

Does My Head Look Big in This?

Ages: 14-17

Awards: Australian Book for the Year for Older Children 2007; Black-Eyed Susan nominee 2009

Genre: Realistic Fiction; diversity title

Summary: Amal Mohamed Nasrullah Abdel-Hakim is a 16-year-old Palestinian Australian teenager who makes a huge decision: she decides to wear the hijab full-time. The hijab is the traditional scarf Muslim women wear over their heads to display their dedication to their faith. Amal battles racism, ignorance, and unruly scarves as she also faces growing up and the pains that go with it.

Personal Reaction: The book held my interest; I enjoyed Amal's spunky character and the way she stuck up for herself. I found the story to be a bit unrealistic, though. Her parents were very supportive and played huge parts in the story. Also, Amal always seemed to bounce back from the real-life racism that she faces with an almost positive energy. However, unlike many books that address religious prejudice and ignorance, Abdel-Fattah's novel does not preach to its readers about Islam. It answers questions by incorporating the teachings and traditions of Islam into Amal's everyday life.

Evaluation:

- The book has an appeal to Muslim young women. However, the book can easily appeal to open-minded young adult female readers of any religion. Amal deals with crushes, parental issues, bullies, and fashion disasters. The only difference from a typical realistic fiction coming-of-age novel is that Amal has made a religious choice that will be eye-opening for non-Muslim readers.
- As aforementioned, the novel is realistic fiction. Amal, by deciding to wear the hijab full-time, begins a journey for self-identity. Does she find it by the end of the novel? No, but she is quite a bit closer to understanding herself and her goals in life. The ending is not clean and tidy, but the novel does not end negatively; Amal has come to appreciate and rejoice in her religious decision.
- The book has an obvious social studies connection because it, in a non-preachy way, provides a complete overview of what it means to be Muslim as a modern teenager. The novel provides insight into Ramadan, the Koran, the meaning behind the hijab, and Islam's teachings on relationships, careers, and women.
- If there is any controversy that arises because of this book, it is controversy steeped in bigotry. Nothing in this book should be challenged. Even during a party where Amal is faced with peers drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual activities, she makes the right decisions based on the teachings of her religion. No challenge should be made to this book; if such a challenge is made, it is backed by ignorance.
- As mentioned earlier, Amal's journey does not quite fit the journey of the typical realistic fiction heroine/hero because she has supportive parents and a constant positive energy. However, the racism issues she must face are so realistic that they overshadow those elements that may not seem as realistic.

Abdel-Fattah, Randa. *Does My Head Look Big In This?* New York: Scholastic Inc., 2005.

Kate

More Than Just Friends: Poems from Him and Her

Ages: 13-16

Awards: n/a

Genre: Poetry

Summary: *More Than Just Friends* is a combination of "His" and "Her" poems. The poems revolve around two friends who date, break up, and reinstall their friendship. Every page includes poems from both Him and Her about their budding relationship that ultimately does not work out. The book includes a variety of poetic forms: Free Verse, Luc Bat, Poems for Two Voices, Sonnet, Tanka, Terza Rima, and Villanelle.

Personal Reaction: The two authors include a note to the reader at the end of this book of poetry, claiming that these poems are not supposed to reflect *all* of high school relationships, just most of them. I agree with their comment after reading this book. The poems flowed realistically with one another and I felt as if I was hearing the insides of a teenage boy's and girl's head. The element I liked the best is how intriguing it is to read the poems from the male perspective. I am a female and have felt the way the "Her" in these poems feels; I found it intriguing to hear thoughts from the other side.

Evaluation:

- Teenage girls will read this book in no time, with no qualms. Because it is poetry, teenage boys may not pick it up as willingly, but will still connect to the simple problems that the "Him" expresses through his poetry. The storyline is simple: they were friends, things changed, they dated, had sex, and then broke up. Many teenagers have experienced or will experience this teen trend.
- The poets included a glossary of poetic forms and devices. In an English classroom, students could divide the poems up, identify the forms, and then organize the poems in chronological order.
- The poets, Sara Holbrook and Allan Wolf, initially wrote these poems as a series of emails. They used the same seven poetic forms to represent the thrill and the angst of high school relationships. Sometimes they rhyme, sometimes they do not; however, the language mimics that of an average, middle-class teenager.
- The two teenagers have sex in this book. Not much is mentioned about it, except that they did and then had a difficult time hiding it from their friends. Some parents, and teenagers, may find this reference to sex unacceptable, especially for middle school readers.
- This is a book of poems and not a novel written in verse. There is not a drawn-out plot or a cast of characters. Every poem can be read separately from the rest of the book. And, each poem uses poetic devices taught in English classrooms: imagery, rhyme, metaphor, alliteration, etc.
- One element that is distracting about this book is the visuals. Every page or two has a black and white photograph of teenagers. These photographs do not seemingly fit the poems and only detract from the poems' messages.

Holbrook, Sara and Allan Wolf. *More Than Friends: Poems from Him and Her*.
Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Wordsong, 2008.

Good in education

Kate

The Unnatural Inquirer

Ages: 16-18

Awards: VOYA Perfect 10-2008

Genre: Mystery with fantasy elements

Summary: John Taylor, a private detective, returns in this eighth installment of the *Novels from the Nightside*. The Nightside is a fictional dark side to London where Taylor is constantly plagued by new mysteries. In this novel, he is hired by a tabloid newspaper to find Pen Donovan, a man who was able to video record a message from the afterlife.

Personal Reaction: It took me awhile to read this novel. However, I did enjoy John Taylor's character and the slew of other zany characters that he encounters. Because it is the eighth book in the series, I was lost at times, especially since many characters and settings within the book are fantastical, and thus difficult to wrap one's mind around. But, I can see the appeal in the way Taylor solves his mysteries using his third-eye gift. He is more powerful than he (the first-person narrator) originally leads the reader to believe.

Evaluation:

- This novel will appeal more to the older teen reader. Most of the characters are adults. The only teenager is John Taylor's secretary who lives with a bartender twice her age. However, the appeal of the novel is in its colorful characters, not any realistic connections readers may make to characters' situations.
- Quite honestly, this book would work best in a creative writing class where students focus on the different genres. It is a private eye mystery with a fantasy twist. The characters Taylor encounters in this novel are extraordinary and worthy of character analysis by students interested in novel writing. Some characters he interacts with are Bettie a lust demon, a gay Cardinal (religious, not aviary), a Tyrannosaurus Rex, and Shotgun Suzie, Taylor's bounty-hunter girlfriend.
- The style of the author is simple enough to read. The language is not difficult. However, Green employs the style of fantasy writers by creating types of creatures, magical icons, and supernatural powers. Readers need to be prepared to interpret these imaginary elements in order to follow the storyline.
- There are a quite a few controversial aspects to this novel beyond the magical elements. Sex and affectionate groping are mentioned quite often; Christianity is interpreted as dark and God is referenced as being less-than-merciful; Violence is constant throughout, especially in regards to John Taylor's third-eye gift.
- According to *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, Green combines two genres: fantasy with mystery. John Taylor is a private eye who is cynical and jaded with life and all that he has seen. However, as aforementioned, he interacts with mystical creatures (and is one!) and magic permeates throughout the novel.
- The novel is not for reluctant readers. It is confusing at times, and the interaction between John Taylor and Bettie (who is trying to steal his affection away from Shotgun Suzie) is often annoying.

Green, Simon R. *The Unnatural Inquirer*. New York: Berkeley Publishing Group, 2008.

Kate Walten

Excellent Evaluation &
Nice summary

Sunrise Over Fallujah

Ages: 16-18

Awards: Walter Dean Myers-Margaret A. Edwards Winner 1994

Genre: Realistic (Semi-Historic) Fiction

Summary: 18-year-old Robin Perry, dubbed Birdy, serves a tour of duty during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. While in Kuwait, Birdy meets and befriends Jonesy and Marla, two members of his battalion. The three of them, idealistic at first, are in the Civilian Affairs Battalion, a group of soldiers that act as liaisons between the Iraqis and American combat soldiers. As he encounters more and more atrocities, Birdy's belief in the goodness this war will bring for Iraq diminishes and leaves him bitter.

Personal Reaction: The novel was excellent: well-researched, compelling, and informative. However, it did not hold my interest. This may be because there was no connection between myself and Birdy. Birdy is a young African-American male, living in Iraq during wartime and I cannot begin to imagine his state or his emotions. Also I was lost in some the terms at the beginning and could not keep straight many of the characters. However, once I finished, I recognized how important this novel is for young adults; they do not have much literature on the current political situation in the Middle East.

Evaluation:

- *Sunrise Over Fallujah* will appeal more to young men than women. However, the tough-as-nails Marla may pull in female readers who are intrigued by the notion of women in combat.
- The language will confuse younger readers. Most teenagers younger than 16 will not be able to follow the storyline because they will instead be muddling through all of the terms that Birdy uses throughout the novel (despite the comprehensive glossary of military terms and Muslim terms at the end of the novel).
- This novel can supplement any global issues class or modern world history class that is able to extend their units into the 21st century. Although the story of Birdy is central, the political and military issues are paramount throughout the entire story. Within this narrative, there is a lot to learn about modern warfare.
- Birdy narrates the story. Myers also includes quite a bit of dialogue to represent military slang. Beneath the light-hearted bantering, however, Birdy's serious storytelling reveals the tragedy that surrounds these soldiers. He also includes letters and emails to his mother and Uncle Richie, demonstrating his attempt to protect them from knowing about the atrocities he has witnessed while in Iraq.
- All that Myers includes is realistic; however, some may view the descriptions of the tragedies that befall both the Iraqis and the American soldiers as gruesome. Younger teenagers may not be able to handle some of the mental pictures.
- This novel is not historic fiction because it exists as a possible storyline that could (and did) happen in recent years. However, the 2003 version of the war in Iraq is vastly different from the 2009 version, so the storyline this novel depicts should be considered one that is a bit dated. *Sunrise Over Fallujah*, however, is a realistic fiction novel because Birdy is a teenager who undergoes a change. He makes a journey from idealism to realism about the war and its effects.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Sunrise Over Fallujah*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2008.

Deadline

Ages: 14-17

Awards: Chris Crutcher-Margaret A. Edwards Winner 2000

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Summary: During a cross country physical, diminutive Ben Wolfe learns that he has a terminal blood illness and has approximately a year left to live. Choosing to forgo treatment, Ben does not tell anyone and instead lives his senior of high school as fully as possible. He becomes a football star, despite his size, he engages in epic debates with his narrow-minded social studies teacher, and he dates his dream girl, Dakota. In the end, he learns that he is lucky to be able to say goodbye to those he loves before he dies.

Personal Reaction: I cried at the end of this novel. I also cried when Ben tells his brother (and best friend) Cody that he is ill. The love between the brothers is simple and pure; Crutcher does not trivialize or overemphasize their relationship. Perhaps it is cliché to describe my reaction as one that induces tears, but this story was heartwarming with its lively cast of characters and internally-profound narrator. I would recommend this book to any reader.

Evaluation:

- Both young men and women will enjoy Ben Wolfe's journey through his senior year. It is probably not best for tweeners because it includes thoughts on child molesting, domestic abuse, and mental illness.
- Ben's fascination with Malcolm X is central to the story. His intellectual focus on Malcolm X's life (and the project he chooses to pursue-renaming one of his town's streets after Malcolm X) can easily be mimicked in a language arts classroom during a biography unit. This novel is also an excellent sports story and can be encouraged among the football enthusiasts of a classroom.
- Ben employs quite a bit of internal dialogue. The dialogue is between Ben and a Jesus look-a-like named Hey-Soos, an all-knowing entity who questions Ben's decisions and helps guide him to new ones about his situation with death.
- Ben challenges the bigots in his hometown by advocating for the Malcolm X Street renaming. While sensible readers will view his project as a chance for Ben and his peers to learn about the wider world, some may view his attempts as too liberal and invasive.
- This is most definitely a realistic fiction novel because Ben, without the aid of many adults, makes a series of decisions that demonstrate his growth as a human; he recognizes that he should not hide his impending death from those he loves. He changes his attitude about his situation by the end of the novel.
- Another element from this novel that makes it realistic is Crutcher's treatment of spirituality. Ben is guided by Hey-Soos who is honest and moral. However, the focus is not on religion; rather, Ben is guided by the notion that a God is helping him through this tough year. No one reading this novel will feel ostracized by its treatment of spirituality: the mark of an all-inclusive realistic novel.

Last Name, First Name. *Title*. Place: Publishers, Year.

Monster

Ages: 14-17

Awards: Coretta Scott King Honor 2000, Michael L. Printz Honor 2000, Best Books for Young Adults 2000, Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers 2000

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Summary: Steve Harmon is a 16-year-old teenager from Harlem on trial for murder. He tells the reader his story in movie script format, interspersing scenes from the trial with scenes from his life and the time leading up to the murder of which he is accused. Acquitted at the end, the reader is never sure whether or not he is actually innocent.

Personal Reaction: Although the book was not of the style or topic that I tend to gravitate towards, Steve Harmon's story and the way he presents it to the reader is so unique in its format that I was quite intrigued. I particularly enjoyed all of the lawyers' closing remarks because of how "sincere" they all sound. I was glad to read in the interview with Myers at the end of the book that the reader is supposed to be unsure about Steve's innocence. I wanted to believe Steve was innocent, but in his journal entries, he never refers to himself as innocent; he refers to himself as a good person.

Evaluation:

- 1 This book will appeal to both male and female reluctant readers. Although it is presented in an unfamiliar format, the language and the internal thoughts of Steve are simple to understand and the ease with which Steve moves back and forth between his personal thoughts and the film script make it simple for a reader to transition from the internal monologue and the external dialogue of the court.
- 2 This book could be used to supplement a social studies unit on the judicial system especially in regards to how prosecutors obtain and use witnesses. The book could also be used in conjunction with a psychology, sociology, or psychology unit on prison's effects on prisoners.
- 3 In addition to the social studies curriculum, *Monster* is an excellent example of script writing and could be used as an artifact in a creative writing class.
- 4 *Monster* is a challenged book and could be highlighted during a unit on censorship or during Banned Books Week, in the media center.
- 5 The style, as aforementioned, is a combination of a personal journal and a film script. While the journal entries are quite introspective and give the reader an inside look at Steve's views on the case and his role as a "monster," the film script presents the reader with a detached look at the trial.
- 6 This novel contains references to violence, especially in regards to how prisoners are treated by guards and other prisoners in the detention center where Steve is being held. Younger readers may have a difficult time with the actions of the inmates.
- 7 Some of the script lingo may prevent a low-reader, early on in the novel, from understanding and thus being engaged by the story.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: HarperTeen, 1999.

lessons from a dead girl

Ages: 15-18

Awards: Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers 2008

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Summary: As children, Laine and Leah had been best friends. At the start of the novel, Laine, now 18, learns that Leah has died in a car crash. Instead of grieving, Laine relates her and Leah's abusive history. Beginning in elementary school, Leah had sexually abused Laine, claiming that they were "practicing" for when they were older. Through her accounts, Laine demonstrates how insecure and emotionally unstable she is, and how Leah's death lifts a weight that had been pressing down upon her since childhood.

Personal Reaction: I was surprised that this book was selected as a Quick Pick. The language and style was not difficult, but the subject matter of child abuse by another child is unique to most young adult fiction (the abuse detailed in YA realistic fiction often comes from adults). The trauma that Laine relates to the reader is complex and difficult to relate to, unless a reader has experienced a very similar abuse. However, I was engaged; throughout, I had great sympathy for Laine's story.

Evaluation:

- Much of the story is shocking; there is not a lack of intensity or emotional instability. Young adult females will be able to identify, on some level, with both Laine and Leah who are growing through their mistakes and emotional decisions. The only difference is both Laine and Leah have experienced sexual abuse. If young women cannot connect, they can at least empathize and learn.
- Knowles's novel would be an excellent supplement to a health classroom. Health curriculums include units on abuse: self, domestic, sexual, and emotional. *Lessons from a dead girl* covers can provide an outlet for students who may have experienced similar abuses. Knowles's novel is also a valuable book to display in a guidance office (along with a number of other abuse-oriented books!).
- The language and style of the author is not difficult; there are no deviations in Laine's storytelling except the order in which she provides the events. The story begins with Leah's death and Laine's empty response to her death. The remainder of the book is a chronological flashback of Leah's and Laine's relationship.
- A number of controversies surround this book: the sexual abuse that both girls face; domestic abuse; high school parties with drugs and alcohol; Laine's self-discovery of her sexual preferences; and her relationship with her gay friend Web.
- This novel is a realistic fiction novel because it is told in first-person point-of-view by a young woman who has identity issues that are connectable on some level with most teenagers. She questions friendships and grows from her experiences with Leah into someone who understands her painful emotional journey. The end is not clear-cut; Laine is not healed, but she is in the process.
- An issue with Laine's character is that many readers may grow frustrated with her submissiveness. She rarely displays confidence (until the last chapter of the book) which may repel young women looking for a strong protagonist.

Knowles, Jo. *lessons from a dead girl*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2007.

Again, excellent!

Kate Walford

Freedom Riders

Ages: 12-14

Awards: Sibert Honor Book 2007; ALA Notable Books 2007

Genre: Nonfiction

Summary: Ann Bausum tells the story of John Lewis and Jim Zwerg, two young men who took part in the Freedom Rides of 1961. These men plus many others boarded buses in Tennessee to travel through the South, protesting segregation. They encountered abuse, beatings, extreme racism, and, eventually, success. The book begins with letters from Lewis and Zwerg addressing the youth of today, encouraging them to make a difference.

Personal Reaction: I read this book quickly. It is definitely an appropriate nonfiction book for a middle school student. However, if used in conjunction with a civil rights unit in high school, this book would be an excellent supplement especially for a lower-level reader. I learned quite a bit, despite my typical aversion to nonfiction, and I especially appreciated the "Chronology" provided at the back of the book.

Evaluation:

- Some older readers may not appreciate being given this book because it is the size of a children's picture book and the cover is a bright purple and blue; some older, but lower readers may resist it purely because it looks childish. However, the photographs coupled with the straightforward presentation of facts will appeal to most young adult readers because it does not regurgitate dry facts to its readers.
- This book can be used in a social studies classroom while studying the Civil Rights Movement or in a Language Arts classroom alongside rhetoric and poetry that were presented or written during the Civil Rights Movement.
- The style is eloquent. The facts and quotations are presented in a narrative manner, thus providing a very smooth read for young adults.
- The book provides a Table of Contents, a Chronology, an Index, a Bibliography, and a Further Readings at the back of the book, thus marking it as a well-researched and reliable resource.
- The book meets genre specifications for young adult nonfiction on a number of levels, but most impressive is its "multilayer" content. Bausum chose two riders to highlight: one black and one white. She presents us with their childhood histories and why they joined the Civil Rights movement. She also addresses important historical characters, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and highlights many of the racist tendencies of the South at the time of the Freedom Rides. I left this book with a broad understanding of both the atmosphere of the time period and how it affected these two men.
- The letters from Zwerg and Lewis give this book credibility. They reference their work as Freedom Riders and how teenagers now have just as much opportunity to right the wrongs of the world as they did 50 years ago.
- One last point: Bausum does an excellent job of incorporating information from journalism sources of the time. She provides many headlines and quotations from articles written about the Freedom Riders from 1961.

Bausum, Ann. *Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2006.

The Rag and Bone Shop

Ages: 13-16

Awards: Best Books for Young Adults 2002

Genre: Mystery

Summary: Jason, a shy twelve-year-old, often spends time with his neighbor Alicia. Tragically, Alicia is murdered and Jason is the last person to see her alive. Jason fits the profile of a killer and is unknowingly set up for an intense interrogation by a master interrogator, Trent. Trent is intent on forcing Jason to confess. At the end of the interrogation, Jason has admitted to killing Alicia, even though the police discover that Alicia's brother killed her. The novel ends with indications that Jason is having nightmares because of what he went through and that Trent is degraded and alone.

Personal Reaction: A true thriller from beginning to end. What I most appreciated from this book was the simple insertion of the personal baggage of both Trent and Jason. Jason is a loner kid who cannot make friends but will stick up for himself and others if needed. Trent, despite the fact that he is aware of how dejecting his job is, continues to pull confessions from suspects because he knows that he excels at it. Neither character is vindicated at the end. Cormier allows all of these personal issues to coincide with the overriding plot of the novel: the murder.

Evaluation:

- The appeal to young adults is in every aspect of this book. Unlike most young adult novels, the story is not told in first person point-of-view, but it is narrated so that we understand what both Trent and Jason are thinking.
- The young adults' opportunity to see all that they are thinking and still be unsure about the outcome of the murder investigation is fascinating. In addition to this, the book is a short, quick read. It will hold a young adult's attention from beginning to end.
- This novel would be an interesting addition to a psychology unit. Examining why Trent continues with the interrogation despite the fact that he knows Jason is innocent will bring about a lively discussion. Also, Jason's role in school's social dynamics could be examined in both sociology and a psychology class.
- The language is simple and the sentences are short and concise. I was fascinated with how well Cormier painted such in-depth personality profiles of both Jason and Trent without much narration at all. His ability to insert key details about their personalities into their actions and the way other interact with them is ingenious. He also incorporates short bouts of flashbacks to give us insight into Trent's personal background.
- There are no controversial aspects to this book. If people take offense to how "cruel" Trent is in trying to extract a confession out of an innocent person, they are missing the point of the novel.
- This novel is a mystery because the victim, Alicia, is strongly connected to the protagonist. Also, Jason, as the protagonist, has the mystery forced upon him merely because of his friendship with Alicia. The violence is underplayed.

Kate Walton

Loving Will Shakespeare

Ages: 13-15

Genre: Historical Fiction

Summary: Meyer's novel is a fictionalized story of Anne Hathaway, wife of William Shakespeare. Told from her perspective, Anne (known as Agnes by her family) narrates her story beginning when she was just seven. Agnes must endure a hateful stepmother, a slew of unwanted and wanted admirers, the monotony of the farm life, and her odd and unique relationship with Will Shakespeare who is seven years younger than herself.

Personal Reaction: As an English teacher, it is hard not for me to adore William Shakespeare. I have been to Stratford twice in my life. Both times, I have heard only a little about Anne Hathaway's role in Shakespeare's life. Although this novel is fiction, I still enjoyed learning about Anne's everyday tasks and the expectations of Elizabethan women. Although not the most exciting book I have read thus far, *Loving Will Shakespeare* held my interest and gave me insight into a Anne's character.

Evaluation:

- This book will only appeal to young adult females. *Loving Will Shakespeare* is a coming-of-age novel for Anne Hathaway. She is often stunted by her role as female in Elizabethan society. However, the story will appeal to a wide range of female readers because the dialogue is practically modern and Anne encounters many problems that young adult females encounter: love, lost love, mother-daughter issues, sexual yearnings, etc.
- *Loving Will Shakespeare* is an excellent supplement to a unit on William Shakespeare. As I said above, not much is known or discussed in regards to Anne Hathaway because she represents the part of Shakespeare's life that is not glamorous or dramatic. This novel gives insight (albeit fictionalized) into Shakespeare's earlier years. It can also be an excellent addition to an Elizabethan unit, especially in regards to women. One example is the concept of the "bawdy court," where young women went once caught in a sexually lascivious act.
- Meyer's style includes a healthy balance of internal monologue and dialogue. The sentences are short. Meyer incorporates some Elizabethan dialect into her writing, including "mayhap," "mistress," and "yeoman," but she makes sure to be clear in their meaning for the reader who is unfamiliar with such terms.
- Since this is a historical novel based upon real people, no contronversial aspects truly exist. However, Anne is pregnant with his daughter before she weds Shakespeare and some may take issue with this.
- *Loving Will Shakespeare* meets historical fiction specifications because it takes place in an authentically historical time and place, Anne and Will are two young adult characters who experience similar issues that today's young people encounter, and most characters were real people that lived in Stratford during the time of Shakespeare. I finished this book feeling that I had a better understanding of Elizabethan England.
- One issue that I had with this novel was its length. The novel spanned 19 years of Anne's life, and at times it included scenes that were slow-moving and unnecessary to understanding Will and Anne's character development.

Kate Walton

Memory Boy

Ages: 12-15

Awards: n/a

Genre: Science Fiction; Adventure

Summary: Miles and his family are living in a futuristic world covered in fine volcanic ash. Two years earlier, a series of globally devastating volcanic eruptions wreaked havoc. Many are out of jobs, electricity is rationed, most people rely on canned and packaged food, and cars are a thing of the past. Miles, a handy mechanic and carpenter, has created the *Ali Princess*, a contraption built of bicycles and sailboat parts. Miles family uses the *Princess* to “sail” to away from their home in the suburbs and must survive in the wild, so as to find safety away from the looters and violence that have overtaken the city.

Personal Reaction: The story itself was intriguing. However, I was unimpressed with the ending which moved too quickly and did not resolve itself. Once Miles’s family is turned away from their lake house because of the dangerous squatters living there, they instead seek a cabin that Miles knows exists “somewhere.” Their ability to find this hidden cabin and then the extreme open-endedness of the last page made me frustrated with the time I had invested in the story.

Evaluation:

- The appeal to young adults is in the strong characters of Miles and his sister Sarah. They are both teenagers who are living in a time that we can only imagine. Their ability to adapt and to face adversity while maintaining lively personalities are strong reasons why both male and females may find this book engaging.
- The book could easily be used in a science/geology classroom which is discussing rocks, volcanoes, and lava. The tragic global occurrences that provide the setting for this story are feasible and should be discussed. The intriguing concept of the *Ali Princess* could also be emphasized in a physics or a mechanics classroom.
- The language and sentence structure of the novel is simple. Miles’s relationship with the hermit who was forced in a nursing home by his family is reflected in random references to the old hermit’s stories interspersed through current action. These story references are in italics and are a sentence or two. The first half of the book alternates between the past in which Miles was interacting with the old man and the present in which Miles’s family is traveling.
- *Memory Boy* is a science fiction novel because it takes place “in the future” and the characters are faced by an environmental disaster that has yet to happen in our time. The technology of this book is nothing that could not happen now. And of course, because good science fiction actually references science, the global disaster of the volcanic eruptions is an excellent basis for this.
- As I said earlier, the story was engaging, but the ending was quite disappointing in how vague and fake it was. I felt as if Weaver was rushed to finish the end with no intention of writing a sequel. I could not appreciate the anticlimactic way the family resigned to sleeping in tents by the river without knowing whether a sequel would provide the closure that is needed for such an adventure story.

Weaver, Will. *Memory Boy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.

Graceling

Ages: 15-18

Awards: Best Books for Young Adults 2009; Amelia Bloomer 2009

Genre: Fantasy

Summary: Katsa is a special young woman living in the Middluns of the seven kingdoms. She has the grace of killing. A small portion of the people in the seven kingdoms are born with a "grace". They have different colored eyes and are blessed/cursed with a special talent. Over the course of the novel, Katsa must combat her role as a thug by befriending Po, a man graced with mind-reading, and saving a young princess from her evil, graced father.

Personal Reaction: I am a fantasy buff, so this book was quite appealing to me. The story itself took me awhile to read; however, careful, concentrated reading is quite typical of my fantasy-reading tendencies. Parts of the novel dragged, as I will highlight below, but I will definitely still recommend this book to any teenage fantasy fan.

Evaluation:

- The appeal to young adults is directly connected to how well this novel fits into the fantasy literature genre.
- This novel fits into the fantasy literature genre because it takes place in an imagined world, the seven kingdoms, where people have magical skills and the ending is concrete and tidy.
- The novel is about a teenager who is an enviable skill; she can defeat and kill anyone. The young adults who read fantasy literature will easily suspend their imagination, picturing themselves with a grace, living their lives with skill and talent.
- The book is appealing to either male or female readers. Katsa provides a strong female character. She grows into a young woman who falls in love but maintains her identity. Po provides a sensitive, strong counterpart to Katsa.
- Quite a bit of the novel is focused on effective fighting skills. Beyond the obvious use as a fantasy, a teacher could incorporate elements of the novel into a middle ages unit, where knights, horseback riding, and clashing kingdoms abound.
- The only controversial aspect arises when Po and Katsa have sex. Nothing is detailed in the novel; all sexual references are implied. There is a "fantasy" birth control mentioned; some students or parents may take issue with this.
- There were two parts in the novel that dragged for me. At one point, Katsa and Po are journeying to the kingdom of Monsea to rescue Princess Bitterblue. This journey takes over 70 pages. Po and Katsa are constantly stopping and talking about their feelings. Not only were these scenes redundant, but they also were slightly unbelievable. Similarly, when Katsa and Bitterblue are escaping Monsea, they are constantly stopping for the night, cooking food, sleeping, and then repeating the process. I felt that much of these two extended scenes were of an unnecessary length and provided too many redundant details. Readers whose interest is lagging will not succeed in plowing through these parts.

City of Thieves

Ages: 17-18

Awards: Alex Award 2009

Genre: Historical Fiction

Summary: Lev Beniov is a 17-year-old Jew living in Leningrad during the Nazi siege. One night he is caught looting and is imprisoned. In a cell with an odd Red Army deserter, Kolya, he awaits his death. They are spared because a colonel is in need of eggs. Kolya and Lev are given a week to find a dozen eggs or their lives are over. After many adventures, they find themselves as Nazi prisoners. Lev challenges a head SS officer to a game of chess. If he wins, Kolya and Lev are to be let free (along with a friend Vika) with a dozen eggs. Despite a knife fight after the game, the three escape with the eggs. On the journey back to Leningrad, Kolya is shot and Lev must deliver the eggs himself.

Personal Reaction: I was caught from beginning to end. What a phenomenal book! I am so pleased that this book is considered a great adult book for young adults, because I wholeheartedly agree. I was in love with Kolya throughout the entire novel. Benioff wrote a magnificent character in Kolya because not only did I experience his charm through Lev's eyes, but I also was entranced by his charm through his own dialogue and actions. And of course, Lev was that sweet almost-man who had so much more to him than a scared little Jew. I was thrilled that the grandmother of the beginning was Vika.

Evaluation:

- The appeal to young adults is definitely the characters. The setting will be relatively unfamiliar to them simply because the Russian side of World War II is not emphasized in social studies classes. Though they will learn a lot about the Siege of Leningrad, it is Lev, Vika, and Kolya who will really entrance the young adult reader. They are all teenagers with standard teenage emotions and thoughts.
- Obviously this book should be a suggested resource for students studying World War II, either in Modern World History, the World War II elective, or AP European History. The Russian side to the war is so important.. However, rarely does a reader get insight into what an everyday Russian citizen was experiencing.
- The entire story is a flashback. A grandson has asked his grandfather to tell him about the time he knifed two Germans. When the grandson begins to press him for details, his grandfather responds, "You're a writer. You make it up." From there, the story is told in simple chronological order. However Lev is able to provide a lot of historical and literary background on Russia and Leningrad.
- The novel is filled with inappropriate issues for the younger teenage reader. There are many references to sex, including best positions and the purchase of whores. Also, people drink schnapps and vodka throughout the story (although these drinks are cultural among Russian and German people, some parents may not be able to realize this and will take issue with the characters' extensive drinking).
- *City of Thieves* is a prime example of historical fiction. It provides an accurate depiction of Russia during World War II. The characters are all believable. Kolya and Lev reference many famous Russians of the time, mostly musical and literary greats, but they are never characters within the novel. Most of all, Lev, Kolya, and Vika all experience emotions that teens might feel now, in the present.

Life Sucks

Ages: 17-19

Awards: Top Ten Graphic Novels for Teens 2009

Genre: Graphic Novel – Supernatural

Summary: Dave, a young nonviolent vampire has chosen to abstain eating fresh blood (he does not kill humans). Throughout the story, Dave pursues Rosa, a Hispanic Goth teenager fascinated with vampires. Dave's vampire "brother" Wes (they share the same vampire master, Radu) also pursues Rosa. The story culminates when Dave's roommate exposes his vampire secret to Rosa who immediately desires to be a vampire herself. Dave cannot bring himself to transform her into a vampire. So, Wes bites Rosa. This act makes her Wes's slave. By this time, she has fallen in love with Dave - but all seems lost! Fortunately, Radu commands Wes to release Rosa. In the end, Dave gets the girl and is content with his vampire-self. With this self-acceptance, he bites his first human.

Personal Reaction: The story was gripping, fast moving, and introduced an interesting twist on the vampire story. Dave worked at a convenience store, he dressed and acted like a human, and he didn't kill to survive. These elements marked him as an appealing hero (despite the fact that he is a vampire). He reminded me, on the surface, of the Cullens from the *Twilight* saga. Though graphic novels are still not my favorite genre, I appreciated the supernatural elements enough to breeze through this book.

Evaluation:

- This book will appeal to students who like both supernatural stories and graphic novels. Even though there is romance, most of the characters are male and many of the themes are male-centric. However, if a young adult likes graphic novels and can understand the multi-levels of both Dave's and Rosa's characters, he or she will like this book.
- This book cannot be used much further than a Language Arts or English classroom. Also, there are quite a few lewd references to sexual intercourse. It should probably not be introduced to any student below the tenth grade. It is most appropriate for the older teenager.
- The visuals and text were on the smaller side of graphic novels. Each page had multiple drawings. Most of the characters spoke in common teenage language. All of the graphics are dark, bold colors: red, blue, black, gray. Nearly every scene takes place at night (due to the vampire themes).
- Other than sex, alcohol is also referenced. Dave, because of his humanitarian tastes, only drinks blood from the blood bank. However, he is cut off from this supply at one point and relies solely on "blood brew." Though not real, the reference to alcohol is there and should not be encouraged among a younger audience.
- Most of the text is dialogue, with occasional narration boxes. It is a standard graphic novel especially because of its aforementioned dark atmospheres.

Abel, Jessica, Gabe Soria, and Warren Pleece. *Life Sucks*. New York: First Second Books, 2008.

Pretty Monsters

Ages: 16-18

Awards: n/a

Genre: Short Stories - Horror

Summary: Kelly Link presents nine short stories that all take on a fantastical edge and leave the reader with a creepy vibe. One such story, "The Faery Handbag" tells the story of Genevieve and her eclectic grandmother Zofia. Zofia is from a Faery land that, in an effort to protect itself and its inhabitants from raiders, shrunk itself and now exists inside a handbag. However, people keep disappearing inside the handbag. "The Specialist's Hat" is about twin girls who resent their father. One night, he hires a babysitter, but she turns out to be a ghost. She convinces them to kill themselves to hide from their father. Much like the above stories, the plotlines of all the stories are unique and intriguing.

Personal Reaction: I have never been a reader of short stories and this one failed to draw me in and keep me. Though marked as horror, the stories (though creative) did not leave me with any more than a creepy feeling. One story, "Monster" is about a monster that massacres an entire camp troop of boys. He leaves one alive and has a conversation with him at the end of the book. It was not horrific; it was just really weird. I did not feel compelled to share the book with anyone else, including students I have taught.

Evaluation:

- The obvious appeal to young adults is in the ages of the main characters of the stories. They ranged from 11 to 18. However, the stories can only be understood by the most saavy of readers. Link uses a lot of devices to disrupt the chronologies of the stories and low-mid level readers will get lost in the storylines and thus not understand the endings. Both genders are represented in the main characters of these stories.
- This book would be most beneficial in a creative writing class. Her story ideas are so odd that they could be used as great starting points for budding writers. Beyond an English classroom, however, I do not think there is any other curricular connection within the book.
- Link's style is not set. In some of her stories, she moves in chronological order at a fairly moderate pace; her sentences are short and her language is simple. Then, in other stories she bounces around from one point in time to the next with subtle transitions. She incorporates poems, songs, emails, letters, and other atypical forms of narration – the purposes behind these techniques is to increase suspense and awareness of the unknown.
- None of her stories are really controversial. Most of the creepiness derives from her use of the supernatural: ghosts, alternative worlds, monsters, and witches. The issue for younger readers is not the content but the advanced level of style.
- These stories meet the genre specifications for supernatural and horror stories because they occur at night in some dark and eerie setting. All of the protagonists of the stories are not aware of the evil that surrounds them at first. And, many of the stories revolve around family issues that escalate into unreal dimensions.

Link, Kelly. *Pretty Monsters*. New York: Viking Group, 2008.

American Born Chinese

Ages: 13-16

Awards: Top Ten Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2007

Genre: Graphic Novel – Biography

Summary: A supernatural monkey king becomes a deity through mastering multiple disciplines of kung fu, but he allows his abilities to cause him to believe he is something better than a monkey. A teenage Chinese-American named Jin who has a similar problem as the monkey king is not happy with his role as Chinese-American. Jin denounces his Chinese heritage, but the monkey king (who has now accepted the fact that he is a monkey) comes as Jin's cousin to visit. A fight between the two ensues and the monkey parable becomes apparent to Jin who is then comfortable with his own heritage.

Personal Reaction: I am not a particular fan of graphic novels nor did this book change my perception of graphic novels. However, once I got to the end and realized the value of the monkey king parable and how it parallels Jin's struggle (a story which many students, both minority and not, can relate to), I understand why this book has become such a popular representation of graphic novels. The themes were very applicable to young adult struggles.

Evaluation:

- Until the end of the book, the jumps from story to story were difficult to perceive. Some young adult readers will not maintain interest through these storylines if they are unable to see the connections.
- The transitions between the genres (fantasy and realistic) and the somewhat confusing introduction of new characters make *American Born Chinese* a difficult book for a low-level reader who needs a chronological storyline and strong, understandable introductions of characters.
- The story is short and, like many graphic novels, there is not much text and the action moves quickly. The story includes a little bit of violence. These elements will make this book an appealing read to consistent graphic novel readers, especially young men. The violence may be a reason for controversy, but it is not a convincing one.
- Jin is a relatable character for any teenager who has felt uncomfortable with him/herself. He rejects ethnic values to try to fit in to what he perceives as the American teenage ideal. Middle and high school teachers see students act this way everyday with how they dress, who they choose as their friends, and how they act around adults.
- This book would be an excellent supplement to a health classroom. Many of the teaching tools that health teachers use when focusing on self-esteem and self-acceptance focus on females. *American Born Chinese* helps to breach this gender divide through cartoon visuals and monkey kings.

Yang, Gene Luen. *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second Books, 2006.

Hitler Youth: Growing up in Hitler's Shadow

Ages: 15-18

Awards: Sibert Honor 2006

Genre: Nonfiction

Summary: *Hitler Youth* is split into ten separate chapters, each focusing on a chronological element of the youth involvement in Germany before and during World War II. The book focuses both on how the children in Nazi Germany were controlled by the Nazi party and how they were able to resist. Text is supported by accounts of children who were involved in the Hitler Youth movement, many of whom were either killed or executed for treason. However, many contributors were children who survived the war.

Personal Reaction: I was fascinated by each of the individual stories. As an adult, I was also slightly frustrated because there was so much more that I wanted to know about certain people involved in the Hitler Youth movement (the mark of an excellent nonfiction book – it made me hunger for more). The story was well-written and emotionally evocative; I was very disturbed by how brutal these children acted towards their parents, other children, and Jews. The photographs of the actual youth involved in the stories gave the characters life.

Evaluation:

- *Hitler Youth* could be used in conjunction with a World War II unit because of its primary source value. A social studies teacher could also provide this text to students interested in researching war's effect on children.
- This book is quite appealing to young adults because the stories that Bartoletti relates are about young adults, many of whom had a lasting effect on the rise and fall of the Nazi party. Young adults could also be inspired by many of the stories of the abdicators who stood up for the rights of the Holocaust victims. The stories in this book are appealing to both males and females.
- As is customary in excellent nonfiction for young adults, Bartoletti's style combines facts and interviews while still relating the information in a narrative format. *Hitler Youth* reads like a novel of sorts. However, many of the sections within the chapters are relatively short, so she allows for lower-level readers who lose interest quickly to stay motivated and engaged.
- Quite a few of the stories are brutal, especially the stories about the concentration camps and the executions. This book is not for a middle school reader, unless that student is given prereading instruction that prepares them for the brutality.
- *Hitler Youth* meets the nonfiction specifications in a number ways. Every page has a photographic accompaniment. At the end of the book are extensive ancillary materials such as a timeline, epilogue, cast of characters, and quotation sources. The book also has a clear and simple table of contents and an index of subjects.
- The book is multi-layered. Although the stories revolve around German children and their involvement in or revolt against the Hitler Youth, Bartoletti (a renowned nonfiction author) also highlights important elements of World War II including the reparations the Germans had to pay for World War I, the mercy killings of people with disabilities, and the extensive concentration camp system.

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. *Hitler Youth: Growing up in Hitler's Shadow*. New York: Scholastic Nonfiction, 2005.

Miracle's Boys

Ages: 14-16

Awards: Coretta Scott King Award 2001, Best Books for Young Adults 2001

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Summary: Lafayette is a 12-year-old living with his two brothers, 15-year-old Charlie and 21-year-old Ty'ree. Charlie has just returned from a four year incarceration at a juvenile detention center for armed robbery. While Charlie had been away, their mother died. Charlie returns home bitter and angry. The climax occurs when Charlie is arrested again for riding in a stolen vehicle; however, a benevolent police officer releases Charlie into the hands of his brother. The three have a bitter, angry, but freeing argument that shows all three of them how much they need one another. The novel ends with the three sitting on their front stoop, Charlie's arm around Lafayette.

Personal Reaction: I listened to this book on CD and found myself crying a whole lot while I was driving. Dule Hill, a TV actor, narrated the story and instilled so much emotion into Lafayette's thoughts, Ty'ree's stories, and Charlie's angry outbursts that I felt as though I was there with those boys, watching their tragedy and their love unfold. The story would not have worked had it not been narrated by Lafayette. His internalization of so many elements of his life, along with his feelings towards both Charlie and Ty'ree, made this story so compelling.

Evaluation:

- This novel will appeal to both male and female readers. The three main characters are males who, though loving and affectionate towards one another, still experience and act as teenage males do, especially Charlie and his penchant for trouble. Female readers will enjoy this novel because of its emphasis on family and the obstacles that the brothers overcome to remain together.
- Charlie is charged as a juvenile and sent to a detention center for four years. This book could be taught alongside or incorporated into a government lesson or unit on juvenile's rights and restrictions within the court system.
- Woodson's style, as with all of her novels, is quite simple in language and syntax (the lexile level of all of her books is quite accessible to the lower reader). Lafayette provides quite a bit of a narration; however, it is the dialogue that pervades the story. While the language and timeline is simple (mostly chronological with a longer flashback to Lafayette's time with psychiatrist Dr. Vernon), the themes and the character development is not. Woodson packs a lot of emotion and growing up into two days worth of story; the lower, reluctant reader may have trouble grasping her messages.
- There is nothing controversial about this novel. Charlie references gangs, but none of the brothers are gang members.
- *Miracle's Boys* is a realistic fiction novel because it follows the maturation of a young man. Although Lafayette is our protagonist and narrator, Charlie is the character who makes strides in his maturation as he moves from a scared boy to a bitter teenager to a young man who recognizes how important life choices are. There are no parents within this novel. The story relies on three young men to work out their problems and remain together.

Dead Girls Don't Write Letters

Ages: 14-16

Awards: Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers 2004

Genre: Suspense

Summary: Sunny Reynolds hated her older sister Jazz. So, when Jazz is killed in an apartment building fire, Sunny rejoices. At the start of this novel, however, Jazz writes a letter to her family and returns from the dead. Well, Jazz doesn't return, but someone who is pretending to be Jazz returns. As the novel, which spans seven hours and takes place entirely in Sunny's house, progresses, the reader learns that Sunny is an unreliable narrator and has imagined the return of her sister because she is psychologically unstable.

Personal Reaction: This novel was a fast read. I did not enjoy it as much as *Shattering Glass* because I do not think it had the character depth that *Shattering Glass* had. However, the ending is so unexpected, and once I found out how everything was inside Sunny's mind, I was shocked to go back and discover all of the elements that make Sunny an unreliable storyteller; she is devious, unstable, and dishonest. Fascinating!

Evaluation:

- *Dead Girl's Don't Write Letters'* definite appeal to young adults is the lack of a neat, tidy ending. First of all, Sunny is not a character a teenager wants to connect to; she does not have depth, thus one cannot empathize with her troubles. She does not endear herself to the reader which makes the abstract, psychological twist at the end satisfying, though creepy.
- Psychology classes might use this novel to psychoanalyze Sunny's creations and the illness from which she suffers. In English, the examination of an unreliable narrator is paramount to understanding the ending of this book.
- The style is relatively straightforward: adequate dialogue interspersed with internal thoughts by the narrator. Also, there are letters, emails, and journal entries scattered throughout, which are not unique in language or tone from Sunny's straightforward (or so we think) narration.
- I do not think there are any controversial aspects to this book. Perhaps if one wants to stretch, people may be opposed to how much the siblings hate one another. However, even this hate is eliminated when one realizes that Sunny is delusional.
- The novel is a suspense novel because the reader is forced to hear the story from an unreliable narrator who constantly feeds the reader with negative, hate-filled commentary about her sister. And yet, the dead sister is seemingly "alive". The twists within the plot and storytelling hold the reader's interest, especially since the novel is so short and simple.
- This book is appealing to the reluctant reader. The language and character development will not challenge (and may not hold the interest of) the higher-level reader, though the suspense may still be appealing to the higher-level reader.

Giles, Gail. *Dead Girls Don't Write Letters*. Connecticut: Roaring Books Press, 2003.

Good evaluation's
Rate

The Earth, My Butt, and Other BIG Round Things

Ages: 15-19

Awards and Acknowledgements: Printz Honor 2004, Black-Eyed Susan Award
Nominee 2006, Top Ten Most Frequently Challenged Books 2006

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Summary: Virginia Shreves has perfect parents and siblings: what many consider a perfect family. Unfortunately, Virginia is overweight and underappreciated and feels that she does not fit the Shreve mold. Once her brother Byron is accused and found guilty of date rape, however, Virginia's reaction sets in motion a number of life-changing decisions that help her love and accept her body, her self-worth, and her family.

Personal Reaction: This novel was one of the most challenged books (according to the ALA website) of 2006. I had a difficult time deciding why. I figured it must be because of the date rape issue and the fact that at times Virginia contemplates suicide. I enjoyed the inner-monologue of Virginia. During moments where she was at her lowest, I felt the same devastation as she did (ex: the time she pinched (and bruised) all the fat places on her body, when her brother called her a "fat piece of shit," and the day she spent eating numerous buckets filled with popcorn in the movie theater until 9:30 at night).

Evaluation:

- The subject matter is primarily directed to young adult females. It is important to note that, although overweight Virginia is the primary focus of the novel, another female character shows signs of an eating disorder. Other female characters include the stuttering best friend, the Peace Corps sister, the oppressive mother, and the raped college student.
- Overall, I believe the best way to use this in a language arts classroom is to focus on reasons why it may have been censored. I have read a number of young adult novels that go into more sexual detail than this one; I would be interested to hear student opinions. However, this book could also be used to begin a unit on making a webpage, as Virginia and her friends do towards the end of the novel.
- The novel is presented in first-person point-of-view, interspersed with lists that Virginia makes to control her life and emails back and forth between Virginia and her best friend. Virginia is a well-read fifteen year old who uses subtle humor to describe her relationships with her parents, friends, brother, and teachers.
- Controversially, the book addresses date rape and how the attacker's family members deal. Virginia's parents attempt to ignore Byron's crime, and she is forced to face the issue alone. The other controversial aspect of this story is the social perception of weight and its effect on beauty. Virginia is overweight, has no real desire to exercise, and is constantly brought down by skinny girls at school and her parents who value looks over personality.
- The story engages the reader, but I had a difficult time buying into the complete transformation of Virginia by the end of the novel. The first 4/5 of the book details Virginia's low opinion of herself during her sophomore year. She completely reverses within a short span of time and some readers who wish to connect with her issues may not buy into her quick transformation.

Mackler, Carolyn. *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2003.

Peeps

Ages: 16-17

Awards: Teens Top Ten Pick 2006

Genre: Fantasy *Supernatural*

Summary: Cal is a nineteen year old living in New York City. Cal has been infected by a vampire ("peep") and is now a carrier of the peep strain. He does not show extreme symptoms of the strain but can pass it on to others by kissing or engaging in sexual intercourse. This first book in the series details his search for the originator of his strain. During the course of the story, he meets and accidentally infects Lace, his love interest.

Personal Reaction: I had a difficult time getting into this story. At times the action is quite intense, especially during the scene where Cal is underground and almost attacked by a horde of vampire-infected rats. However, my favorite part of this book was not the story itself. Every even chapter number, instead of following the storyline, provides information about different parasites. I found myself moving through the action chapters just so that I could read about a new parasite.

Evaluation:

- I am sure Westerfeld hoped to direct this story towards a wide teenage audience, but his unorthodox treatment of college sex does not paint a healthy picture for students under the age of 16. The peep strain is contracted by Cal because he has random, virginity-losing sex with a peep named Morgan. He is horny all of the time because he cannot ever have sex again without infecting other women.
- The appeal to young adults is evident through the relationship Cal builds with Lace. However, they fall in love in only two days.
- I was not aware this was a first in the series until the novel ended without any resolution beyond Cal and Lace finally consummating their relationship in a hotel.
- The chapters about parasites are fascinating and serve to provide a biology curriculum with short, entertaining reads about a variety of parasites.
- Cal is alone a lot in the story; he hunts infected peeps by himself. Much of the novel is presented through his thoughts. It is not until Lace latches onto him where dialogue provides some insight into their relationship. Unfortunately, Lace overuses the term "dude" when speaking to Cal.
- The controversial aspects have already been outlined above: the informality with which Westerfeld deals with sex, especially how Cal feels about losing his virginity to a vampire, is not treated with taste. Younger teenagers might have questions about sex after reading this book, but these questions may be skewed because of the oddity with which sex is presented.
- The story is a fantasy because it incorporates fantastical creatures: the peeps and the peep carriers. Cal does not change much, however, over the course of the novel, but this may be because it is the first in a series. It seems more that he goes through self-awareness changes prior to the beginning of the book because he is already infected with the peep strain before the book begins.

Westerfeld, Scott. *Peeps*. New York: Razorbill, 2005.

The Outsiders

Ages: 12-15

Awards: S.E. Hinton-Margaret A. Edwards Winner 1988

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Summary: Ponyboy Curtis lives with his two brothers, Sodapop and Darry, in Oklahoma in the 1960s. His parents have been dead for eight months, and the three brothers are struggling to cope with their deaths. During a late-night fight that ends in a murder, Ponyboy and his best friend Johnny flee to the countryside where they save children from a fire. Johnny dies because of his injuries and Ponyboy must face both Johnny's death and his continuing role as a poor, white-trash hoodlum.

Personal Reaction: I have read this book a number of times. The first time I read *The Outsiders* was in eighth grade when it was assigned as required reading. Every time I read the part where Darry and Ponyboy are reunited in the hospital, I cry. Despite the majority of the characters being young men, I find deep connections within this book, perhaps because Ponyboy is such a thoughtful teenage narrator who experiences familiar internal conflicts.

Evaluation:

- The story is directed at all young teenagers, though much of the humor is inherently male.
- Ponyboy is a connectable character because he has friends and enemies, he has siblings whom he both loves and hates, he has strengths (such as track and school) and weaknesses (such as not thinking before he acts), and keeps many of his emotions bottled up inside.
- The novel is required reading in Frederick County in eighth grade and can definitely supplement a unit on poetry, first-person introspective point-of-view, friendship, and cultural and economic divides.
- The style of the author is a blend of deep thoughts by the narrator combined with dialogue that demonstrates quite a bit of slang from the late 60s. The narrator has many insecurities and the dichotomy between what he thinks and what he says highlight these insecurities.
- Although quite tame compared to many young adult novels, *The Outsiders* does contain teenagers who drink, smoke, swear, and fight. These issues need to be addressed prior to distributing the book to teenagers as a whole class.
- Young adult novels, especially realistic, should mimic how teenagers speak to one another. As aforementioned, the characters in this novel interact realistically, thus meeting the requirements of a realistic novel. *The Outsiders* also revolves around a character who matures. Ponyboy must recognize and move beyond Johnny's death. He does so by writing his story as an English assignment. He has reached a higher level of maturity, because he is willing to take his story out of his head, and put it to paper.

Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Viking, 1967.

John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth

Ages: 16-18

Awards: Printz Honor 2006

Genre: Biography, Arts

Summary: Through photographs, compelling prose, and primary source quotations, Partridge tells the full story of John Lennon's life, from his time as a rebellious child and teenager in Liverpool, through his successful but troubled experiences as a Beatle to his marriage to Yoko Ono and his assassination in 1980.

Personal Reaction: I grew up listening to my Dad's records, tapes, and eventually CDs and MP3s of the Beatles. John Lennon's wacky, zany songs such as "I Am The Walrus" and "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" were among my favorites. To have an opportunity to read a biography of a man about whom I had always wondered (and that this biography did not merely regurgitate dry facts) was refreshing and, at times, shocking. John Lennon was troubled, narcissistic, but brilliant; it was cool to read why he was all that he was.

Evaluation:

- John Lennon led a racy life, complete with orgies, drugs, and erratic behavior. Most teenagers have heard his songs; they will appreciate knowing why his songs are so captivating.
- The photographs strewn throughout the biography are poignant and compelling. A reader who picks up the book will be intrigued by the photographs of Lennon, the Beatles, and Yoko Ono.
- The book can supplement a language arts biography unit, a cultural unit in a music class, and a unit within a photography class, specifically focused on profiles and black and white photography.
- Partridge creates a true, quality biography by not sympathizing with Lennon's personal and professional issues nor does she celebrate him. Her biography pulls Lennon down from his place among the musical greats and treats him as the human that he is. *argued for a more objective biography*
- The bibliography at the end is extensive with endnotes that provide sources for all her facts and photographs.
- At times, the narration deviates from Lennon's life and focuses on the other three Beatles and Yoko Ono. For a Beatles fan, this poses no problem, but for a reader unfamiliar with the band's basic history, these deviations may cause confusion.
- Though a biography filled with fact, many of the actions of John Lennon were illicit and poor examples of responsible stardom. Teachers must stress to students that he is not necessarily the norm so as to avoid discomfort while reading and complaints by parents.

Partridge, Elizabeth. *John Lennon: All I Want is the Truth*. New York: Viking Press, 2005.

Speak

Ages: 13-18

Awards: Printz Honor 2000, ALA Best Book for YA, BCCB Blue Ribbon, SLJ Best Book of the Year

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Summary: Melinda Sordino is an outcast ninth grade student at Merryweather High School because she called the police while at a party over the summer. However, no one knows, including her best friends and her parents, that she called the police because she had been raped while she was under the influence of alcohol. The book, told from her witty, biting point-of-view, details her first year in high school as the ultimate outcast.

Personal Reaction: I read the book in less than three hours, rushing through to find out what happens to Melinda. Her storytelling was, at times, hilarious. But at other times, my heart was breaking for her. High school is difficult and how Melinda copes with Rachel/Rachelle, IT, her parents' constant fighting, and the tree that cannot be drawn only adds to her place in the devastating world of a high school outcast.

Evaluation:

- Though the storytelling and the plot can easily keep a male reader interested, the subject matter is primarily directed at young adult females.
- Most young women will easily be able to connect to Melinda's character because she has a strong combination of confidence and insecurity, both of which all young women have some measure of.
- The novel is an excellent addition to an independent reading project in a high school English class. It also lends itself to an art class, because of Melinda's odd relationship with her art teacher and his "tree" assignment.
- The style of the author constantly changes throughout. Though we hear Melinda's voice all the time, sometimes it is self-reflective, other times it is written as a movie script (emphasizing her not speaking), and occasionally it is written as notes passed back and forth between characters. However, this style does not promote confusion; it only serves to enhance the teenage-ability of the novel.
- Realistic novels revolve around young people forced to solve typical teenage problems. The thought is, since teenagers are faced with problems everyday, reading about them shows that they are not alone. *Speak* does this by addressing issues such as rape, alcohol at parties, parents fighting, and lost friends.
- The beginning is slow; reluctant readers who are impatient to learn of conflicts right away may be deterred by the narrator's unwillingness to share her problem with her readers early in the story.
- Occasionally, the ninth graders that Melinda describes for us, are not realistic freshmen, but rather act and are treated like upperclassmen. This view, however, in no way reduces the quality of the plot and narration.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999.

Kate Walters

Shattering Glass

Ages: 15-17

Awards: Black-Eyed Susan nomination 2006; Best Books for Young Adults 2003; Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers 2003

Genre: Suspense

Summary: Narrator Young Steward and his high school friends Rob, Coop, and Bobster decide to transform the dorky Simon Glass into the king of popularity. However, Rob, the unspoken leader, has other intentions beyond the transformation. By the end of the novel, Rob's need for power and the others' tendencies to follow whatever he says leads to Simon Glass's gruesome death and Young Steward's incarceration.

Personal Reaction: I was unable to break up the reading of this novel. I read it straight through from beginning to end without stopping. It was a well-written. However I was not surprised to find out that *Shattering Glass* was Gail Giles's first novel because the dialogue and descriptions at times seemed contrived and awkward. I could not stop reading because of the intensely suspenseful build-up found in the opening quotations of each chapter. Every quotation (stated by many minor characters) implied some type of violence would occur, but it is not until the last page that Bobster and Rob kill Simon Glass by pummeling him to death with baseball bats.

Evaluation:

- The book features five male primary characters who interact much like high school males do: they cannot make decisions, they eat *a lot*, and they fantasize about girls. However, the villain Rob is not a character that many can relate to: a relief to readers. The strong female character Ronna is a heroine within the story.
- The suspense Giles incorporates cannot escape *any* reader.
- There is not much in the novel that can reach out to other disciplines besides English and Language Arts. However, within the English classroom, the first-person narration supported by the quotations from a variety of sources would be an interesting element on which to focus within a unit on point-of-view.
- The style is relatively straightforward: adequate dialogue interspersed with internal thoughts by the narrator, Young. What makes the style unique is how every chapter begins with a quotation about the "case" from minor characters.
- Although this book is a must-read to analyze the effect of cliques and popularity contests, the bullied dork is murdered and the two murderers are not imprisoned, but the innocent one is. People may take issue with the devastating ending.
- Although not technically a mystery because the crime is not committed until the end, the book is a suspense because the character interactions and the allusions within the chapter-opening quotations lead the reader to believe that something tragic will occur. The novel also contains some elements of realistic fiction.
- For some, the narrator will not be someone to whom a reader can relate. He does not have much feeling for others besides himself. This portrayal may turn teenagers off to reading this novel.

Giles, Gail. *Shattering Glass*. Brookfield, Connecticut: Roaring Books Press, 2002.