



About Series Books

As a youngster, I discovered the Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, the Bobbsey twins, and other series books and wanted to read them all. I could hardly wait until the next volume was published. Then I would rush to the library and eagerly sign up for the next available copy, or my parents would give me a copy as a present. I owe my love of reading to these books. Mystery and suspense books are my passion.

It is no wonder that *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (Scholastic, 2005) has proven to be such a success. It is filled with magic and intrigue. Harry is quite a bit more somber, and he is placed in more dangerous situations. Readers are not sure what to expect next. Who can Harry trust? What does Harry find out as he goes on strange journeys with Dumbledore? Surprise ending.

Other books in series that young adults and I have found enjoyable are:

- Alex Ryder series by Anthony Horowitz (Philomel).
- Charlie Bone series by Jenny Nimmo (Orchard)
- Pagan Chronicles series by Catherine Links (Candlewick)

- The Edge Chronicles by Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell (David Pickling Books)
- Artemis Fowl series by Eoin Colfer (Hyperion)
- Warriors series by Erin Hunter (Harper Collins)
- Cirque Du Freak series by Darren Shan (Little, Brown)
- Inkheart series by Cornelia Funke (Chicken House)
- A Series of Unfortunate Events series by Lemony Snicket (Harper Collins)
- Young Wizards series by Diane Duane (Harcourt)
- The Immortals series by Tamora Pierce (Simon Pulse)
- The Spiderwick Chronicles series by Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black (Simon & Schuster)
- Divide series by Elizabeth Kay (Chicken House)
- Misfits, Inc. series by Mark Delaney (Peachtree)
- Eragon series by Christopher Paolini (Knopf)

One way of using series books effectively in the classroom is having reading groups. Students can choose a series and can continue to read in that group and discuss each sequel. Then once a month, representatives from each

group can do “a sell your series” presentation to the entire class. This lends itself for a wide range of writing activities. The class can “publish” a journal of responses to various books in a series; each group can design ads. Students might write to the authors of the series and publish the responses from the authors.

Times Present and Past

Suzanne Fisher Staples has created a brilliant story with *Under the Persimmon Tree* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005.) Afghanistan and Pakistan are the settings for this battle with the Taliban. Najimah, a young Afghan girl, who watches the Taliban seize her father and brother, also witnesses the death of her mother and younger brother in an air raid. She then makes her way to Pakistan and meets Nusrat, an American woman, who married an Afghanistan doctor. He is running a field operation elsewhere. Nusrat is not sure where he is and awaits letters or messages about his whereabouts. Nusrat finds solace in teaching a few people in her home. She worries about her husband in this war-ravaged world, but she has hopes he will return. Najimah is

biding her time, determined to find her brother and father. She is sure he is nearby. Nusrat says she will help her in her endeavors. Dangers lurk everywhere as we meet characters we wonder if we can trust. The writing is brilliant and fast moving. Staples knows this part of the world well. She understands their customs and emotions. Must reading.

Another war novel, *The Eyes of the Emperor* (Random House, 2005) by Graham Salisbury takes readers back to Pearl Harbor just before and during World War II. Eddy and his Japanese family who live in Hawaii and their friends witness the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. Eddy has enlisted in the United States Army and is a devout American; however, because he and his friends are Japanese-Americans, there are those in the Army who can't overlook their ethnicity. Can they be trusted? This is a nightmarish part of U.S. history that is based on real facts.

Maria Testa's *Something about America* (Candlewick, 2005), a story told through poems, involves an immigrant family from Kosovo who escaped from the hatred and prejudices and landed in America. While the young daughter manages to adjust to the new environment over the years, her father and mother have very mixed feelings. They miss their old home and their country. They wonder about returning there now that the war is over. An incident in a nearby community involving immigrants stirs the family, and they realize "all the world's sadness is in America." Poignant and provocative.

Add a Dash of Mystery

Carl Hiaasen's *Flush* (Knopf, 2005) is a mystery that involves a casino boat owner who might have authorized flushing waste into ocean waters. How can young Noah get the proof he needs? Fast and fun reading.

In *In the Night on Lanvale Street* by Jane Leslie Conly (Henry Holt, 2005), we learn that at night a Baltimore neighborhood can be extremely dangerous, especially with gangs and drugs around. Then thirteen-year-old Charlie and her younger brother, Jerry, become involved in solving a neighborhood murder

In Richard Scrimger's *From Charlie's Point of View* (Sleuth, 2005) Charlie's dad has been accused of being a bandit. Charlie and friends are determined to prove his innocence. This involves a number of weird experiences. Exciting and funny.

Anthony Horowitz is creating a new series, and it opens with *Raven's Gate* (Scholastic, 2005). Fourteen-year-old Matt, an English lad, is accused of a crime he did not do. He has two choices: go to jail or go live with an old lady in a remote town. He chooses the latter. Then he discovers his troubles are really beginning.

Rick Yancy, in *The Extraordinary Adventures of Alfred Kropp* (Bloomsbury, 2005) has Alfred find himself a victim of a robbery in which his uncle is involved. The uncle is killed. Alfred now is picked up by strangers who want him to help get the stolen object back. It is a very special object that has most unusual powers. Fun and nice twists and turns.

Carl Deuker in *Runner* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005) introduces readers to Chance, a seventeen-year-old who lives on a run-down boat with an alcoholic father. To survive Chance becomes a "runner." But for whom? At what personal risk? Exciting. Fast moving.

In *Devil's Footsteps* (Delacorte, 2005) by E. L. Richardson readers have a chance to enter a world in which the children are disappearing. Meet the Dark Man and watch the horror begin. What can thirteen-year-old Bryan do? Don't let the young age of the protagonist fool you.

Leslie Connor's *Dead on Town Line* (Dial, 2005) is a murder mystery told through poetry. Cassie Devlin, the victim, is watching things unfold, and she discovers another mystery guest. Can be read in one sitting and should surprise readers.

Short But Not Always Sweet

New collections of short stories are flourishing. I have found a few collections that should meet a variety of tastes.

Mary Lanagan's *Black Juice* (Harper Collins, 2004) reflects facets of life and death which provoke vivid imagination and much thought. For example, how would you feel watching a family member sink to her death in a tar pit in one story; or in another, following a "lost" young lady on her way to a "wedding school blessing" in a church? This book is filled with unusual characters and events. The author is Australian and puts an interesting turn on storytelling.

David Lubar's *Invasion of the Road Weenies* (Starscape, 2005) is fun and "fantastic." These weenies are joggers who never smile and are rather weird, and some would say creepy. In one story, for example, word has it there is an old woman who gives out large bars of chocolate at Halloween. Each bar feels like it weighs ten pounds. Amy and Wendy wonder how the old lady can afford to be so generous as they carry their bags of goodies home. But as they were on their way home. . . . Who would ever believe them?

Gary Soto's *Help Wanted: Stories* (Harcourt, 2005) tells the stories of young Mexican-Americans as they go through a variety of experiences. What's Caroline going to do about her bratty six-year-old brother? About her family? Are they ever going to learn proper etiquette? Caroline had written Miss Manners for advice. Miss Manners was her heroine. Things were not only sad at home, but also at school. Things had changed between Elena, her best friend, and her. Then there were other incidents. Only if Miss Manners would answer. Then what?

A Nice Mixture

Jon Scieszka's *Guys Read* ((Viking, 2005) a collection of stories, pictures, essays, etc., written by male writers, illustrators, and editors. Boys who went to the Guys Read Web site listed the authors and illustrators they most enjoyed. Jon contacted these people and had them contribute to this book. Boys should enjoy the

collection. Chris Crutcher, for example, tells about his experiences in high school in Cascade, Idaho, and the mysteries of the "C" Club initiation. Of course, to be able to join the club, you had to be an athlete, good or bad. Ask the students, before they read the article, to tell what they think the initiation might be and would they like to join. Surprise! Daniel Handler (Lemony Snicket) has a strong, and funny, statement on "Principals and Principles." Other writers include: Chris Lynch, Jack Gantos, T. A. Barron, Walter Dean Myers, Stephen King, to name a few.

Paul Volponi's *Black and White* (Viking 2005) is the story of two outstanding athletes, Marcus, who is black, and Eddie, who is white. Together they are super strong on any basketball court. Then one night they do something that really affects their lives. This is a great story with a haunting ending.

Francis Chalifour's *After* (Tundra, 2005) is the story of a young teen's struggle to understand his father's death and the sadness he feels for quite some time. His relationships with his friends suffer. The school psychologist tries to help. His mother does all she can to bring him out of his doldrums. A moving and poignant tale.

Martin Sandler's *America through the Lens: Photographers Who Changed the Nation* (Henry Holt, 2005) is a remarkable book of text and photographs. Each essay about the photographer reflects a focus on a particular segment of what was happening in America at

a particular time. Mathew B. Brady photographed every living president from John Quincy Adams to William J. McKinley, including Abraham Lincoln. Brady and some assistants took many pictures during the Civil War, and "were the first to record a major event in the nation's history." James Van Der Zee, many years later, had a studio in Harlem and photographed many African-American leaders and events. Other photographers include: Dorothea Lange, Toni Frissell, NASA, Lewis Hine, and Margaret Bourke White.

Neal Shusterman's *The Schwa Was Here* (Dutton, 2004) is an unusual tale involving a maybe-you're-here and then maybe-you're-not fantasy student called Schwa. He is sort of invisible. Who is he? Why does he do what he does? Anthony Bonano, who is telling this story, wants answers also. Schwa has a way of showing up at unexpected times and then. Lots of fun and says much about friendships.

Troy Blacklaw's *Karoo Boy* (Harcourt, 2005) takes place in South Africa. After the death of a twin brother, Douglas is taken by his mother into this small town and makes friends with two other young people, Marika and Moses. This novel of growing self awareness has a perfect setting. Strong stuff; invigorating.

M. Jerry Weiss is Professor Emeritus at Jersey City State College in Jersey City, New Jersey, and recipient of the 2003 Ted Hipple Service Award.

