

<p><i>Anna's Blizzard</i> by Alison Hart Peachtree Publishers, 2005, 141 pp., \$12.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 1-56145-349-8</p> <p><i>Anna's Blizzard</i> by Alison Hart depicts the struggles faced with living on the prairie during a harsh winter. The main character, Anna, loves the prairie and would rather tend to her sheep than to her arithmetic and reading lessons. Anna uses her knowledge of living on the prairie and tending to her sheep and horse to lead the children of the one-room school to safety during a life-threatening blizzard.</p> <p>One weaves the theme of nature versus man throughout this historical fiction book. For example, a blinding snow storm traps the children in the school, forcing them to eat crumbs left over from lunch, boil snow for water, and huddle together for warmth. Their hopes of making it through the night vanish when the roof caves in due to the weight of the heavy snow. Despite all physical obstacles the blizzard brought, Anna uses her courage to bring the children to safety.</p> <p>Erin Jurand Fort Riley, KS</p>	<p><i>Best Foot Forward</i> by Joan Bauer Putnam, 2005, 183 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Humor ISBN: 0-399-23474-8</p> <p>With <i>Best Foot Forward</i>, Joan Bauer continues the adventures of Jenna Boller. Having concluded the adventures described in <i>Rules of the Road</i>, Jenna returns to Chicago and her job at Gladstone Shoes. Mrs. Gladstone returns, as well, struggling to assert the control over the corporation that was promised to her as Director of Quality Control at the conclusion of <i>Rules of the Road</i>. Mrs. Gladstone's greedy son Eldon continues to engage in shoddy business practices, and Mrs. Gladstone moves through the novel toward the inevitable confrontation that mirrors the plot of <i>Rules of the Road</i>.</p> <p>Added to the mix this time is Tanner Cobb, a good-hearted adolescent on parole for theft and determined to throw his life away. We also meet Charlie Duran, a young man who appeals to Jenna because "He understands retail."</p> <p>As always, Bauer's prose is delightful, and the potentially serious issues (Will Mrs. Gladstone save the soul of the corporation? Will Tanner be rehabilitated?) never threaten to break the essentially humorous spell of the novel. Readers who loved <i>Rules of the Road</i> will have to read <i>Best Foot Forward</i>.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>The Chronicles of Faerie: The Hunter's Moon</i> by O.R. Melling Amulet Books, 2005, 274 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 0-8109-5857-0</p> <p>Sixteen-year-old Gwen is excited to spend her summer in Ireland with her aunt, uncle, and cousin Findabhair, who's the same age and beautiful in a tall, skinny kind of way, everything Gwen believes she's not. The two cousins share a love of faerie lore and decide to backpack across Ireland searching for faeries. They spend their first night camping on a sacred hill of Tara, and that night dreams of the king of the faeries fill the minds of both girls as he tempts them with life in Faerie Land. When Gwen wakes the next morning, she discovers Findabhair has been kidnapped by the faerie king. Alone in a foreign land, Gwen must find a way to rescue her cousin and protect her own life with the help of some new friends and a new boyfriend.</p> <p>This book is fun for fantasy enthusiasts and lovers of Irish literature. The author combines elements of Irish mythology with songs and poetry written in the beautiful Irish language.</p> <p>Lisa Armitage Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Claiming Georgia Tate</i> by Gigi Amateau Candlewick, 2005, 196 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Fiction/Death/Grandparents/Sexual Abuse ISBN: 0-7636-23339-3</p> <p>Considering that the 12-year-old narrator of this novel is sexually abused by her father, remarkably little time is spent dealing with the issue, as if the sexual abuse were more of a plot device to get Georgia back in the arms of her grandfather than a real trauma. That quibble aside, however, the narrative voice here is measured and wise beyond her years, yet rings authentic. Georgia is raised by her grandparents in the rural South, her daily life filled with work, religious worship, friendship, and fun. When her grandmother dies unexpectedly, Georgia's grandfather decides to send her to live with her father. The results are not good, and Georgia must find her way back home. She has the gift, as many protagonists do, of making friends with bizarre strangers who later can help her, in this case: a transvestite, a refugee from Haiti, and a convict recently released from prison. The ending is bittersweet yet hopeful. The characters evoke enough interest to hope for a sequel.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Laie, HI</p>

<p><i>The Convicts</i> by Iain Lawrence</p> <p>18th Century English Social History/ Prison Conditions/Seafaring ISBN: 0-385-90109-7</p> <p>Delacorte Press, 2005, 200 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Meet Charles Dickens for the MTV generation. The story starts with a six-year-old girl falling from a bridge over the Thames to her death, the mother's resulting madness, the father's bankruptcy and incarceration in debtor's prison, and goes from there to recount the adventures of 14-year-old Tom Tin, which include finding a diamond, losing it in the muck, a trial for murder, imprisonment on a slave ship and an adventure at sea. A final Dickensian touch is the amazing coincidence of Tom's being mistaken for a previously unknown evil twin. Shorn of Dickens' verbiage, but filled with details of the filthy streets of London, the desperation of its poorer inhabitants, and evil conditions of prison life, this book should keep boys reading while teaching them how lucky they are to live in the 21st century. Judging from its abrupt conclusion, this book is the first in a series about Tom Tin and may end up with as panoramic a scope as <i>David Copperfield</i>.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Laie, HI</p>	<p><i>The Cry of the Icemark</i> by Stuart Hill</p> <p>Fantasy Chicken House, 2005, 472 pp., \$18.95 ISBN: 0439686261</p> <p>Stuart Hill's debut novel is a thrilling fantasy epic that will be readily devoured by fans of the genre. His hero is 14-year-old Thirrin Freer Strong-in-the-Arm Lindenshield who "carried her names with ease." Thirrin is the warrior-princess of Icemark, a Norse-styled realm invaded by the unbeaten army of Gen. Bellorum. The novel focuses on Thirrin's quest to build an alliance of people and fantasy creatures before Bellorum's army arrives.</p> <p>Hill builds a fascinating social conflict between Thirrin's and Bellorum's worlds. Among the armies in Thirrin's alliance are the Hypolitan, a warrior society led by women and whose people are often named after famous characters in Greek literature. Thirrin's alliance includes fantasy creatures such as witches and warlocks, vampires, ghosts, and zombies.</p> <p>Hill's writing style is flowing and will be quickly picked up by younger readers. The only minor complaint is that events go so well for Thirrin that it is hard to see a real conflict for her. Nevertheless, his wonderful characters and engaging writing leave the reader desperately waiting for more adventures about Thirrin and her friends.</p> <p>John Ritchie Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>The Dark Hills Divide</i> by Patrick Carman</p> <p>Fantasy Orchard Books, 2005, 251 pp., \$11.95 ISBN: 0-439-70093-0</p> <p>Patrick Carman's <i>The Dark Hills Divide</i> is Book 1 in a series of fantasy books from The Land of Elyon collection.</p> <p>While the book gets off to somewhat of a slow start, the reader soon becomes involved in the mystery surrounding the walls of Bridewell and the heroic young lady, Alexa, who will one day assume her place as one of the co-rulers of the kingdom.</p> <p>Led by her new friend Yipes, Alexa travels territory unknown even to adults, bravely facing dangers in order to save the kingdom.</p> <p>Karen Ford Holton, KS</p>	<p><i>Dead on Town Line</i> by Leslie Connor</p> <p>Poetry/Death Dial Books (Penguin Group), 2005, 131 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-8037-3021-7</p> <p>In the spirit of <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>, Cassie Devlin, writer of music, loyal friend, and school leader, has been taught to try to walk around in other people's shoes. With this in mind and upon classmate Gail Sherman's request for friendship, Cassie invites her to join Composer's Workshop, a group of dedicated musicians who work on their compositions together at school. For Cassie, this friendship leads to her body buried near the town line.</p> <p>Told in poetic free verse by the ghost of Cassie, the story details her struggle to accept her new existence and her efforts to help her loved ones locate her body. Along the way, Cassie meets another forgotten soul who learns, along with the reader, how Cassie ended up "dead on town line."</p> <p>An interesting mixture of hope and despair, this tiny novel takes a thought-provoking look at jealousy, violence, and life after death.</p> <p>Robyn Seglem Olathe, KS</p>

<p>Flush by Carl Hiaasen Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, 272 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Dysfunctional Family/Environment ISBN: 0-375-82182-1</p> <p>Noah Underwood accepts the daunting task of justifying his father's outrageous behavior through investigating the Coral Queen casino boat for flushing their sewage tank directly into the ocean. Noah is faced with opposition beginning with his father's arrest for sinking the Coral Queen and his mother's threat to divorce his father due to his anger issues. Noah finds support in his sister Abbey and together hatch a plot to prove their father was trying to stop the pollution and save the beaches, not that he had gone berserk. Help comes to Noah and Abbey from some interesting local characters that often cause Noah to fear for his own safety. These interactions strengthen Noah, providing him with the inner strength he ultimately relies upon to execute his plan to flush dye down the toilets of the Coral Queen to form a recognizable trace.</p> <p>The characters capture the diversity of Florida, creating the flavor of the novel and helping steer the plot. Noah's development into a self-confident boy runs parallel to the challenges he encounters throughout the novel allowing the reader to experience Noah's character development.</p> <p>Patti Rich Phoenix, AZ</p>	<p>The Giant Rat of Sumatra or Pirates Galore by Sid Fleischman Greenwillow Books/Harper Collins, 2005, 194 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-06-074238-0</p> <p>This is a wonderfully descriptive book about a young boy who boards a ship bound for California with a group of mutinous pirates. The adventures that ensue are colorfully described by the author in words that are easily accessible to middle-grade students.</p> <p>The setting of the book makes it particularly appropriate for multidisciplinary study. California in the 1840's was a volatile place. The Indians were still there but had been displaced to some degree by Mexicans and Americans fighting for the vast ranch lands of the state. For this reason social studies and history, as well as multiculturalism, could be easily integrated into the reading of this book. Also, if a teacher were using Robert Louis Stevenson's <i>Treasure Island</i>, this book has many literary parallels to be drawn. This book would probably appeal to male students in particular since the protagonist is a young man who is far away from home on a ribald adventure.</p> <p>Kenan Metzger Muncie, IN</p>
<p>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince by J.K. Rowling Scholastic, 2005, 652 pp., \$29.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Adventure ISBN: 0-439-78454-9</p> <p>When the sixth book in the Harry Potter epic begins, the wizarding and muggle worlds are terrorized by Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters. To make matters worse, Snape makes an unbreakable vow with Mrs. Malfoy, and Draco Malfoy is suspected of being a Death Eater. In the meantime, Harry and Dumbledore travel through the Pensieve to learn how to defeat Lord Voldemort. The stakes are high when Draco's plan is revealed and the Half-Blood Prince betrays those who trusted him most. In the midst of poisonings, werewolf attacks, and a tragic death, Rowling adds much-needed comic relief when Dumbledore visits the Dursleys, the Weasley twins create "the constipation sensation that's gripping the nation" (p. 116), and Ron and Lavender are "snogging" all over Hogwarts castle. Fans will be waiting impatiently for the last book in the series to learn more about R. A. B., horcruxes, and Harry's fate.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p>Hoofbeats: Lara and the Gray Mare: Book One by Kathleen Duey Puffin Books, 2005, 140 pp., \$4.99 (paperback) ISBN: 0-14-240230-3</p> <p>Kathleen Duey says, "Girls throughout history have grown up trusting horses with their friendship, their secrets, and even their lives. The <i>Hoofbeats</i> books are about that trust." Thus, her theme is tried and true, but she has staked out interesting new territory: 17th century Ireland. Nine-year-old Lara is almost old enough to marry in her rural, patriarchal society, but she works like a man, doing chores from making butter and cheese to spreading manure on the fields. The men are gone fighting in constant wars. Lara's life is work, some play, and love for a horse in a society where horses are reserved for warriors. Life is precarious, food is scanty, raiders are a constant threat, and girls are not supposed to have fun. This first book ends at a beginning, with Lara's capture by a raiding party along with the abduction of the foal she saved from death. Lara's voice is engaging and sympathetic if more mature than today's nine-year-old girl.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Laie, HI</p>

<p><i>The Lace Dowry</i> by Andrea Cheng Front Street/Boyd's Mills Press, 2005, 120 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Family Problems/Friendship ISBN: 1-932425-20-9</p> <p>Living in 1933 Budapest, twelve-year-old Juli dreams of exciting careers while her mother schedules dance lessons and commissions an exquisite lace tablecloth for her eventual dowry. Contemporary Juli is unenthused with marriage, dancing, and lace, causing additional discord between mother and daughter. While viewing the tablecloth, Juli befriends the tatter's daughter, Roza, who also differs with her mother, and witnesses their family's hardships.</p> <p>When the lace maker's eyes fail, the tablecloth's progress stalls, and Juli's mother sadly abandons the project. She confides she was once a poor peasant ordered to marry a disagreeable man, but instead stole family money and escaped to Budapest. The dowry was meant to protect Juli from a similar fate.</p> <p>Now contrite and determined to complete the tablecloth, Juli can accomplish this only by simultaneously imitating and defying her mother regarding family money. When the lovely tablecloth is finished, it creates lasting bonds among the women and girls in this simple but engrossing story.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>	<p><i>The Manny</i> by Sarah L. Thompson Dutton Children's Books, 2005, 181 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Love/Dealing With Parents ISBN: 0-525-47413-7</p> <p><i>The Manny</i>, by Sarah L. Thompson, is told from the perspective of 16-year-old Justin Blackwell, whose sarcasm and wit really make this book stand out from others and lots of fun to read.</p> <p>Justin is hired by a wealthy couple to work as a nanny for their four-year-old son, Aspen, one summer in the Hamptons. During the summer, Justin faces the typical teenage issues of how to ask a girl out, how to deal with the girl's hostile ex-boyfriend, and how to respond to adult injustices. Things don't always go smoothly for Justin, but he survives pretty well.</p> <p>Karen Ford Holton, KS</p>
<p><i>Maximum Ride—The Angel Experiment</i> by James Patterson Little, Brown and Co., 2005, 423 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Adventure ISBN: 031615556X</p> <p>James Patterson, who usually writes intense crime novels for adults, slips in his attempt to write an action-adventure series for kids. This first novel introduces readers to Max, who leads a group of young kids who have had two percent of their DNA altered by evil scientists. This alteration gives the group wings. It also gives them each their own unique special power. Max and her "family" are hunted by the evil scientists and another group of genetically-altered kids who are like werewolves. The premise sounds exciting, but the story itself is filled with every possible comic book/Saturday morning cartoon cliché.</p> <p>Patterson's own writing style seems uneasy. Max is typically our narrator, but Patterson occasionally slips out of the first-person voice to get the audience caught up on other events. When she speaks, Max sounds horribly fake and uses phrases like "son of a gun." Despite Patterson's attention to contemporary issues like animal testing and genetic engineering, his 133 chapters of action without substance will leave readers more sick than satisfied by this ride.</p> <p>John Ritchie Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>A Maze Me: Poems for Girls</i> by Naomi Shihab Nye Greenwillow Books, 2005, 124 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Poetry/Young Womanhood ISBN: 0-06-058190</p> <p>Nye reports that she kept a journal during her 'tween years, maybe writing only three lines a day. Those jottings remind her now of what she observed and felt during those years when her body insisted on growing up while she clung to childhood. These 72 poems grow out of those long ago observations, reminding her and her readers to notice everything, to think about everything, to wonder about the world and how to establish peace around you and in you. These poems are full of daily wonders: silver spider trails, glum Mondays, the heart of a pumpkin the day after Halloween, the little chair in kindergarten where her body no longer fits. If girls could be encouraged to put down the cell phones and the Ipods and look away from television and movie screens and see the sky, the grass, the lives around them with similar wonder and respect, as both girls and women they would shape a better world. This small book is a good place to start.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Late, HI</p>

<p>Never Mind the Goldbergs by Matthew Roth PUSH (Scholastic Inc.), 2005, 360 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Matthew Roth's novel bills itself as "The greatest Hollywood punk rock Orthodox Jewgirl story EVER TOLD!"—it's that and far more. It is also an episodic novel told by its teenage star, Hava Aaronson. Within ten pages, Hava grew on me. Roth gives her a sensitive voice that shows her confusion and anger are real; her insights are fascinating. Whatever one's cultural background, any reader who has ever felt trapped by the mores of his or her society will hear truth in Hava's voice.</p> <p>As Hava leaves New York for Los Angeles to star in a new sitcom about Jews, we follow her attempts to adapt to a very different society. In the LA party scene, Hava confronts issues of sex, drugs, underage drinking and other temptations in a manner that is both shocking and, in Hava's well-crafted voice, realistic. These scenes restrict the novel's potential audience to mature readers. However, they will find in Hava a voice they have been longing for—a voice that speaks to and for those who have ever felt they were living on the margin of "normal" young society.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Ritchie Manhattan, KS</p>	<p>No Exit (The Big Empty, Book 4) by J. B. Stephens Penguin RazorBill, 2005, 247 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>The United States has turned into a police state after the Strain 7 virus created a crisis. Novo Mundum seems to be the ideal community that supports the arts in a world that is in panic. Dr. Slattery and his military brother who control this community have plans for Novo Mundum and the rest of the world that worries a group of teens. They narrowly escaped the community and are looking for Keely's mom, a virologist, to help them from what might be Strain 8. The teens end up back at Novo Mundum to stop a tragedy and save the community and possibly the world. However, their plans take them in a strange direction. There is an accident, and now they must work quickly to accomplish their goal.</p> <p>The fourth book in a series, <i>No Exit</i> takes readers into a world in which no one would want to live. For readers who expect to breeze through a book, don't give up on this one. It starts slow but comes together and leaves room for another adventure into the lives of the characters you have come to enjoy.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Paula Lane Clay Center, KS</p>
<p>Out Standing in My Field by Patrick Jennings Scholastic Press, 2005, 165 pp., \$16.95.</p> <p>On the surface, this novel appears to be a play-by-play account of a little league game. However, the main character, Ty Cutter, hates how his father forces him to play baseball. The baseball game just turns out to be a backdrop for Ty's life, as he deals with a younger sister who is smarter than him, a father who is an emotionally abusive alcoholic and a mother who is in denial. Young men will enjoy this novel, whether or not they like baseball, since it deals with many issues that boys struggle with every day. The story also features a strong female character in Ty's sister. At first I read this novel thinking it would be a tedious account of a baseball game, but I discovered it was a captivating, first-person, present-tense recounting of the life of a young man who strives to discover who he is aside from his parent expectations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kenan Metzger Muncie, IN</p>	<p>Poor Is Just a Starting Place by Leslie J. Wyatt Holiday House, 2005, 196 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Dreaming of escaping the confines of her hometown and family in Kentucky during the Great Depression, twelve-year-old Artie Wilson enters an essay contest to win a \$25 savings bond and frantically searches the woods around her home for the answers to the family's secrets of buried treasure. Heritage, the essay contest's topic, forces Artie to examine the lives of her ancestors against the backdrop of her own experiences—the chores of a family farm, extreme poverty, putting food on the table, disease, and a less-than-understanding father.</p> <p>Accurately portraying rural life in the South during the 1930s, this book reveals the dreams and goals of a young woman desperate to overcome poverty and move on to bigger cities and better things. The reality of the story's setting comes crashing home for the reader in that there are no quick and easy solutions to Artie's problems and that it is her determination and courage that finally win the day.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Matt Copeland Topeka, KS</p>

<p>Prom by Laurie Halse Anderson Viking Press, 2005, 225 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Relationships/Family ISBN: 0-670-05974-9</p> <p>Ashley Hannigan, an 18-year-old senior, has no interest in school or school-related activities until prom is canceled. Ashley's long-term plan has been to get through high school, have a boyfriend, move out of her parents' house, and get a job. All of these she plans to do with minimal effort. Among other things, her grades are abysmal, her boyfriend's a dropout, and her waitress job involves wearing a rat costume.</p> <p>With the urging of her best friend, she becomes involved in saving the prom. After being given some decision-making power and responsibility for the prom, Ashley discovers that school is actually not so bad. She wants to go to the prom! Being permitted to attend is another matter.</p> <p>Students will enjoy the first-person account and the short chapters. The humorous antics of quirky characters add to the fun. The story's resolution is satisfying as Ashley is not willing to settle for a life with few possibilities. She is going to try the local community college. One knows she will make it.</p> <p>Joy Ferichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p>Ranger's Apprentice by John Flanagan Philomel Books, 2005, 249 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 0399244549</p> <p><i>Ranger's Apprentice</i> is the first book in a trilogy following six orphans. The first book focuses on Will, the reluctant Ranger's Apprentice. Will, orphaned from birth, has convinced himself he is the son of a brave warrior and would much rather be apprenticed into battle school. His slight size makes him a poor candidate for that particular school, but his quick thinking, honesty, and castle-scaling abilities make him a perfect candidate to be Halt's hardworking apprentice.</p> <p>Danger is quickly approaching the kingdom, as Lord Morgarath is plotting to overtake the land, and Will must put his skills to use to help Halt save the kingdom. In the end Will is faced with a life-altering choice and the key to unlock his parentage. <i>Ranger's Apprentice</i> is a wonderful read for lower middle school students into fantasy like <i>Lord of the Rings</i>. This book focuses on friendship, honesty, and other values, without being "preachy." While I am not usually into fantasy, one of my students recommended it to me, and I could hardly put it down.</p> <p>Kim Osenga Manhattan, KS</p>
<p>Scrub by David Ives HarperCollins, 2005, 208 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Humor/Western/Mystery ISBN: 0-06-059841-7</p> <p><i>Scrub</i> is the first-person account of William Stanley Christmas who, at the age of thirteen, runs away from home and begins his life as a scribe. Traveling all over the West, Scrub (William) makes his living writing letters for those who are illiterate. The intrigue begins in chapter one when he discovers that he is being followed by a mysterious stranger who wants him dead. Chapter titles such as "Attack at the Triple X Ranch" and "I Write a Letter and am Murdered" provide the reader with quick, interesting summaries of the action that will take place.</p> <p><i>Scrub</i> would be an excellent book to be read to students. As many words are phonetically spelled ("mazewell have a thoro look"), they sound authentic read aloud; they could create confusion for individuals reading silently.</p> <p>Lisa Scheriff Knoxville, TN</p>	<p>The Sisters Grimm: The Fairy-Tale Detectives by Michael Buckley Amulet Books, imprint of Abrams, 2005, 304 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Fairy Tale ISBN: 0-8109-5167-9</p> <p>At almost twelve, Sabrina is a savvy survivor. From the day her parents disappeared, she and her younger sister Daphne have been shuffled from one horrible foster home to another. When the book opens, she and Daphne have been sent to Ferryport Landing to a woman who claims to be their grandmother. Unfortunately, Granny Relda is a genuine nut case. However, Sabrina's doubts are dispelled when she sees the giant for herself and meets a host of fairy tale creatures, from Prince Charming to the Big Bad Wolf. When Granny is captured by the giant, Sabrina and Daphne must discover who has let the giant loose and rescue their grandmother. Then Sabrina learns that the Everafters (as the fairy tale creatures prefer to be called) can't leave Ferryport Landing until she and her sister are dead!</p> <p>In this modern-day fairytale, Buckley has succeeded in creating a sympathetic heroine with a realistic voice plopped down in a fantastic setting. Most lovers of fantasy fiction will enjoy this book. It may even delight girls who enjoy realistic fiction because of Sabrina's plucky personality.</p> <p>Virginia Beesley Quinter, KS</p>

<p><i>The Sledding Hill</i> by Chris Crutcher Greenwillow Books, HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, 230 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Eddie Proffit suffers “a hurricane of calamity” (p. 19) when he first finds his father dead at the family gas station and only two months later finds his best friend, Billy, dead in the school gymnasium. In that moment, Eddie stops speaking. Speaking is the only piece of his life that he can control. When he stops speaking, Eddie begins to listen, really listen, to those around him: Billy reaching out from the dead, Reverend Tarter trying to control his students and censor their experiences, and newfound friends confessing to being alone and afraid. When Eddie begins speaking again at a church service, he has a great deal to say, much to the chagrin of Reverend Tarter. In his first novel for a middle-grades audience, Crutcher masterfully captures the pain of adolescence: surviving death, strained family relationships, and questioning your faith.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p><i>Sophie Pitt-Turnbull Discovers America</i> by Dyan Sheldon Candlewick Press, 2005, 185 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-7636-2740-2</p> <p>Sophie is devastated when she learns that her family is not going to France as usual for their summer holiday. However, the situation improves when she is invited to change places with the daughter of a family friend, which means living in New York for the summer. Little does Sophie realize that she will not stay in Manhattan (like she thought) nor have a relaxing vacation (she shares a room, sleeps on the floor, and has to supervise two precocious children).</p> <p>Dyan Sheldon’s easy-to-follow story chronicles Sophie’s adventures navigating Brooklyn in the summer heat, supervising the kids, and interacting with the neighborhood residents.</p> <p>Most female readers will be able to relate to this humorous tale. With short chapters and relatively easy vocabulary, the novel would probably appeal to girls in grades six through ten. A helpful glossary at the end provides clarification for any foreign terms.</p> <p>Lisa Scherff Knoxville, TN</p>
<p><i>The Sword that Cut the Burning Grass: A Samurai Mystery</i> by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler Penguin, 2005, 211 pp., \$10.99</p> <p>In this the fourth samurai mystery by these authors, Seikei, a fourteen-year-old samurai, is sent on an important mission by the shogun: Seikei must convince the young emperor to perform his ceremonial duties. Seikei learns that the boy emperor believes he is not the true emperor, but before Seikei can solve that problem, the emperor is kidnapped, rebellion breaks out against the shogun, and Seikei is being blamed for allowing both disasters to occur. Fortunately, a young woman and a mysterious warrior come to Seikei’s aid. The three odd companions set out on a dangerous mission to rescue the emperor and stop the rebellion. Although this riveting book is labeled a mystery, it is also a fascinating historical fiction. Young people will love its fast pace and be drawn into the exotic world of sixteenth century Japan where adolescents take on adult responsibilities and significance.</p> <p>Virginia Beesley Quinter, KS</p>	<p><i>We Beat the Street: How a Friendship Pact Led to Success</i> by Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt with Sharon M. Draper Dutton’s Children’s Books, 2005, 183 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 0-525-47407-2</p> <p>Sampson, George, and Rameck were three boys growing up in tough New Jersey neighborhoods. Drugs, robbery, and murder were normal. But a handful of positive influences guided them away from destruction toward each other. They made a pact to go to college. Their friendship and dedication to the pact led all three to graduate from college and medical school. Today they practice medicine and dentistry in the communities where they grew up.</p> <p>I could not put this book down. Each chapter shares an anecdote and personal remarks from one of “The Three Doctors.” These are their stories from age six to adulthood. Speaking honestly of their discouragement, failures, and successes, they offer encouragement to kids who find themselves in hopeless situations. This book should be carefully shared with upper elementary and is a must-read for middle and high school.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>

<p><i>Westminster Abby</i> by Micol Ostow Penguin Group, 2005, 168 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Coming of Age/Relationships ISBN: 0-14-240413-6</p> <p>Abby Capshaw's application to the Students Across the Seven Seas Study Abroad Program has been accepted. She has mixed emotions as she heads to London. She sees herself as vanilla ice cream; sweet, plain, and not very exciting. Never one to be a risk taker, this trip is stretching her limits. This may be the perfect opportunity to assert her independence from her over-controlling parents, escape a disastrous break-up with her boyfriend, and become one big hot fudge sundae!</p> <p>Upon arriving in London, Abby determines to do things she wouldn't ordinarily do. She introduces herself to a green-haired girl. She commits lies of omission to avoid conflicts with her parents. And she ventures into a new relationship, even though she's not looking for one.</p> <p>I enjoyed watching the relationships unfold in this book. Middle and high school girls will relate to the issues of friendship and dating. Readers will enjoy realistic characters interacting with peers in a foreign country. This is the first book in a series that focuses on adventures of teen-age girls studying abroad.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>	<p><i>Wright & Wong 1: The Case of the Prank that Stank</i> by Laura J. Burns and Melinda Metz Razorbill, Penguin Group, 2005, 182 pp., \$5.99</p> <p>Mystery/Friendship/Asperger's Syndrome ISBN: 1-59514-014-X</p> <p>Orville Wright and Agatha Wong have been friends since second grade. They are not social outcasts, but they aren't exactly popular, either. Agatha is honored, and Orville, diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, is ambivalent when the student body president and the captain of the junior high football team ask them to join the committee to plan the yearly prank for the big game with the rival Sharks. What promises to be an outstandingly successful prank turns to disaster when their opponent's clubhouse catches fire, and the football field itself soon goes up in flames. Orville is positive their prank couldn't have caused the fire, but all signs seem to point to them. Abandoned by their own student body, the pair set out to prove their innocence.</p> <p>This was a fun, fast read. Orville's Asperger's Syndrome is introduced to readers, and Agatha's loyalty to him takes precedence over her desire to gain popularity. Middle school students will relate to believable characters and social groups that can change daily.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>
<p><i>The Xanadu Adventure Starring Vesper Holly</i> by Lloyd Alexander Dutton's Children's Books, 2005, 145 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Girls' Adventure Quest ISBN 0-525-47371-8</p> <p>Lloyd Alexander, well known for his more adult fantasy novels, is with this book closing out the Vesper Holly series, one created to fill the empty spaces where smart, spunky, adventurous heroines ought to be. Vesper has been called on several times in past novels to save the world in exotic places, and this narrative set in Xanadu, is no exception. Vesper has her final showdown with the evil Dr. Helvitiutis, accompanied as always by her biographer, the prissy Professor Brinton Garret and his beloved wife Mary, and a newer character, "the Weed," or Tobias Wister Passavant. Vesper is comely and wealthy. The Weed is gangly and awkward but of a scientific bent. After all the villains are [finally] conquered, Vesper and Tobias marry and produce a child, thus apparently putting an end to her need to travel. Witty prose and sly jokes at Dr. Brinton Garret's expense make this a lively read. Fans of this series will grow up to read and enjoy Elizabeth Peters.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Late, HI</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i> Lori Goodson 409 Cherry Circle Manhattan, KS 66503</p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p>