

<p><i>The Afterlife</i> by Gary Soto Harcourt Children's Books, 2003, 168 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Chuy is a 17-year-old boy, born in Mexico and raised in Fresno, Calif. Although he is tragically murdered in the bathroom of a night club, his sudden death brings about many revelations about life, falling in love, and relationships.</p> <p>Average in looks and in life, Chuy narrates his short life and newly acquainted afterlife as he details his experiences, feelings, and what he learns as a ghost.</p> <p>The prequel to Soto's popular <i>Buried Onions</i>, which takes a look at events surrounding Chuy's death from the point of view of his cousin.</p> <p>Readers will enjoy Soto's <i>The Afterlife</i>, a creative and original journey of life and death as seen through the eyes of Chuy.</p> <p>Kim Morgan Chandler, AZ</p>	<p><i>At the End of Words</i> by Miriam R. Stone Candlewick Press, 2003, 55 pp., \$14.00</p> <p>In her memoir, Miriam Stone, currently an undergraduate student at Columbia University, tells a powerful story about mothers and daughters and pain and healing. In the form of poetry and diary entries, Stone shares the difficulty of watching her mother die from cancer and her personal struggle to cope with the everyday issues many teenage girls face. In addition to discussing the experiences of being a high school student, such as attending the prom and hanging out with friends, Stone also reveals her feelings on the importance of family in getting through hard times. Although the relationship she had with her mother is the primary focus, her father and brother are also an integral part of her life.</p> <p>Miriam finds serenity in her writing and uses it to express to her mother what she wishes she had said before her mother passed away. Told with passion and honesty, this story reveals the power of words and the heart-wrenching thoughts of a teenage girl. So well written is this memoir, that the reader has a genuine feeling of what it must have been like for Stone, as a high school senior, to lose her mother. Although heartbreaking, the story is refreshing because it takes the reader on a journey through pain and suffering that ends with the author healing and finding peace.</p> <p>This narrative is a must-read for all young women, as Stone beautifully expresses her fears, regrets, pain, and eventual peace and happiness.</p> <p>Amanda C. Hudson Glendale, AZ</p>
<p><i>Alia Waking</i> by Laura Williams McCaffrey Clarion Books, 2003, 214 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Not all girls have the privilege of becoming warriors, and Alia wants nothing more than to be accepted into the woman warrior sisterhood, the keentens, with her best friend, Kay. Her brothers died fighting the war against her society's enemy, the Beechians, and Kate wants to fight to end the war.</p> <p>The keentens are highly selective when choosing girls to join the sisterhood, but when Kay and Alia discover two Beechian children hiding in the forest near their house, the girls are sure that their capture will lead to an invitation to be a keenten. Kay and Alia are assigned to guard the prisoners until their fate is decided. However, Alia is slowly realizing that she has a special gift—trees in the forest speak to her.</p> <p>Through her newly discovered gift, her relationship with the Beechian children, and a conflict with Kay, Alia discovers something terrible has been happening in her own society. She is determined to right the wrongs even if she must give up her dream of being a keenten and her best friend to uncover the truth and bring the justice for which her brothers died fighting.</p> <p>From the first page, young readers will be captured by the excitement and the suspense of the book. Long after the last page is turned, however, the reader will still remember the importance of compassion and self-discovery to help us through life.</p> <p>Brittany Scovel Mesa, AZ</p>	<p><i>Confinement</i> by Carrie Brown Algonquin Books, 2004, 368 pp., \$24.95</p> <p>Confinement is not only the title of this thoughtful and haunting novel; it is also the prevailing theme, the glue that holds the characters together. First we meet Arthur Henning, widower and survivor of Nazi Europe, who flees to America with his young son, Toby. Hired by the Duvall family to be their chauffeur, gardener, and handyman, Arthur finds peace in the cottage on their estate. Here, Arthur and Toby slowly recover from their trauma, surrounded by idyllic countryside and the companionship of the mansion's kitchen servants and the Duvalls' young daughter, Aggie. As Arthur watches Toby and Aggie grow up safe and strong, a new life seems possible.</p> <p>However, the idyllic setting hides an undercurrent of confinement. Each character is trapped in his or her own individual way. As a teen, Aggie finds herself pregnant. The events brought on by the pregnancy tear apart both families. Aggie is dispatched to a home for unwed mothers to cover her parents' shame and to dispose of the child. Toby vanishes, and the Duvalls slowly implode. Shocked by the heartlessness of the Duvalls, yet afraid of losing his comfortable position, Arthur suffers in quiet, powerless misery. Only when faced with the threat of once again losing everything, does Arthur begin to create a future.</p> <p>Brown reveals Arthur's haunted, inner world in layers, switching between flashback, daydreams, and the present. It is a tale of fear and guilt, emotional survival, and the redemptive power of love.</p> <p>Amy Fiske Phoenix, AZ</p>

<p>Dark Waters by Catherine MacPhail Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, 2003, 176 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 1-58234-846-4</p> <p>Family Loyalty/Honesty</p> <p>Col McCann—known by the entire town because of the vicious actions of his father and older brother—struggles with the decision of being the local town hero or following his family name and becoming a nuisance to the society.</p> <p>Col has just helped his brother, Mungo, escape trouble with the police by providing him an alibi for some unknown crime he committed. While visiting his favorite hangout, the loch, Col risks his own life attempting to save a young boy named Dominique from drowning when the ice cracks underneath him. Now in Dominique's family's good graces, Col must deal with his brother's dislike for the attention it has brought to him and his family.</p> <p>After he learns of Mungo's crimes against his own friends—crimes he was unknowingly an accomplice to—Col struggles with the decision of being loyal to his family or doing the right thing and correcting the wrongs that have been done.</p> <p>Rickey Kishbaugh Phoenix, AZ</p>	<p>Fault Line by Janet Tashjian Henry Holt & Company, 2003, 246 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-8050-7200-4</p> <p>Comedians/Dating/Abused Women</p> <p>At 17, Becky Martin is a high school senior with aspirations of becoming a comedian. With her best friend, Abby, Becky performs stand-up at a local comedy club in San Francisco, striving to connect with her audience, perfect her act, and make it big on the comedy scene.</p> <p>After one of her performances, Becky meets Kip Costello, a fellow amateur comedian, and the two connect through their shared talent. The relationship takes an intense turn, and Becky begins to isolate herself from friends and family. Facing the demands of school, college applications, two jobs, and her future in comedy, Becky attempts to balance her life with her feelings for Kip, becoming dependent upon him in the process. When the relationship turns emotionally and physically abusive, Becky is forced to rely on her own instincts to turn away from Kip.</p> <p>The novel grants readers a glimpse into the thought processes of Kip and Becky, the abuser and the abused, as well as the resounding effects of such relationships upon friends and family. Though Becky's pursuit of a career in comedy frames the subject matter, the topic of abuse in teenage relationships remains serious and important for all young adults.</p> <p>Amanda Humphrey Tempe, AZ</p>
<p>The Divide by Elizabeth Kay The Chicken House, 2003, 318 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 0-439-45696-7</p> <p>Fantasy/Adventure</p> <p>Alone in the world, separated from true friends, and isolated by his parents, Felix struggles with a heart condition that threatens his life. Torn between life and death, Felix and his parents set out to Costa Rica in search of a chance for life. Against his parents' wishes, he escapes briefly to view the Great Divide (where the Atlantic and Pacific oceans split) only to discover himself in a world unlike any he has ever known before.</p> <p>In a mythical world where legends live and humans don't exist, Felix discovers many magical and amazing creatures fascinated by science but living in a world of magic. He is led on an adventure beyond his dreams as he and his new friends search to find him a cure. Lost in the challenge of a mythical world, Felix is faced with the chance to discover something greater than his cure, and he begins to see the hope to a brighter future.</p> <p>Amy Young Mesa, AZ</p>	<p>Finding My Hat by John Son Orchard Books, 2003, 185 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-439-43538-2</p> <p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Have you ever felt like your family is different than everyone else's? Jin-Han Park has. Young Jin-Han is a first-generation Korean American immigrant. Not only do Jin-Han's parents speak a different language at home than he speaks in public, but they look different, act different, and eat different foods than everyone else. In <i>Finding My Hat</i>, we follow Jin-Han through his battles in kindergarten all the way through his years in junior high school where he quite humorously discovers girls.</p> <p>Jin-Han's story is that of a young boy dealing with the many hardships and triumphs life seems to throw at him. <i>Finding My Hat</i> is told with grace and style, while still addressing many difficult issues including the tragic death of his mother.</p> <p>Young adult readers will be quick to engage in Jin-Han's story.</p> <p>Stephanie Rips Tempe, AZ</p>

<p><i>Flight of the Fisherbird</i> by Nora Martin Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, 2003, 146 pp., \$16.25 ISBN: 1-58234-814-6</p> <p>Clementine, better known as Clem, was born to immigrant parents from Scotland. Her father and Uncle Doran invest in a large island—Granger Island—to farm. Clem grows up on the island. When she is 13, she starts to see the world more clearly, after her uncle's partner dies and his daughter, Sarah, ends up living with Clem and her parents.</p> <p>This book explores the struggle of a young girl learning that people, even those one depends on, can have many faces. With Sarah's arrival, Clem's uncle visits more often, and Clem starts to wonder why he is so interested in her. As the book progresses, Clem's perspective of the people around her changes.</p> <p>This is a great book for teenagers interested in adventure and exploration, as well as learning about becoming an adult and noticing that the world is not as perfect as they thought it was.</p> <p>Kim Haugen Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>The Green Dog: A Mostly True Story</i> by Suzanne Fisher Staples Frances Foster Books, 2003, 128 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>The summer between fourth and fifth grade promises to be a lonely one for Suzanne. She has no real friends near her home on Chapman Lake, and she needs a dog. In fact, she already knows what the dog looks like and that she will name him "Jeff."</p> <p>Suzanne has a love for all creatures and a lively imagination that takes her to far away places, but her yearning for a canine companion is taking all her thoughts this summer. A dog appears on the porch one day, and, in spite of her parents' misgivings, Suzanne convinces them to let Jeff stay. The girl and the dog become fast friends, and Suzanne is happier than she has ever been until the mischief begins. Jeff is a free-spirited dog who causes more than his share of troubles, and Suzanne's father threatens to send Jeff to live on a farm. How can Suzanne keep Jeff in line, and how many chances will he get?</p> <p>This semi-autobiographical novel will enchant young readers as they come to know Suzanne as a bright, imaginative, and caring girl. Her love for Jeff will strike the hearts of many readers, while the dog's repeated antics foreshadow a decision that will be difficult for Suzanne to understand.</p> <p>Susan Mullarkey Phoenix, AZ</p>
<p><i>The Flip Side</i> by Andrew Matthews Random House Children's Books, 2003, 146 pp., \$14.95 ISBN: 0385730969</p> <p>Robert Hunt is a 15-year-old boy who, like many other teenagers, is trying to make sense of not only society's views on sexuality, but also his own role as a teenage male. Through experimenting with the female gender in addition to finding himself in a Shakespearean play, Robert realizes the importance of being comfortable with one's self.</p> <p>Growing up in a small town in England, Robert has had an ordinary life. However, when forced to star as Rosalind in the play, <i>As You Like It</i>, the confused Robert begins to question the role of gender. The inexplicable and extraordinary feeling that arises when he plays Rosalind strangely makes him feel happy within himself. Quick to deny this sense of liberation, Robert seeks a confidant, Milena, who has also switched gender roles in the play. Coincidentally, Robert finds relief and reassurance in Milena, for she, too, has reservations about her own sexuality. Shortly after Milena's confession, Robert receives news that his best friend, Kevin, has been struggling with the same dilemma, for he has been hiding his homosexuality from himself, as well as everyone else. This reoccurring issue of gender in society causes Robert to accept Kevin for who he is.</p> <p>Told with honesty and humor, young readers will enjoy this novel, for it presents issues relative in the lives of many teenagers. Robert's search for himself and dedication to his friendships is admirable and inspiring under the lighthearted approach of showing the importance of knowing yourself.</p> <p>Amanda Fiegel Philadelphia, PA</p>	<p><i>Inkheart</i> by Cornelia Funke The Chicken House, 2003, 554 pp., \$19.95 ISBN: 0-439-53164-0</p> <p>Meggie is a rather mature 12-year-old who lives with her father, Mo. She even calls him Mo and has for as long as she can remember. One thing she does <i>not</i> remember is how one night when she was just 3 years old, while her father was reading aloud to Meggie, her mother vanished from the room, out of the very bed she had been sitting in. Mo has a special gift (which he passes down to Meggie) of reading characters out of books when he reads aloud. As her mother disappears, three men, Capricorn, one of the most dangerous characters; Bastia, his cruel and heartless servant; and Dustfinger, a man who plays with fire, stand across the room from Mo and Meggie. They are characters from <i>Inkheart</i>, the book Mo had been reading aloud. After Mo chases them out of his house, he is left with Meggie; for nine years it is just the two of them, and for nine years Meggie listens intently when Mo tells stories of her mother's mysterious and exciting trips around the world. Meggie, believing her father, hasn't realized her mother is trapped in a book.</p> <p>Filled with twists and turns, ups and downs, this fantasy will leave you moved, especially at the reunion of three people separated for many years. Most likely in the end you will feel as Meggie and her Aunt Elinor did, that books are better left under their covers and not meant to come alive.</p> <p>Evita Wiatr Chicago, IL</p>

<p><i>Keeper of the Night</i> by Kimberly Willis Holt Suicide/Depression/Self-mutilation Henry Holt and Company, 2003, 308 pp., \$16.95 ISBN 0-8050-6361-7</p> <p><i>Keeper of the Night</i> is set in Guam, and the beauty of this setting stands in contrast with its subject matter. The book opens with the suicide of Isabel's mother and traces the paths of Isabel and her family toward recovery. As the oldest daughter, Isabel assumes responsibility for her father, her brother, and her sister, and she watches helplessly as they each descend into their grief. Her father throws himself into his work, ignoring his children. Brother Frank's anger eventually leads to self-mutilation, and her younger sister, Olivia, suffers from nightmares.</p> <p>Kimberly Willis Holt skillfully weaves local legends and folklore into Isabel's story. In a series of very short chapters, we clearly see her frustration with her inability to help herself and her family.</p> <p>Perhaps best suited for middle-grade readers, <i>Keeper of the Night</i> is a gentle and compelling exploration of the effects of depression on one family.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Leaving Protection</i> by Will Hobbs Fiction/Alaska Fishing Adventure HarperCollins Children's Books, 2004, 192 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-688-17475-2</p> <p>Born in a floathouse on the back bay of Port Protection, Alaska, 16-year-old Robbie McDaniel needs to earn money. He hops a ride to the fishing village of Craig in hopes of finding work as a deck hand on a fishing boat. After finding no opportunities, he finds a job with Tor Torngensen on <i>The Storm Petrel</i>. At first, they are highly successful at catching King Salmon, the most lucrative of the fish in season. Then a hull sets in, and Robbie finds out that, in addition to fishing, Tor is also searching for plaques buried by Nikolai Rezanov of the Russian-American Company who intended to claim parts of Alaska for Russia. When not fishing, Tor is an antique dealer, and he has come into possession of Rezanov's journal, which details where the plaques were buried. The plaques are valuable, and by finding and selling them, Tor can secure his retirement. During the fishing lull, Tor becomes obsessed with the search for the plaques, and Robbie worries that Tor may not go back to port. In the end, an intense change in the weather and the accompanying storm push the story in roller-coaster fashion to the exciting conclusion.</p> <p>Stylistically, Hobbs wastes no words, and the intensity created by the tight word choice convinces me that fishing for King Salmon could be the highlight of anyone's life. As usual, Hobbs integrates the results of the meticulous, historical research that he always does and, as a result, enhances the narrative flow. Robbie as a responsible young adult decision-maker is an excellent role model for young adults. This is a fine book in the Hobbs tradition.</p> <p>Edgar H. Thompson Abingdon, Virginia</p>
<p><i>The Last Mall Rat</i> by Erik E. Esckilsen Coming of Age/Courage Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, 182 pp., \$15.00 ISBN 0-618-23417-9</p> <p>Mitch Grant is 15 years old and looking to make some money. Too young to get a job legally, he accepts money from salespeople at the mall to get revenge on rude customers by harassing them in the parking lot. Mitch's world quickly spins out of control as his services become highly demanded by the salespeople, and Mitch recruits his three closest friends to help him with his business. As exaggerated rumors begin to fly through the small community about the teen's activities, the community becomes terrified to go to the mall and puts pressure on the police to take action against the teenagers. The police place full blame for the teen's real and imagined activities on Mitch's best friend, because of his troubled past. Mitch must find the courage to confess his role in the mall harassment or allow his friend to take the fall alone.</p> <p>The story takes the reader on a journey with Mitch as he makes one faulty decision that leads to an uncontrollable disaster. Mitch, along with the reader, learns that facing the consequences of his actions and doing the right thing are important parts of growing up.</p> <p>Tracy McHugh Gilbert, AZ</p>	<p><i>Midnight Blue</i> by Pauline Fisk Fantasy Bloomsbury, 2003, 250 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1582348294</p> <p>A young girl named Bonnie stows away on a neighbor's mystical hot air balloon in an attempt to escape her wicked grandmother. She comes to ground in the "land beyond the sky," a parallel universe complete with a mirror image of herself as well as alternate versions of everyone she knows.</p> <p>Although this world is similar in many respects to the world she left behind, it is also somehow different. Here Bonnie finds the family she always dreamed of. Her mother has become the mature adult Bonnie needs and the absentee father has been replaced with the caring Michael. It is a magical world and proves to be everything Bonnie has wished for, yet there is also something very wrong. There is an evil that Bonnie must confront. There is a darkness in the "land beyond the sky." Bonnie soon realizes she has brought this darkness to the mystical land.</p> <p>Bonnie does not want to leave, but she knows she must or those she loves will perish. With the help of her friend, "the shadow boy," Bonnie again boards the hot air balloon, but this time she goes home. When she arrives, she realizes her selfless actions in the parallel world have had some effect on her original world, as well.</p> <p>Simon Baumkatz Custer, S.D.</p>

<p><i>Milkweed</i> by Jerry Spinelli Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, 224 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Holocaust ISBN 0-375-81374-8</p> <p>Little Misha is known by many names throughout his life, names both given him by his adopted people and his cruel oppressors. Naturally searching for identity and acceptance, he gets swept up in humanity's greatest atrocity. Misha is an uneducated orphan in Warsaw, Poland. Adopted by smugglers and Jews, he learns to use his speed, wits, and small size to survive. He and his friends steal from the fortunate to keep alive, and through this, they create hope for themselves by embracing adventure, challenge, and charity.</p> <p>The story is told from Misha's naive point of view, making the story a perfect introduction to the events of the Holocaust for young adults. When the Jews begin to be subjected to terrible things, Misha doesn't understand. He sees the world with a child's eyes and has no way to process what is happening to him.</p> <p><i>Milkweed</i> is heartbreaking, not only for its honest look at an abhorrent series of events, but also for its realistic portrayal of the toll these events take on a boy, his adopted family, and his misfit friends. The book successfully captures these people in all their frail humanity, their joy and follies, their triumphs and tragedies.</p> <p>Steve Rasmussen Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Mystery in Mt. Mole</i> by Richard W. Jennings Houghton Mifflin, 2003. \$15.00</p> <p>Mystery/Humor ISBN: 0618284788</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Andy Forrest sets out to solve the mystery of missing middle school assistant principal Jacob Farley, who turns out to be the missing person that nobody misses at all. Andy's list of suspects almost immediately grows to include nearly everyone he interviews. The story takes place in the unremarkable small town of Mt. Mole, whose sole interesting feature is the geographical oddity that gave the town its name. Mt. Mole is populated by a variety of eccentric characters, including police Chief Eagle Talon (who isn't a policeman at all, but everyone was already used to calling him Chief). While Mt. Mole seems relentlessly ordinary, the affable Andy loves it and appreciates the charm of its odd inhabitants. Soon Andy is joined by his romantic interest, blond cheerleader Georgia Wayne; and yet another mystery crops up: What are the strange rumbling noises coming from Mt. Mole? There are numerous plays on words, and some of them are real groaners, but that just adds to the fun. Although the plot is somewhat predictable, this is a thoroughly enjoyable book because it doesn't take itself too seriously—just like its offbeat protagonist.</p> <p>Wendy Street Pella, IA</p>
<p><i>Mind Games</i> by Jeanne Marie Grunwell Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, 133 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>ESP/Clubs/Individuality ISBN: 0-618-17672-1</p> <p>Do you believe in extra-sensory perception? The six members of the Mad Science Club in Jeanne Marie Grunwell's <i>Mind Games</i> are not quite sure if they do, so they develop an experiment to test the existence of ESP as their required group entry in the school science fair.</p> <p>The members of the club are brought together, not by choice, but by unique circumstances that the reader learns of throughout the novel, which is written in the form of the completed science fair project the group collectively turns in. The group is comprised of an eclectic mix of students—ranging from a star basketball player still hurting from the sudden death of his mother to a young girl who recently moved to America from Russia. Each of the characters narrates different sections of the project that explain how they win the lottery and “prove,” to a certain extent, that they each possess an “extra” sense. Through their inquiry of ESP, the characters also learn the importance of understanding others and discover more about themselves in the process.</p> <p>The characters in the novel are seventh-graders, but the personal challenges they encounter and the realizations they make will also appeal to an older audience of readers. Although the organization of the novel may frustrate some less patient readers, <i>Mind Games</i> is both subtly humorous and perceptive of human nature, making it a novel I “sense” many adolescents will enjoy.</p> <p>Emily Pauly St. George, KS</p>	<p><i>Naming Maya</i> by Uma Krishnaswami Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004, 192 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Coming-of-Age/ India ISBN 0-374-35485-5</p> <p>Maya is an adventurous young girl, who by unusual circumstances leaves New Jersey for India.</p> <p>Her parents have just undergone a divorce. Her father has left for Texas, and her mother decides to go to India, where her closest relatives are. When Maya first arrives in India, she feels out of place and awkward. She realizes some things are going to change, including the way she dresses and acts around people. Maya and her mom are living with Mami, Maya's grandma. Mami is about 80 years old and is a very wise and intelligent woman. Maya is faced with many challenges throughout the book, and each challenge she overcomes with ease. She is always the heroine who comes up with solutions.</p> <p><i>Naming Maya</i> will be enjoyed by many young adults. It is a great opportunity for a young adult to get a greater perspective on the world and its different customs. Since it is set in India, many Tamil words are used throughout the story, which can encourage young adults to want to learn a different language. The book also encourages independence with responsibility.</p> <p>Jennifer Greenband Park City, UT</p>

<p><i>The Night Spies</i> by Kathy Kacer. Edited by Sarah Silberstein Swartz Second Story Press, 2003, 197 pp., \$5.95</p> <p>How would you like to live in a space the size of your closet? For Max, Gabi, and her mother, this is a reality. Germany's horrible dictator, Adolph Hitler, forces them into hiding in a dark, damp, cold barn where they live among animals.</p> <p>Gabi and Max are two determined adolescents caught in the middle of World War II. During this time being Jewish meant living in concentration camps, hard labor, unbearable conditions, and, in most cases, death. This family finds a way to stay alive in hiding through the good graces of others—a priest, a family friend, and a gracious farmer. As any teens would, Gabi, Max, and their new/old friend Eva become curious about the war; they want to help. Sneaking out in the night, they dive head first into a new kind of danger they never knew before—the Nazi soldiers.</p> <p>When they find an anti-Nazi group hiding in the forest, they realize just because they are young does not mean they cannot make a difference. But will the Nazi's catch them? Will they be found in their hiding place? Will they starve to death? Or will they see the possibility of a brighter future once the war is over?</p> <p>Like most adventures, this thrilling story is written with suspense; it has its ups and downs. The reader is left guessing what will happen each time Max, Gabi, and Eva go out for another dangerous journey. This wonderful story is based on real events and real characters.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tiffany Thornton Dallas, TX</p>	<p><i>The She</i> by Carol Plum-Ucci Harcourt Books, 2003, 280 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>After his parents were killed at sea, 9-year-old Evan Barrett and his older brother move away from their seaside home in West Hook to live with their Aunt Mel in the city and escape painful memories. Now 17, Evan is a popular prankster at his private Catholic high school, but he is forced to revisit the past when he is asked to help a classmate confront memories of her own boating accident. In helping his classmate, Evan is drawn back to West Hook where his theory, that his parents were swallowed by a mythical sea witch known as The She, is challenged by his brother's research and a Drug Enforcement Agency investigation. When everything he thought he knew about his parents is threatened and nobody but an emotionally unstable girl and a mysterious Vietnam veteran believe him, Evan is forced to decide once and for all if he will be able to confront The She and accept the truth about his parents.</p> <p>This story touches on the alienation many teens feel from their parents and peers, and readers will be captivated by the vibrant characters, realistic relationships, and mystery throughout the novel.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ashley Marrinan-Levy Tempe, AZ</p>
<p><i>The Ravenmaster's Secret</i> by Elvira Woodruff Scholastic Press, 2003, 240 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>“Chores, chores and more chores,” Forrest complained (p.1), a very typical phrase we hear from young and not-so-young people. <i>The Ravenmaster's Secret</i> is one truly interesting story that will keep your eyes glued on each page to find out what happens to 11-year old Forrest Harper. He is the son to one of the Tower's guards (Yeoman Warders), who lives in a small cottage tucked in the outer walls of the Tower of London.</p> <p>In the beginning of the story, Forrest complains about nearly everything. He wants to go outside the Tower to prove his courage—where no bullies will make fun of him and he can explore different worlds. His daily chores include taking care of ravens kept in the Tower to prevent them from leaving; it is believed that when the ravens leave the Tower, the Tower will fall into the enemy's hands. The position requires a responsible, patient, steadfastness, and keen-eyed person who can gain their trust and understand their ways.</p> <p>Forrest seems to be the perfect candidate for the job. But the curiosity for exploring the world with his best friend, Rat, just seems to be getting further and further away. His great adventures in London's most feared prison do not satisfy his hunger for adventure until he meets Maddy, a Scottish 11-year-old rebel imprisoned in the tower. After learning about the unfairness of his king, Forrest is confused about his destiny. Should he commit treason by helping Maddy escape? Or should he obey the law and allow his innocent friend to be executed?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Patricia Villanueva Phoenix, AZ</p>	<p><i>Shipwreck</i> by Gordon Korman Scholastic, 2001, 129 pp., \$4.99</p> <p>Forced to live and work together, six children fight through daily chores, arguments, disappointments and frustrations as they try to survive on this long, strange, terrifying adventure. Luke, J.J, Will, Lyssa, Charla, and Ian earned this trip by being mischievous or unruly; their parents had enough and did not know what else to do. This trip's purpose is to give them a second chance. The boat trip is guided by two men, the captain, James Cascadden, and the first mate, Mr. Radford. The children live in close conditions and become the crew of the ship. The captain teaches them lessons, and the mate guides them throughout their daily chores and activities. Each of the characters has his or her own unique problems and abilities, but they all agree on one thing: They do not want to be on this ship headed out to sea.</p> <p>Throughout the story, the children face life or death decisions. Both their captain and the first mate abandon them on a sinking ship with no food and no hope. The lessons they learn are numerous; they are forced to swallow their grudges and work together.</p> <p>This novel is an enjoyable look into what can happen to six children who need direction and are sent on a journey to reshape their lives. Little did they know they would end up shipwrecked on an island with nothing but a glimmer of hope.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Nicole August Tempe, AZ</p>

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<p><i>Sister Slam and the Poetic Motormouth Road Trip</i> Coming of Age/Death/Escape by Linda Oatman High ISBN: 1582349487 Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2004, 200 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>With her sorrow over the death of her mother, her anguish over her oversized chest, and her scars from the mocking words of high schoolers, Laura Crapper is less than stable. She is downright frustrated with life and ready to escape into the big, uncharted world, away from all the suffering of her small-town life. So taking on the name "Sister Slam," Laura and her best friend, Twig, pack up the Firebird, say goodbye to their cruel childhood world, and head off—for the first road trip of their lives—to participate in the Tin-Can Poetry Slam.</p> <p>But, on the way, the rhyming sisters learn that real life is just as hard as high school and that adults can be just as cruel as kids. The girls take on the world, rapping their way through a speeding ticket, a smashed pig, and a few car crashes. Then, like a glittery dream, Sister Slam and Twig find themselves living the high life as the stars of slam poetry shows all over New York. And, best of all, a sweet, hot, guitar-strumming guy shows interest in Laura. But when a call comes from home that tragedy has struck, the girls rush back to their hometown, leaving their new, exciting life behind.</p> <p><i>Sister Slam and the Poetic Motormouth Road Trip</i> is an exhilarating, angst-ridden voyage through the world of slam poetry and the trials and thrills of growing up.</p> <p>Lindsay Heyen Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Tomorrow, Maybe</i> by Brian James PUSH, Scholastic Inc., 2003, 248 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Gretchen, 15, most commonly known by her fellow street kids as Chen, is growing up homeless on the streets of New York. She faces the reality of having to beg for money, stealing to eat, and having an uncertainty of where she will sleep each night.</p> <p>Not everything is depressing in Chen's world. She keeps her head held high and looks for the best in every drab situation. Although she sometimes misses the everyday luxuries of having a family and a home, she finds her place in the freedom of the streets.</p> <p>Chen's life takes a significant turn on a typically cold winter night in New York City when young Elizabeth, 11, enters the picture. Chen vows she will always take care of Elizabeth and never leave her side. The two are like sisters. They beg together, they share the money made, and they watch out for one another. After teaching themselves for years that they cannot trust anyone, not even their own fathers, they find the trust and strength in one another to help get through another night.</p> <p>Invoking many emotions, this novel will take young readers through turns and twists that are rather scary and sometimes very sad situations. But perhaps it will make those young people, uncertain of this time in their lives, more aware of their surroundings each day and hopefully provide a little light on the sometimes dark circumstances of their lives.</p> <p>Erin Murphy Minneapolis, MN</p>
<p><i>Theodore Roosevelt: Champion of the American Spirit</i> by Betsy Harvey Kraft Clarion Books, 2003, 163 pp., \$19.00</p> <p>Theodore Roosevelt was born into a wealthy New York family. As a child, he spent much time outside keeping detailed notes on nature. He also was an avid reader. As an adult, he was successful in establishing national parks to protect America's natural resources.</p> <p>An honest man who loved a good fight, Roosevelt put together a volunteer "Rough Riders" unit to fight the Spanish in Cuba. He also worked hard to eliminate corruption in government and break up corporate monopolies in U.S. business.</p> <p>Roosevelt was a problem-solver; he backed Panama in gaining independence from Columbia, to enable the building of the Panama Canal. His charismatic personality helped negotiate peace between warring nations, industry, and their labor force and strengthen the U.S. Navy.</p> <p>Readers will appreciate the author's storytelling approach. Kraft has written a book that will keep readers turning the pages to follow Roosevelt's adventures. This would be a good choice for an overview of Roosevelt's life, but it lacks the depth to use for research papers.</p> <p>Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>Tom Aaway</i> by James Heneghan Orca Book Publishers, 2003, 256 pp., \$6.95</p> <p>In Ireland, where this book starts, the Irish are fighting against the British and the Protestants. Declan Doyle has lived with the fighting for as long as he can remember. When both his parents and sister die because of the battle, Declan joins a gang against the British and Protestants. He is a natural rebel, making bombs, threatening people, and blowing up cars. But soon his is yanked away by his Uncle Matthew to live with him in Canada. Declan has no desire to stay in Canada, he would do anything to get back to Ireland and resume his battles. He then makes an agreement with his uncle that if he stays for three months and goes to school, then his uncle will pay Declan's way back to Ireland.</p> <p>This novel kept me entertained the entire time; I honestly could not wait to find out if he was going to decide to stay or go or if he was actually going to make it the three months. This is a great novel about a teenager who was moving in a downward spiral and, when he is given a chance to see the whole picture, he really grows up a lot and realizes what is important. There comes a time for every teenager when he or she finally starts to see a bigger picture of the world.</p> <p>Jessica Doehrman Phoenix, AZ</p>

<p><i>Walk Softly, Rachel</i> by Kate Banks Realistic/Death/Family/Coming of Age Frances Foster Books, 2003, 160 pp., \$16.00 ISBN 0-374-38230-1 Do you ever think about death? Rachel does. The 14-year-old was 7 when her brother, Jake, died. She never really knew him, but she gets the chance when she finds his journal. For three weeks, the time it takes her to read the journal, she grows alongside her brother. She learns about losses and loneliness, failure and frustration, pain and pressure, shame and sadness. She learns all the things that matter. But what is more, Rachel learns what is behind a smile and how to not just look backward, but forward, as well. Rachel has lost a brother and a best friend; she is about to lose another best friend and a home. She has suffered, but she will heal. She has a grandmother full of advice and a mother and father who are just as capable of making mistakes as she. So life is not about running away, it is about breathing, changing, and starting over. Rachel will let go and say goodbye, but she will also continue to wish for the impossible. With her novel, Kate Banks reminds readers that they are not alone. She gives them reassurance when others may not. You are normal, she tells them, and you do not have to walk softly. Kristian Winston Phoenix, AZ</p>	<p><i>The Whale Rider</i> by Witi Ihimaera Coming of Age Harcourt, Inc., 2003, 152 pp., \$17.00 ISBN:0-15-205016-7 From the day she was born, little Kahurangi was overlooked by most because she was a girl. Her grandfather, the chief of the village, was too blinded by tradition to see the power his little granddaughter possessed. The author takes us to a little village in New Zealand where history and tradition work together in keeping the tribe's strength. The story is told from the perspective of Kahurangi's teenage uncle, who watches her unfold into the role that destiny has reserved for her. Kahurangi is a vibrant, young girl destined to be the chief of her people. However, due to the fact that she was born a girl, she is challenged to prove herself and regain the strength of her land. She is gifted with the ability to speak to whales, allies to her people for many generations. In addition to the description of this New Zealand village, the somewhat mythical stories of ancestry, as well as Kahurangi's ability to speak to sea dwellers, will capture young readers right away. Her innocence and determination carry the reader all the way to the very end. First published in 1987 in New Zealand. Shannon Lederer Phoenix, AZ</p>
<p><i>Warriors of Camlann</i> by N.M. Browne Friendship/King Arthur Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2003, 399 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1-58234-817-0 N.M. Browne's sequel to <i>Warriors of Alanna</i> is a wonderfully inventive twist to the classic story of King Arthur. Hoping to get home after a thrilling trip into A.D. 75 Britain, the two lead characters, 16-year-old Dan and Ursula, find themselves now only a little bit further in time; the people they had fought beside are ancient history, and their previous exploits in battle are all cultural legend. The two slowly begin to make connections between those around them and the characters of the well-known Arthurian legend. Between the confusion and the brewing battle, the characters are also struggling with changes within themselves. Once a great battle hero, Dan is now unable to fight, and Ursula has become the war hero. On top of conflicting envy and jealousy within each character, the two suddenly realize their affection for one another runs deeper than a simple friendship, but neither is prepared to face those feelings. Even picking this story up without having read the prequel, it is instantly engrossing. The language is mature without being overwhelming. Browne doesn't shy away from great detail and military terms with her battle scenes, and there isn't a single moment in the novel that seems she is simplifying the story for a young adult audience. This is a great read for anyone familiar with the legends of King Arthur, but it is also a good start to spark interest in the legend for others. Megan Kearney Mesa, AZ</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review, send a copy of the book to:</i> Lori Goodson 409 Cherry Circle Manhattan, KS 66503 <i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p>