social network where "interesting/beautiful/non-zombie-librarian type people" blog. Her posts report her progress on some self-imposed "Resolutions," which include making new friends, making her parents happy, and having no more "Incidents." We're not told much about said Incidents ("aka, 'you know, all the stuff'") until very near the end of the book other than that they have necessitated that Sera have weekly chats with "Crazy Pete," her pedantic therapist. Sera's posts are commented on by, among others, Patchworkboy, a real-life childhood friend, who, besides flirting with her, encourages her to punctuate and to not use CAPSLOCK.

It seemed like this might end up being a book about schizophrenia but (spoiler alert!) it's not. It is very much, though, a book about body image. One of Sera's preoccupations is with "skinnyifying" herself and though one of her Resolutions is to "shrink her lardtastic arse," she has no interest in

eating disorders, and, in fact, blows the whistle on a friend (lolbabe) who's pro "ana and mia" (Google it). Sera ends up being cyber-bullied and then bullied in real life, too. But after her Mum intervenes, people at school are surprisingly "non-horrible" to her.

The book is peppered with inappropriate but authentic teenage putdowns like "retarded," "gay," "fag hag", fat jokes, and more than a few mentions of snogging (making out), shagging (having sex), as well as "illegal and arrestable" activity like underage drinking, smoking, and drug use (which Sera at least describes as "yucky"). And Sera's steady stream of urks, ums, uhs, ers, erms, aaargs, hrms, ners, and pfffs takes some getting used to. So do the actions inserted between two asterisks (i.e. *hugs*) and the iBook-like frame around each of the pages.

Sera's posts (especially the many funny ones) make compelling reading, and I was hooked half way through. I had to know if she would make her "HAPPINESS DEADLINE" or not. There's loads of relevant commentary from a (fictional) teenager's perspective about the online self vs. the real self. The ending may shock teen readers, but the author's caveat at the end will be no surprise. A good finger-wagging about "The Dangers of The Internets" was inevitable in a book like this.

- Anna Koval, Casa Grande High School Library

Holzer, Harold and Joshua Wolf Shenk, editors. In Lincoln's Hand. Bantam Books. January 2009. \$35.00. 208 p. 0553807420.* BA

This exquisite book is filled with the best of Lincoln's writings on their hand-written pages. The accompanying photographs, drawings, and images create a living frame around the man's indelible and sometimes delicate, almost frailly written thoughts. Teens will be surprised by the voice these words reveal. Lincoln's friends would remember the laugh and smile we will never know. He was an irrepressible storyteller and this collection shows the many facets and jewel-like quality of his heart and mind. The forty-odd selections are introduced by some of the leading lights of the country Lincoln helped create.

- Will Marston, Berkeley Public Library

Johnston, Anthony and Tortosa, William. Wolverine: Prodigal Son vol. 1. Del Ray, 2009. 192 p. 9780345505163. \$12.99. HL

As a lifelong comic book fan, my first thought when I saw this book was, "could this really be as terrible as it sounds?!" After all, this is a comic done in manga style that proclaims to re-imagine the perennially popular X-Man Wolverine as "a teenage rebel with a real good reason for having a real bad attitude" (this is an ACTUAL QUOTE FROM THE BACK OF THE BOOK). The very concept of this book is messing with comics history that is sacrosanct to most fanboys, and the Western-hero-in-Eastern-style thing is a trend that many are doing these days, and nobody is doing well. On paper, the premise stinks of a cash-grab: taking advantage of the manga-craze and the recent Wolverine movie for the sake of parting 12 year-old boys from their money. It is to the credit then of writer Johnston and artist Tortosa that Wolverine: Prodigal Son is actually pretty good.

Logan is an orphaned teen, studying martial arts at the secluded Quiet Earth School for Young People. Because of his all-or-nothing fighting style and raging temper, he's known as "Wolverine" to the rest of the kids. Logan is hiding a secret – razor sharp claws that pop out of his wrists and the

ability to heal from almost any wound. Keeping this secret from the other students at the school is difficult and isolating enough, but when a mysterious group of ninjas come after him because of it, the situation could be downright deadly for everyone close to him. The story is simple enough to pull in new readers, but provides an interesting and novel spin on Wolverine that will appeal to open-minded X-Men fans as well. Unsurprisingly, Wolverine – with his spiky hair, spikier claws, and impossibly large sideburns – looks great done up in manga style, and the book's plentiful action scenes will undoubtedly keep readers flipping pages.

- Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Living Language. iKnow Arabic. December 2008. \$13.95. 1400009510. * BA

This inexpensive program offers a quick and easy way to learn basic Arabic. Teens can impress their parents and classmates with such endearments as "laqad 'amDaytu waqtan jamiilan" (I had a wonderful time). There are the usual tourist headings such as Asking Directions, Food, Making Friends as well as more universal points like Days and Time and Computers and the Internet. The word or phrase is spelled out in both languages as a visual card with a pleasant woman's voice pronouncing it very clearly. This is an exciting new tool for young or old.

- Will Marston, Berkeley Public Library

McCafferty, Megan. Perfect Fifths. Crown, 2009. 292 p. 0307346528. \$22.00. BA.

In her fifth installment of the Jessica Darling series, McCafferty brings Jessica and Marcus back together again for one fleeting, post-teenage chance at romance. Ditching the journal entry style of the previous books, Perfect Fifths is told from both characters points of view. While this final installment will deliver a satisfying ending for fans of the Jessica Darling books, there is little here for newcomers. In keeping with the last two books of this crossover series, the themes, language, and content in Perfect Fifths are appropriate for adults, though mature teen fans of the early books will also enjoy.

- Laura Calverley, San Mateo County Library

McMann, Lisa. Wake. Simon Pulse. 2008. 240 p. 9781416974475. \$8.99. *

Though not a narcoleptic, 17-year-old Janie Hannagan randomly falls asleep and finds herself in other people's dreams. She's completely unsupported by her negligent alcoholic single mother, but Janie is not alone. Her friend/boyfriend/fellow school eccentric, Cabel, revives her with PowerBars when she wakes up, and her mentor dream catcher, Miss Stubin, teaches her how to use her abilities to help people. More conservative readers may blush at the girl-kissing-girl fantasies, and more sensitive readers may cringe at the teenager-on-fire nightmares. The eerie book trailer (on the author's website) will tempt even the most reluctant readers, and the mystery will hook one and all. Book 1 of a trilogy. Appropriate for grades 9-12.

- Anna Koval, Casa Grande High School Library

McMann, Lisa. *Fade*. Simon Pulse. 2009. 256 p. 9781416953586. \$15.99. *

Janie and Cabel are back to tackle more dream-related dramas at their high school – but this time as employees of the local police department. Out to bust a pervy teacher on campus, Captain Fran Komisky uses Janie as the bait. The pace is fast and the mystery is engrossing – what’s causing Janie to have so many strange physical side effects from her dream catching and could an old journal from Miss Stubin be the key? Lida McMann fans will be begging for the final installment of the series *Gone*, available February 2010! Those opposed to teen sex should be warned that Janie and Cabel do consummate their Twilight-esque romance, though they do so safely and lovingly. Book 2 of a trilogy. Appropriate for grades 9-12.

- Anna Koval, Casa Grande High School Library

Pike, Aprilynne. *Wings*. HarperTeen, 2009. 290 p. 9780061668036, \$16.99. *

Though she’s been homeschooled her whole life, Laurel’s parents are eager to send her to a public high school so she can start to socialize. Laurel is less eager, but she manages to make a good friend in David, a science wiz, on her first day of school. Lucky for her, as she needs his help when she sprouts a set of wings (petals, actually) one day. It turns out Laurel is a faerie, which explains her odd eating habits and affinity for the outdoors, and must now stop her beloved forest from takeover by some non-faerie loving creatures. Aprilynne Pike fills this story with wonderful details, gradually revealing the truth about Laurel, a quirky character with an equally offbeat family. The plot unfolds slowly, but it never drags, and the last third of the book is a thrilling ride to see if good will triumph over evil. There is also a healthy dose of romance. Suffice it to say a sequel appears to be in order. Combining the intriguing premise with an endorsement on the cover by Stephenie Meyer, *Wings* should quickly find its way into the hands of many teen readers.

- Kelly Keefer, San Leandro Main Library

Ramthun, Bonnie. *The White Gates*. Random House 2008. 256 p. 9780375845543. \$16.99. *

When Torin Sinclair moves to Snow Park with his single doctor mom, he gets a new school (a strange 6-12 combo), a new sport (he was a surfer in So Cal), and serious mystery to solve. With the help of his choir teacher and his two new friends, Tor gets to the bottom of a doping scandal that leaves at least one teen dead. Though there’s ample “boy book” attributes – like spooky Native American legends, sports, drugs, and the supernatural – older male readers probably won’t like how young Tor is (only 12), how little sex there is (not even one kiss), and how totally Walt-Disney-like it all ends. Even still, most readers will deem this page-turner snowboarding story anything but a “waster!” Appropriate for grades 6-12.

- Anna Koval, Casa Grande High School Library

Ryan, P.E. In *Mike We Trust*. Harper Teen. 336 p. 9780060858131. \$16.99.

When his dead dad’s twin pays him a visit after a long, awkward absence, Garth Rudd is gung-ho for a father figure – especially after his coming out was less-than-enthusiastically accepted by his mom, who is financially struggling, still mourning, and totally fearful that her shrimpy son will get

clobbered if he's ever gay-bashed. Mike takes Garth to his first gay bookstore, gives him condoms, buys him shoes, and takes him out to eat fast food – all luxuries for a poor, repressed gay 15-year-old – and Garth is gaga. Sick of his disgusting, demeaning, and likely illegal job cleaning out the “trash pocket” at Peterson’s Department Store, and clueless to his uncle’s sleaziness, Garth is quickly tricked into helping Mike extort money from people supposedly for his “college fund.” California readers may not know about Chesapeake Bay geography or get the boating references, but they’ll like the independent, artistic best friend Lisa and the uber-hot-but-sweet new boyfriend Adam. And the one gay kiss is less scandalous than most of Mike’s schemes. Appropriate for grades 9-12.

- Anna Koval, Casa Grande High School Library

Salmon, Dena K. *Discordia: The Eleventh Dimension*. Disney, Hyperion Books, 2009. 223 p. 97814231111092 \$16.99. *

Lance hates his new school and wishes he could spend all his time playing the cybergame “Discordia.” He and a fellow player with the avatar “MrsKeller” are invited on a quest which transports them into the world of Discordia. They must use their wits and knowledge of the rules of the game to get back to their real lives before they transform into the monsters they only pretend to be in the game.

This is a fascinating fast-paced read for anyone who enjoys adventure games. It’s all there with rules and descriptions of characters and their powers, how to get more power, how to lose it. All the intricacies of real cybergames. For all those who wish they could jump into the game, this is a creepy tale of what just might happen. The story is all about the game. Lance as a human being seems peripheral. We know he’s just moved to a new home that’s not as nice as his old one and he goes to a new school that he hates. In the world of the game he learns to make alliances, make deals, manage his resources and problem solve. It’s all about the game. The ending hints at a sequel and I’m sure it will be another entertaining read. An engaging read for gamers and fans of adventure stories.

- Elsie Tep, Contra Costa County Library

Satrapı, Marjane. *Chicken With Plums*. Pantheon Books, 2006. 84 p. 9780375714757. \$12.95. BA

The illustrations in *Chicken With Plums* are much like that of Satrapı's earlier work, *Persepolis*. Emotions are conveyed in images, and the slower pacing of this book compliments its melancholy mood. However, like *Persepolis*, this graphic novel relies heavily on dialogue and narration. Set in Iran in 1959, it depicts the life of a famous relative in Satrapı's family, and reflects on his life over his last week living. The story is premised on the fact that her great uncle, a talented musician named Nasser Ali Khan, chose to end his life after his wife breaks his prized tar (a musical instrument). The story painted, while only graphically depicted in black and white, is much more complicated than such a metaphor. The characters in this short, 84 page read are deeper than you might expect, not good or bad, but well rounded, and each draw a certain amount of sympathy. This story is sad. In the book, a friend of Nasser Ali tells him that his story is like any of the best love stories; tragic. He is unable to marry the woman of his dreams because her father does not respect his profession as musician. He, in turn, does not respect the woman he ends up marrying, or one of

his children because he does not identify with him, even though both of these characters are devoted to him. It is a tragedy indeed, that many years later, when Nasser Ali sees the woman of his dreams again, they are doomed to continue to be separated, but what is more unfortunate, is that Nasar is unable to connect with the people that are close to him, judging them just like the father of his first love.

- Dana Aleshire, Contra Costa County Library, San Pablo Community

Swanson, James L. Chasing Lincoln's Killer. Scholastic Press. 0439903548. \$16.99.

Swanson's adult version of this story was gripping enough but this condensed telling is sure to enthrall many a teen. Booth was a 26 year-old Washington stage heartthrob admired by many. With the squeeze of a single-shot Derringer, Booth became the most reviled and hunted man in the country. Booth could feel the hornet's nest of fury that hunted him even as he worried at the lack of rebellious response from the newly defeated South. His 12-day flight towards the safety of the dying Confederacy is a riveting story that Swanson recounts with arresting detail.

- Will Marston, Berkeley Public Library