



**Multicultural Titles for the Middle Grades**  
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**Contemporary Fiction**

Adoff, Jaime. *Jimi and Me*. 2005, Hyperion, Ages 12 and up, \$15.99, 329 pp.

Keith James thinks that having his father die in a convenience store shooting is the worst thing that ever happened to him. His life is uprooted even more when his mother and he move from Brooklyn, New York to Hollow Falls, Ohio, to live with his aunt. There, Keith is the only bi-racial guy in his school; he can't figure out why his mother is so sad all the time; and, above all, he misses his father – especially the times they played Jimi Hendrix tunes together. He isn't prepared for the turn of events that takes him on an angry search for a family member he didn't know existed. In a twist of fate, he learns that he has a stepbrother named Jimi. Adoff's use of free verse, short sections, and use of first person bring Keith's personality to life. Keith's pain is real, but his individualism keeps the reader turning pages. Due to its subject matter, this is recommended for upper middle and lower high school. Adoff shows great promise as an award winning author.

Alegría, Malín. *Estrella's Quinceañera*. 2006, Simon & Schuster, Ages 11 and up, \$14.95, 260 pp.

Caught between two worlds, Estrella Alvarez (or "Star" to friends at the private school where she is a scholarship student) does not want her mother to plan a *quinceañera*, the traditional 15 year old "coming out" party signifying that a girl has reached womanhood. She'd much rather celebrate at a sophisticated party like those of her friends at private school, Sheila and Christie. Embarrassed by her mother, attracted to a street boy her father emphatically does not like, and feeling separated from her family, old friends in her *barrio* and new friends in her school, Estrella flounders through her

fourteenth year trying to figure out who she really is. The first person narrative gives an in-depth look at Estrella and her feelings. Peppered with Spanish words (explained by a glossary in the back), it is packed with realistic dialogue that keeps the pace moving. Alegría sets the tone immediately through chapter headings in which Estrella defines a Spanish word and adds her own “take” on it; for *quinceañera* her second definition is: “The way I see it, it’s just a lame party with cheesy music and puffy princess dresses.” Interesting plot twists (how on earth does her grandmother know her would-be boyfriend, street kid Speedy?), embarrassing moments, and Estrella’s own feisty actions keep the action flowing. This whirlwind tour of Estrella’s warm yet strained family life, of the neighbors and friends in her *barrio*, and the world of her private school friends give the reader a realistic glimpse of just how hard it can be to straddle two cultures.

Boles, Philana Marie. *Little Divas*. 2006, Amistad/HarperCollins, Ages 10 to 13, \$16.89, 165 pp.

With her mother working for a year in Ghana, twelve year old Cassidy lives with her father and spends most of her time, as usual, with her bossy cousin Rikki. Both girls can’t wait for seventh grade to begin, but when Cassidy discovers her parents are planning to send her to a snooty private school that’s the home of her worst enemy, the summer seems ruined. Worse, class cutup Travis Jones simply won’t leave her alone. She’s been mad at him for ages, but he’s gotten awfully good looking; what if he really does like her? And now Rikki seems to dislike Cassidy’s new neighbor, Golden, even though Cassidy thinks Golden is really nice. Guided by Mary, Rikki’s sister, who regularly sneaks out to see her boyfriend, the girls plan to attend a forbidden pool party, where they hope to set out their new reputations as divas – cool girls who are also nice. The first person narrative is full of dialogue and flows smoothly. Strong family connections, a positive depiction of contemporary African American life and language, and full of details involving fashion, boys, and a girl’s place in the world, this will make the rounds among ‘tween and early teen girls.

Canales, Viola. *The Tequila Worm*. 2005, Wendy Lamb/Random House, Ages 9 to 14, \$15.95, 199 pp.

When she is six, Sofia’s mother tells her that a good *comadre* is someone who “makes people into a family. And it’s what I want you and your little sister, Lucy, to grow up to be.” A series of short chapters relates the wide variety of experiences Sofia has growing up in a close-knit *barrio* in Texas and figuring out just what it means to be a *comadre*. Friendship, religion, holidays, family, traditions such as holding a *quinceañera* or picking stones out of the beans with her father every week are all discussed in a fresh, first-person narrative that reveals a bright, complex girl. She is not only trying to figure out her own culture, but her place in the wider world, particularly when she is accepted in high school as a scholarship student at an exclusive private boarding school. Sofia is a multi-faceted character who faces situations to which many readers will readily relate. This “realness” -- along with the humorous narrative -- makes this a highly satisfying read. Peppered with Spanish words that are deftly explained through the text, the rich characterization and universal themes in this book make it an excellent choice for introducing another culture.

Charlton-Trujillo, E.E. *Prizefighter en Mi Casa*. 2006, Random House, Ages 10 to 13, \$15.95, 224 pp.

12-year-old Chula Sanchez is poor, Mexican, and not particularly popular in her south Texas town. She feels that nothing about her is special or unique. Life has never been particularly easy and things only get more difficult when Chula is involved in a terrible car accident caused by her father's drunk driving. The accident leaves him paralyzed and leaves Chula with epilepsy seizures. Classmates avoid her because they don't understand the seizures. Both her teachers and her mother treat her as if she is now mentally slow. Determined to find a way to pull his family out of debt, Chula's father contacts El Jefe, a revered prizefighter from Mexico. He hopes that El Jefe can use his relentless strength to win the local, illegal boxing matches; profits could help the family's finances. Unfortunately, when El Jefe arrives, he brings more confusion to a home already filled with problems. Chula is afraid of the prizefighter, a massive man who looks like a Mexican version of the Hulk. El Jefe has a reputation for showing no mercy in the ring, sometimes even killing those he fights. But when Chula has a fight at school, El Jefe is the one who tries to comfort her. They even talk about her epilepsy, something her family avoids discussing. El Jefe encourages Chula to see herself as special; she takes his advice by working hard at school and eventually becomes an honor student. Still, Chula can't quite figure out the two sides of El Jefe, and struggles to figure out how both good and bad can reside inside one person. In the end, El Jefe changes life for everyone in Chula's family. This is an incredibly moving story.

Cheng, Andrea. *Shanghai Messenger*. Illustrated by Ed Young. 2005, Lee & Low, Ages 9 and up, \$17.95, 37 pp.

When her uncle in China invites her to visit, Xiao Mei is not sure she wants to go. She's spent her whole life in America, is only half Chinese, and doesn't even speak the language. Her grandmother clearly wishes her to go visit her six brothers and sisters. "Nai Nai's eyes/are far away./She puts her hand/on mine./Then I say it/without thinking,/I'll go." The first person narrative, written in free verse, is a strong vehicle for this story. Xiao Mei doesn't always understand Chinese ways; when she falls ill she reads the English label on her medicine that indicates it will cleanse the body of evil spirits. "What evil spirits?/I don't have evil spirits,/I will not swallow./I want to go home/right now." And she feels just as out of place with her mixed-race heritage in China as she does in America: "...and here too/people stare at me/in the street." But many aspects of China touch and charm her, from the warm acceptance of Nai Nai's extended family to traditions such as doing tai chi exercises with the ladies in the park. The book's format is unique. Each page is framed by strong, orange-red patterns that resemble gates, giving the reader the perception that s/he is entering another world. The free verse format leaves much white space, which is offset by Ed Young's soft pastel, ink, dye, charcoal and crayon illustrations; these bring to life the experiences of Xiao Mei. The book ends with Xiao Mei and her brother Max sending pictures to their relatives in Shanghai, underscoring the new connection between members of this extended family. A pronunciation guide/glossary is included at the beginning of the book. Highly recommended.

Corbett, Sue. *Free Baseball*. 2006, Dutton, Ages 9 and up, \$22.50, 152 pp.

Eleven year old Felix Piloto can't understand why his workaholic mother doesn't seem to like baseball. After all, isn't his dad a baseball superstar in their native Cuba? When he gets free tickets to a local farm team game, Felix ditches his babysitter and sneaks into the locker room, where he's mistaken for the opposing team's batboy. Through a fast-paced series of events, Felix finds himself in a neighboring town with a new job – and an opportunity, he thinks, to find out more about his mysterious father. But is he ready to accept the truth about his family? With its solid characterization, large doses of humor, excellent descriptions, and Spanish words and expressions that help readers relate to the world of the Cuban refugee, this may be a good choice for mystery lovers as well as baseball fans.

Cunningham, Laura Shaine. *Midnight Diary of Zoya Blume*. 2005, HarperCollins, Ages 11 to 14, \$15.99, 163 pp.

When she was four, Zoya was adopted from a Russian orphanage by an independent and free-spirited woman named Mimi. She is now twelve and lives in Manhattan. Zoya loves her life, but has recurring nightmares of a Buka, a shadow witch who tries to come and take her away. When the dreams take over, the only person that can comfort Zoya is Mimi. When Mimi becomes seriously ill and has to go to the hospital, Zoya must face her nightmares alone. Before Mimi leaves, she gives Zoya a diary and tells her to write down all her thoughts and feelings. She tells Zoya to find her first memory and it will be her point of view. Zoya struggles with this idea. She really isn't sure what her first memories are. Much the story revolves around Zoya's dreams, her fears, and the need to trust someone besides her mother. While Mimi is gone, her friend Leon comes to stay with Zoya. At first Zoya keeps her distant from Leon, but she can't help but be fascinated by his magic tricks. It seems that Leon can make things appear and disappear. Zoya wonders if he can use his magic to make her mother reappear soon. With Mimi absent, Zoya decides it is time to open an old plaid suitcase that came with her from Russia; she has always avoided the suitcase and the memories that it holds. When she looks through the case, a flood of memories come to her. She finally allows herself to remember her young mother, their empty room, and the day that her mother took her to the orphanage. Zoya recalls walking through the cold with her young mother, who repeats over and over again how much she loves Zoya, but she can't keep her any longer. When they arrive at the orphanage, Zoya seizes onto an icy metal stair railing and refuses to let go. She continues to hold on until her mother agrees not to leave her. Next, in what Zoya sees as an act of betrayal, her mother yells for someone to come outside and take Zoya away. A very large woman in a black coat comes down the stairs, scoops up Zoya, and forces her into the orphanage. This painful memory is the source of her nightmares. Understanding her past helps Zoya conquer the nightmares. When Mimi returns home from the hospital, with a diagnosis of cancer and an unknown prognosis, Zoya tries hard to cope with her fears of loss, and comes to realize that she has great strength and will be able to survive with or without Mimi.

Dhami, Narinder. *Bhangra Babes*. 2005, Delacorte Press, Ages 8 and up, \$14.95, 185 pp.

In the final book of this trilogy, Amber, Jazz, and Geena Dhillon are excited that their plan to match their aunt and Mr. Arora is finally ending in a wedding. What they haven't counted on, however, is Mr. Arora's interfering Aunti-ji! The events of the story take the girls on a "roller-coaster" ride of life experiences; they feel like they are playing the children's game of "Will he? Will he not?" School, boys, and a wedding consume the girls' time. In a surprising twist at the end, it is one of the least likely characters who saves the wedding reception from disaster. This hilarious teen novel is one that many girls will enjoy, particularly those who have read the first two books.

Hobbs, Will. *Crossing the Wire*. 2006, HarperCollins, Ages 13 and up, \$16.89, 216 pp.

"Los Árboles is an out-of-the-way place surrounded by mountains" and offers little hope for the future. Victor Flores' father had crossed the border between Mexico and the United States every year to find work to support his family in Mexico, but he was killed in an accident in his last job. Now, Victor is faced with the decision of making the dangerous trip for the sake of his mother and siblings. There is no money for a coyote, so Victor must go alone. He is ill-prepared for the obstacles that face him, yet his drive to support his family keeps him alive. Despite the hardships, Victor manages to get to Washington where he finds work picking asparagus and is able to send his first Western Union money order home to his mother. All Victor sees ahead of him is hard manual labor and a healthy fear of being caught and sent back to Mexico, but he knows this will be his way of life for years to come. Hobbs captures the dangers of heat, cold, dehydration, and starvation and the hope of a better life very well. Pair this one with Ann Jaramillo's *La Linea*.

Jaramillo, Ann. *La Linea*. 2006, Roaring Brook Press, Ages 11 and up, \$16.95, 131 pp.

Fifteen-year-old Miguel's father has finally sent money to Don Clemente so that Miguel can join his family in California. The trip across La Linea will be difficult, and Miguel is nervous about three things: seeing his parents for the first time in seven years, meeting his younger twin sisters, and leaving his grandmother and thirteen-year-old sister, Elena, in San Jacinto, Mexico. Following his going-away celebration, Miguel takes the bus toward his first destination. However, the *federales* stop the bus and demand that everyone get off for questioning. During the interrogation, Miguel recognizes Elena who has disguised herself as an *india*. The two, along with several others, are put on a bus going south rather than north. It is at this point that the harrowing experience of crossing the border between Mexico and California begins. Miguel and Elena hop freight trains, are robbed, and nearly die in the desert of southern California, but they safely reach their destination. The last chapter, "The Phone Call," brings closure to the book as ten years later Miguel and Elena are in the midst of their annual phone call. The author, married to a Mexican American, teaches English as a Second Language to seventh and eighth graders in Salinas, California. This book comes from the stories that her husband's family told and from the stories that she hears daily from her students.

Lachtma, Ofelia Dumas. *The Trouble with Tessa*. 2005, Pinata Books, Ages 8 to 12, \$9.95, 122pp.

This one is just for fun. The reader finds themselves in the warm home of 11-years-old Tessa del Campo. The character of Tessa is a young girl of Mexican descent. She is surrounded by her family, including a lively group of extended Hispanic relatives. Tessa has a stay-at-home mom that cooks for her family and for every charity events that comes along. Tessa is trying to make her way through a boring summer. She can't understand why her father has cancelled a trip that Tessa really wanted to take. Tessa ends up using her vivid imagination to pass the time. When she finds yellowing pages in the bottom of a junky trunk, she realizes that she has found some directions for magic spells. She doesn't think that it is any coincidence that she found the sheets. Tessa decides it must be her destiny to become a witch! She begins working on her magic by casting a spell that will prevent her little sister from calling her "Tess." Tessa can't believe her luck, when the magic spell seems to work. When Tessa's diary with the magic spells disappears, she panics. How can she be a really good witch, if she can't cast any more spells? Tessa's belief in her developing powers, also hit a major roadblock when she thinks she has cast a spell that will cause her parents to divorce. Tessa starts to think about how good her life has been. Suddenly, everything is changing and Tessa fears that her secret powers are spinning out of control. Short diary entries accompany the third person singular narrative, giving insight as to Tessa's motives and adding interest to the text. A sprinkling of Spanish words and details about Tessa's extended family let readers know about her Latino heritage, but the focus stays on Tessa's highly imaginative view of the world. Preteens will probably appreciate the role of friends here, as well as Tessa's frustrations with family members.

Lin, Grace. *The Year of the Dog*. 2006, Little Brown, Ages 8 to 12, \$14.99, 134 pp.

As a child, Grace Lin, the daughter of Taiwanese Americans, often felt that she didn't have a culture of her own. She was American, but white people called her Chinese; yet Taiwanese did not consider themselves true Chinese. To give her sister and her a sense of their cultural heritage, her parents celebrated Chinese holidays, invited other Taiwanese families to the parties, and helped them see that they belonged in each culture. In this book, Lin tells her own story through fictional characters. As Pacy, she explores what it means when her parents tell her it is the "Year of the Dog," and as such, it is a good year for family, friends, and "finding herself." The book is for younger readers, but has import for those elementary age girls who are trying so hard to find themselves. Best known for her picture books, Lin incorporates small drawings throughout the book, adding an even lighter touch to this humorous family story. Students who reading level matches the Carolyn Haywood *B Is for Betsy* books may find this appealing.

Littman, Sarah D. *Confessions of a Closet Catholic*. 2005, Dutton, Ages 11 and up, \$15.99, 193 pp.

Justine Silver is Jewish, and a middle child who thinks her parents love her less than her older sister and younger brother. She and her family have just moved, leaving behind Justine's best friend since birth. She has found a new best friend, Mary Catherine McAllister, who is Catholic. Since Justine is already questioning her Jewish religion, she researches other world religions and decides that she wants to be Catholic, too. She

practices her confessions in her closet, using her teddy bear as “Father Ted.” In a similar vein as *Are You There God, It’s Me, Margaret?* Justine searches for her identity, her religion, and her place in her family. She also experiences the death of her beloved grandmother, Bubbe. Toward the end of the book, Justine actually goes to confession at Mary Catherine’s church, where the wise priest suggests that she explore her own Jewish faith. This she does. She finds a Jewish synagogue she likes, convinces her family to become kosher, and learns like herself, as well. In this funny, yet serious novel, Littman addresses one of the important issues that pre-teens and teens face – how, or if, they will follow the religious traditions of their parents. She provides the venue for readers to explore their own feelings about several issues: growing up, feeling insecure, facing death, and beginning relationships with the opposite sex. Well-written and witty, this is a fun read that may appeal to many middle school girls.

Lombard, Jenny. *Drita: My Homegirl*. 2006, G.P. Putnam’s/Penguin, \$15.99, 135 pp.

Alternating chapters with different typefaces present this story in first person narrative from the viewpoints of its two ten year old protagonists, Drita and Maxie – both of whom have secrets. When Drita enters Maxie’s classroom, she is newly arrived from war-torn Kosovo and speaks almost no English. Classroom cut-up Maxie makes a joke at her expense, and as a result is assigned to help Drita become familiar with the school. As the two girls’ lives begin to intertwine, each reveals more about her home situation. Drita’s mother is so depressed from the trauma of life in Kosovo and the ensuing move that she sleeps all day on the couch, leaving Drita’s grandmother, or Gjyshe, to care for her while her engineer father drives a cab. Maxie still aches from her mother’s death three years previously, but never discusses her with her friends and rarely with Grandma. Her father has begun to date, which only makes things worse. Fresh and lively, this moves quickly and shows not only the importance of friendship, but of family. As an added bonus, Maxie’s upper middle class African American family helps counteract some stereotypes.

Look, Lenore. *Uncle Peter’s Amazing Chinese Wedding*. Illustrated by Heo Yumi. 2006, Atheneum, Ages 4 to 8, \$16.95, 31 pp.

Through the eyes of young Jenny, Uncle Peter’s wedding is a disaster. “I’m his special girl. *Just me.*” And indeed, the events of the day seem to conspire against her: she is squished in the car, Uncle Peter thinks she is joking when she asks to shoot a few hoops, and her cousins beat her to the bed-jumping ceremony, leaving her not with candy, but with “Aunt Louise’s healthy tofu chips.” Jenny’s straightforward recitation of her woes accompanies descriptions and explanations of traditional Chinese wedding rituals. “Stella will serve tea, showing she is no longer a guest but a member of the family.” (Jenny replaces it with hot water.) “If this were a hundred years ago, she would ride in a special chair carried by his friends.” Contemporary, almost cartoon-like illustrations in rich reds, oranges, and greens highlight Jenny’s sadness while illuminating the text; the reader sees details of each ritual, and family members come alive as they exuberantly celebrate.

Lupica, Mike. *Heat*. 2006, Philomel, Ages 12 and up, \$16.99, 220 pp.

Michael Arroyo and his brother Carlos are immigrants from Cuba and are living alone, trying to stay together until Carlos reaches his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Their father was a great part of their lives until his death three months ago. Seventeen year old Carlos works two jobs, and twelve year old Michael plays baseball. Michael's greatest hope is that his team will play in the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Unexpected obstacles get in the way for each boy. Carlos loses one of his jobs and takes on a scalping job. Michael's age is challenged by the coach of an opposing team, and he is taken out of play. The boys can't prove Michael's age because they have no birth certificate from Cuba. Several people help the boys and see that Michael gets the birth certificate, gets to play in Yankee Stadium, and knows his team is headed for Williamsport. Baseball is predominant in this story – Michael eats, breathes, and sleeps it. Lupica has created a book that will keep baseball lovers on the edge of their seats. This book should be on all library shelves!

Ly, Many. *Home is East*. 2005, Delacorte, Ages 10 and up, \$15.95, 294 pp.

Nine-year-old Amy Lim and her parents live in a Cambodian neighborhood in Florida. She wonders why all of their friends are Cambodian, and her father explains that “life wouldn't be the same without *his* people, that if you didn't share the same history, then there couldn't be true understanding.” Amy hears rumors that her mother, who is much younger than her father, is about to leave them, but she doesn't want to believe such a thing could happen. However, it does, and Amy's father begins drinking and loses his job. Suddenly, he and Amy move cross-country to San Diego where he gets a job as a mechanic. Life is different for them, but they settle into a routine, make friends and find a place for themselves. Near the end of the story, Amy sees her mother and is devastated to find that her mother has a new life. She works through her bitterness and comes to realize that during their three years in California it has become home, and she is, in fact, surrounded by people who love her.

Namioka, Lensey. *Mismatch*. 2006, Delacorte Press, Ages 10 to 14, \$15.95, 217 pp.

Fifteen year old Sue Hua finds herself combating racism is found on many fronts in this smoothly written tale. New to Lakeview High, her white friends immediately match her up with Andy, a handsome Japanese American. “You're both Asian...And you both play in the orchestra. So you're perfect together.” In fact, the two talented violinists do become involved. But Sue's grandmother lived through the Japanese occupation of China, and Andy's father views the Chinese as “...a dirty people” – and the teens have no idea how to introduce the other to their family. In third person singular, Namioka presents readers with alternate chapters describing Andy and Sue's experiences with their immediate families, and takes the story further when the orchestra visits Japan. Andy is placed with a high-ranking Japanese family due to his Japanese ancestry, but their daughter snubs him because he isn't “American” enough. Sue is placed with a Korean family who are held in low social esteem at the private school due to the fact that their forebears were brought to Japan as forced labor. Andy and Sue struggle to understand their place in both worlds while pursuing their own relationship. Plenty of realistic dialogue, fine characterization, and the focus on Andy and Sue's feelings keep the story

moving along at a good pace. Namioka deals with a number of thorny issues without ever sounding didactic – not an easy feat. Highly recommended.

Park, Linda Sue. *Project Mulberry*. 2005, Clarion, Ages 10 to 14, \$16.00, 225 pp.

How will two suburban kids do a project in animal husbandry for the State Fair? After much debate, Julia Song and her best friend Patrick decide to raise silkworms – not the America and apple pie project Julia had hoped for. She already feels “too Korean,” and worries this will brand her even more. When the two discover that only fresh mulberry leaves will sustain their crop of worms, they are befriended by Mr. Dixon, who agrees to let them pick the leaves from his trees. Julia doesn’t understand why her mother discourages her from long visits with Mr. Dixon, and only gradually sees the racism her mother feels for this kind African American man. The first person narrative reveals Julia’s exuberant and open spirit, and gives a clear picture of her steadfast friend Patrick. Julia is very frank about how it feels at times to be the only Korean in a mostly white world, giving readers insight about the Korean culture with details readily accessible to preteens and early teens. An interesting facet of this book is that the author writes down, after every few chapters, the conversation she has in her head with Julia as she is writing the book. True to her age, Julia is often not pleased with her adult writer’s plotline, and consistently complains about her lack of control over what is supposed to be her story. This twist gives readers a view of the writing process while deepening the characterization of Julia. Despite the gravity of many of the issues tackled here, the book’s fast pace and fresh presentation, coupled with excellent characterization, make this a readable story that will fly off the shelves. Highly recommended.

Perkins, Mitali. *Rickshaw Girl*. 2007. Charlesbridge, Ages 8 to 10, \$13.95, 91 pp.

Naima is quite the artist; she always wins awards for the traditional alpina patterns she paints on the sides of her family’s home. She knows her family is poor and gets frustrated because she can’t do more to help bring in money. She is also facing restrictions due to her age; now that she is ten she and Saleem can’t play together as they did growing up, and soon she will have to begin wearing a saree rather than her salwar kameez. Her younger sister, Rashida, envies her, but Naima isn’t happy about it. Furthermore, her father is coming home later and later, exhausted from carrying passengers in his rickshaw. One day while he is napping, Naima decides to try to drive the rickshaw. She wrecks it and then must tell father, who wearily wonders how they will get it fixed. Taking matters into her own hands, Naima goes to the neighboring village to seek work at the rickshaw repair shop. To her surprise, the owner of the shop is a woman who gives Naima the chance to prove herself. The author and her husband spent three years living in Bangladesh and learned much about the culture. They also began to see shifts that would allow women the opportunity to own and run their own small businesses, giving hope for their poverty-stricken families. The story is geared for younger middle schoolers and offers an inside look into a lesser-known culture.

Ryan, Amy Kathleen. *Shadowfalls*. 2005, Delacorte/Random House, Ages 12 and up, \$24.95, 216 pp.

After her brother's devastating death, fifteen year old Anna finds her usual summer trip to Jackson, Wyoming, full of painful reminders of Cody. Her Grandpa seems his usual withdrawn self, and Anna is just as happy to retreat into her own depression. However, Grandpa has arranged for her to babysit Zachary, a boy who has problems of his own, and into this mix comes Zachary's angry big brother Marcus, who finds Anna quite attractive. As Anna works through her anger at her brother and her grandfather, who has always treated her differently than Cody because she's a girl, she learns that people are not always what they show on the surface – especially Marcus. While a totemic grizzly bear is woven into the story in a somewhat stereotypical fashion, the author counteracts this through her humorous depiction of Joseph, a Native American shaman with a Ph.D. in Comparative Religion who plays up to his "Indian image" with humor. This fast-paced read with its elements of romance and mystery (the reader does not know for quite some time how Cody died, nor what Marcus intends) may appeal to teens who are looking for their own place in the world.

Sheth, Kashmira. *Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet*. 2006, Hyperion, Ages 12 and up, \$15.99, 250 pp.

Sixteen year old Jeeta is relieved that her mother has two older daughters to marry off before her turn comes. The constant talk of prospective grooms annoys her, and when her new friend Sarina introduces her to a world in which Indian women have professional careers she begins to see other possibilities for her life. Multiculturalism here has a new twist. Jeeta lives in Mumbai, where her middle class family struggles with the culture change so evident in modern India. Her father seems to accept the changing times and new role of women, although he lets her domineering mother handle their own family life. When Jeeta's budding romance with Neel, a boy she met at a local pool is exposed, it is her father who stands up for her. And when her older sister, Mohindi, is abused by her new husband, it is Jeeta she writes for help. Richly detailed and with a strong sense of place, this brings readers into the heart of city life in Mumbai. Although a few of the plot turns seem a bit pat (Neel turns out to be Sarina's cousin, for example), the pace is good, and Jeeta's feisty voice and dissatisfaction with the status quo will resonate with many teen readers.

Soto, Gary. *Accidental Love*. 2006, Harcourt, Ages 12 and up, \$16.00, 179 pp.

When they meet to exchange mixed-up cell phones, 14 year old Marisa is amazed at how nerdy Rene is. So why is she so attracted to him? In her rough-and-tumble world she has learned to fight with her fists, and has a hard time controlling her anger. When she switches to Rene's school, the ritzy Hamilton Magnet High School, Marisa is amazed to learn that the world works differently than she'd thought. The teachers there really care about her work, and are nice, as well. Students don't fight in the same way, either. Soon she is involved in the school play, making friends, doing well with her school work, and spending every free minute with Rene. But Rene's mom doesn't like her, and Marisa discovers Rene is may have a reason to act "wimpy" around his custodial parent. When her ruse of using her aunt's address to enroll in Hamilton is discovered, Marisa ends up back at her old school – with friends who feel she's gotten stuck-up and are ready to turn

their backs on her. Refreshingly real dialogue, lots of inner conversations by Marisa that break up the third person narrative, and Marisa's very real struggle to change her life make this a page turner. Spanish words peppered throughout the text and Marisa's warm Latino family with her eagle-eyed mother give readers one version of life in the barrio.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Under the Persimmon Tree*. 2005, Frances Foster Books, Ages 12 and up, \$17.00, 275 pp.

In alternating voices, Staples tells the stories of two people whose lives intersect in war-torn Afghanistan in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Young Najmah, or "Star," holds her very pregnant mother back as ruthless members of the Taliban pillage their farm and force her father and older brother to join their unit. Shortly after baby Habib is born, American bombs destroy the farm; Najmah finds her mother and brother's bodies, and mutely acquiesces when old neighbors come to take her to a refugee camp and safety. Her first-person narrative alternates with the third person tale of Nusrat, a young American whose conversion to Islam and subsequent marriage to gentle Faiz has brought her to Peshawar, Pakistan, where Faiz's family embraces her. She starts a school for refugee children while awaiting Faiz's return from the clinic he has set up in northern Afghanistan. There has been no word from Faiz for weeks now, and the family fears the worst. Staples effectively weaves detailed facts about the Taliban, the Mujahideen, the many types of Muslim believers, and the daily lives of many within Afghanistan and Pakistan during this tumultuous time. These never interfere with the story, but propel it towards its conclusion. Strong characterization, a well-paced plot, dialogue that includes many words from the region (a glossary is appended), and solid descriptive language make the story and setting come alive. Although some events are tragic, this compelling story gives Western readers a window on a war that continues to be in the news today. Highly recommended for readers who are exploring themes of social justice or conflict.

Vejjajiva, Jane. *The Happiness of Kati*. 2006, Atheneum, Ages 9 to 12, \$15.95, 139 pp.

Nine year old Kati has always lived with her grandparents, but she often dreams about her mother, whom she has not seen for five years. Each chapter has a subheading that relates to her thoughts about her mother. Her grandmother finally tells her one day about her mother's illness (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and asks Kati if she would like to spend some time with her mother before she dies. Kati chooses to go. Although her mother is bedridden and weak, she fills in all the gaps that Kati has in her memory. Her mother explains why she had to give Kati to her grandparents to raise; she explains all of the things that she has set aside for Kati's future. When her mother dies, Kati is given an envelope that contains information about the father she has never known. She has a choice to make – go live with her father or return to her grandparents' home. She chooses to be with her grandparents because home is where the heart is. Set in Thailand, the story is filled with lush flowers and natural beauty. Without the name of the country, the story could have taken place anywhere in the world. It has a beautiful message of love and belonging. The author lives in Bangkok, and her physician father researches Lou Gehrig's Disease. Highly recommended.

Whittenberg, Allison. *Sweet Thang*. 2006, Delacourte, Ages 8 to 12, \$15.95, 149 pp.

Life changes drastically for eleven-year-old Charmaine Upshaw when her Aunt Karyn dies in an automobile accident leaving her three-year old son, Tracy John. Not only is Charmaine devastated by her favorite aunt's death, but no one has said what will happen to Tracy John. At fourteen, Charmaine knows where Tracy John lives – with her family. As she tells her own story, readers understand her feelings of injustice. Charmaine has to share her room with Tracy John, and she doesn't think it is fair. Her mother, father, and two brothers dote on Tracy John, as do strangers on the street. However, Charmaine stewes with frustration bordering on anger -- until she has to be his babysitter. Slowly she realizes that she, too, loves the spoiled little boy whose nickname is "Sweet Thang." In this coming of age novel, Whittenberg explores all the feelings of younger adolescent girls to whom "Life isn't fair." Sometimes sad, sometimes funny, but honest throughout, this book is a delightful read. Its fully-developed characters are so true to life that they could almost be the family next door.

Whitney, Kim Ablon. *The Perfect Distance*. 2005, Knopf, Ages 13 and up, \$15.95, 246 pp.

Seventeen year old Francie Martinez has made it to the top of the equitation circuit through hard work and determination. Her Mexican born father is head of the stables at West Hills, the elite riding school ruled by its owner, Rob, who trains only the top riders. To pay for her lessons Francie serves as both groom and gofer. Her life is worlds apart from that of her best friend, Katie, whose wealthy father insists on the best and expects Katie to ride far beyond her skill. When a new rider from California catches both girls' eyes, the gap between rider and groom, Mexican and Anglo, and the competition between riders to win the famed Maclay finals widens dramatically for Francie, who must come to terms with her two worlds in order to achieve her dream. Add to this Francie's suspicion that Rob is responsible for the death of a valuable horse and her father's reaction to her discovery, and the story has enough drama to keep readers glued to the text. With its detailed descriptions of riding and its budding romance, this will appeal to teenage girls.

Yee, Lisa. *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*. 2005, Levine Books, Ages 12 and up, \$16.99, 296 pp.

Contrary to the stereotype, Stanford Wong is a star basketball player whose disinterest in academics causes him to miss out on basketball camp and end up in summer school. To make matters worse, his nemesis, brainy Millicent Min, becomes his tutor. Despite the fact that their grandmothers are best friends, the two have been adversaries for a long time. But Millicent's friend Emily catches Stanford's eye, and he finds that Millicent has good advice for him as he tries to attract his first crush. At the same time he has some good advice for Millicent. Stanford's voice is what makes this such a good read – his character shines through every hilarious episode.

## Fantasy

Curry, Jane Louise. *Black Canary*, 2005, McElderry Books, Ages 10 to 14, \$16.95, 279 pp.

This fascinating and unusual book combines historical fiction with fantasy. James is a twelve year old whose parents and grandparents are all musicians. His mother is a famous black jazz singer and his father is a white jazz piano player. James has an incredible voice, but hides it because he is tired of his family's obsession with music. James feels disconnected because his parents only seem to understand music; furthermore, James feels like he lives in three different countries: black, white, and a mixed up in-between. He reluctantly accompanies his parents on a trip to London, where his mother will be performing. While sightseeing with his father, James plunges into a river and nearly drowns. After being pulled out of the water, James can see he still in London, but it's a London from the distant past; he has slipped through a wormhole. The time turns out to be 17<sup>th</sup> century London. James is a curiosity to everyone he meets. Back home he could blend in and be just another face in the crowd. In this London, he doesn't see any black people. He can tell that the white people are staring at him, but not with prejudice, only curiosity. At one point James comes upon some boys practicing a play and one of the boys begins to sing a song. James recognizes the song as a lullaby his mother sang to him when he was little. Before realizing what he is doing, James starts to sing the song and reveals a beautiful high tenor voice. He soon discovers that a boy with a wonderful voice can easily get both food and shelter. As word spreads about James, he becomes known as the black canary. James enjoys the unique way others see him and his diversity becomes his strength. He is eventually recruited to perform with the Children of the Chapel Royal. He begins to lose track of time and is swept up in preparing a solo for the Queen. The tension between James's increasing involvement in events from the early 1600's and his need to find his way back to the present keep this story fast paced and highly involving.

Mosley, Walter. *47*. 2005, Little Brown, Ages 11 and up, \$16.99, 232 pp.

Field slaves on the Corinthian Plantation had only numbers for names. Number 47, "most likely fourteen," since, as he explains, slaves don't have birthdays. He tells the story of Tall John, who comes as a runaway slave from a nearby plantation. There is something very distinct about this young man. He tells Number 47 that he has been seeking him all his life because of a special gift that he has. Number 47 can't understand all the strange things that happen in the next few days and weeks, but his life certainly changes. From his first day on the Corinthian Plantation, it is evident that Tall John has a mysterious side: he is centuries old, is not from this planet; and is gifted with special powers to fight Wall, the evil one who can disguise himself as a human. Tall John tells Number 47 that he has selected him to carry on his work. In this gripping historical fantasy, Mosley takes the reader on wild rides through time and space. He uses the 'n' word frequently, yet it is always in context of conversation. By using first person narrative from the viewpoint of Number 47, a reader can feel the pain and fear that the slaves endured.

Park, Linda Sue. *Archer's Quest*. 2006, Clarion, Ages 12 and up, \$16.00, 167 pp.

Twelve year old Kevin Kim wishes he'd listened more closely when his grandparents told him about his Korean heritage. A boring Monday afternoon has become almost a nightmare; while working on his social studies assignment, a strange man with a wickedly accurate bow and arrow has appeared in his house, and seems to think Kevin is his mortal enemy. Italicized dialogue reveals Kevin's true thoughts as he progresses through an adventurous day with the stranger, whom he names "Archie" (for "Archer"), but comes to understand is really the legendary Chu-mong, a king of ancient Korea who has somehow ended up in the wrong place and time. It is up to Kevin to figure out why Chu-mong ended up at his house – and how to get him back so he can save his people. Readers learn more about Chu-mong when Archer tells Kevin "My father tried to kill me," and slowly reveals his own story as the two pursue a means of returning him to his home. Using the Chinese calendar and zodiac, Kevin must put his math skills to work in order to help Archer; some readers may find this appealing, although others might prefer to skim over these parts. The story's fast pace and Kevin's likable character help overcome any didactic intent on the author's part. This is a fast read that may appeal to boys who like their fantasy tempered by a dose of realistic fiction.

Vaught, Susan. *Stormwitch*. 2005, Bloomsbury, Ages 12 and up, \$16.95, 208 pp.

Following her maternal grandmother's death in Haiti, Ruba Jones has come to Pass Christian, Mississippi, to live with her paternal grandmother. The two grandmothers are polar opposites – Ba taught her about her family history, tracing their lineage back to Amazon women in ancient Africa. Now Grandmother Jones teaches her that the "spells" she learned in Haiti aren't appropriate for Mississippi and makes her attend church services. In the days leading up to Hurricane Camille, Ruba is learning what it means to be black in southern Mississippi in 1969. She is also learning that she must hide her bag of herbs and ritual attire from her grandmother. Ruba senses the oncoming storm, hears the voice from the storm, and knows that she must face the stormwitch to protect her family from destruction. Vaught has created an atmosphere of intrigue and suspense in this historical fantasy that addresses both native Haitian cultures and the struggle for civil rights in southern Mississippi. Highly recommended for public libraries. Because of the spells that Ruba conjures, some middle school librarians might choose to preview this title. Vaught, a native Mississippian, has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and works with troubled teens.

## Folklore

Lester, Julius. *The Old African*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. 2005, Dial, Ages 10 and up, \$19.99, 79 pp.

What a powerful, riveting book from two of the best-known African American writers/illustrators of books for children and young adults: Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney! From reading the note that each man wrote at the end of the book, the reader feels the emotion that each must have felt while working on the book. Lester bases the story on a legend about an African man, brought to this country in chains, who led his Ybo people out of slavery and back home to Africa. The story begins with the old African watching a boy being whipped. Through his magical powers, the old man is able to take the boy's pain so that he does not cry out. As Jaja sits for two days and nights with the boy, he falls asleep and is taken back to the time when he and his wife, Ola, were captured and marched to the ship that would transport them to Georgia. Lester recounts the voyage and its accompanying horrible acts. The story goes that from the time that Jaja saw his wife, Ola, jump overboard, he never spoke again. Yet, he had powers that would allow him to see into the minds of others. He decides to lead his people away from the plantation and back to Africa. Through Lester's vividly descriptive text and Pinkney's comparably descriptive illustrations, the reader is spellbound and transported to the horrible time of slavery and believes that the old African indeed has the power to lead his people home again. Because of its serious tone and graphic depictions, the book is more appropriate for middle and high school readers. It belongs in every school and public library.

O'Brien, Anne Sibley. *The Legend of Hong Kil Dong: The Robin Hood of Korea*. 2006, Charlesbridge, Ages 9 to 12, \$14.95, 48 pp.

Hong Kil Dong is the illegitimate son of Minister Hong, a wealthy and powerful advisor to the king, and as such, he cannot call him father. Kil Dong is extremely bright and very studious, much more so than the Minister's other son. However, because of his status, he gets no privileges, including schooling. When he is no longer able to handle the daily humiliations, he tells his mother that he is going to study with the monks. On his way he meets up with some bandits who demand what they think is an impossible task for Kil Dong. It isn't. Kil Dong becomes the leader of the group and trains the men to be great warriors. Under his leadership, they rob the rich to care for the poor. Kil Dong's magical powers save them many times and move them into the view of the emperor. Kil Dong is appointed as a minister to the emperor and explains the plight of the poor. He then "leapt into the air and was swallowed by a swirling plume of clouds and mist."

O'Brien grew up in South Korea and learned the language and the people. This is her first middle grade graphic novel; however, she has illustrated several books for other authors. As both author and illustrator of this delightful book, she has created a book that will not stay on library shelves!

Rogasky, Barbara. *Dybbuk: A Version*. Illustrated by Leonard Everett Fisher. 2005, Holiday House, Ages 10 and up, \$16.95, 64 pp.

The dybbuk, “simply put, is the personality, spirit, or soul of someone who has died that enters the body of someone who is alive.” The idea of a dybbuk has been around for centuries in Jewish culture, but the author states that she has based this story roughly on a play by S. Ansky that was produced in 1920. Sender, the richest man in Brinitz, wants to find a rich scholar to marry his daughter, Leah. Enter Konin, a starving scholar who usually didn’t linger long in any town. Brinitz was different. Konin lingered because of Leah. They knew they were destined to be together, but how that would happen wasn’t clear to them. Sender would only accept the richest groom for his daughter. Konin spent days each week studying the Kabbalah trying to find a way to marry Leah. That was to no avail; Sender found a rich husband for her. Konin died the day the wedding was announced, but his spirit remained. When Leah visited his grave and invited him to her wedding, his spirit entered her body. Strange things happened, but the mystery of why the two were destined to marry was solved. The rabbi broke the spell and banished Konin’s spirit, but the spirit did not depart from the room. He called to Leah, and she joined him to be forever with her love. The rabbi found her dead near the spot where the spell had been broken. The story goes that because her father had broken his agreement with Konin’s father, neither of them would have heirs to carry on their names. Rogasky’s gift of storytelling and Fisher’s stark, dramatic sepia drawings make this an appealing read aloud for older children and early teens.

Taback, Simms. *Kibitzers and Fools: Tales My Zayda Told Me*. 2005, Viking, Ages 6 and up, \$16.99, 32 pp.

From the illustrator of *Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly*, comes this hilarious collection of short Jewish tales about tricksters and fools. The book has a very broad audience appeal. Amongst the younger set, some will get the dry humor; some will not. However with older elementary children, the humor will be most appreciated. Using bright colors and comical characterization, Taback has created a book that will endure itself to young and old readers alike. A particular favorite story for me is “A Made-to-Order Suit.”

Tingle, Tim. *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Take of Friendship and Freedom*. 2006, Cinto Puntos, Ages 8 to 10, \$17.95, 39 pp.

This is a beautifully written version of an old Choctaw tale and reads as if a storyteller were actually telling the story. The illustrations are also perfect. *Crossing Bok Chitto* is the blending of two very different cultures: the Choctaw and the African slave. It is the story of two very different children: Martha Tom, a young Choctaw; and Little Mo, a young black slave. Even though these two children come from totally different cultures, they forge a lifelong friendship for which they would risk their lives. I think this book should be a part of any Native American, slavery, or Underground Railroad unit of study. The book deals with all of the topics above and provides a unique perspective on the relationships of Native Americans, slaves and the ultimate search for freedom. It would also be a good read-aloud during a study of character education. It stresses that even though people are different in cultures and religious beliefs they can

still have a strong and lasting friendship. Children can benefit from reading this book not only from the historical sense but from the “heart sense.”

### **Historical Fiction**

*Bruchac, Joseph. Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War Two, 2006, Dial, Ages 10 and up, \$16.99, 231 pp.*

Sixteen year old Ned Begay hates his life at a Navajo mission school. Everything about his heritage is considered taboo. He is constantly told that the Navajo ways should be forgotten and the Navajo language should never be spoken. In one of the great ironies of World War II, the Marine Corps suddenly places a great deal of value on the Navajo language. Young Navajo men are recruited and asked to use their native language to create an unbreakable code. Navajo is one of the most difficult of all American Indian languages to learn; only Navajos speak it with complete fluency. Ned Begay ends up joining a select group of Navajo code talkers and manages to create a code that the Japanese can't break. As Ned shares the memories of his life with his grandchildren, he tells them about his experiences at school, his military training, and traveling across the Pacific during the war. Navajo code talkers bravely served their country, but were not even allowed to discuss their role until the late 1960's. The author spent a great deal of time interviewing actual code talkers. Three bibliographies are included: Navajo Nation, Code Talkers, and WW II.

*Carvell, Marlene. Sweetgrass Basket. 2005, Dutton, Ages 11 and up, \$16.99, 243 pp.*

After their mother's death in the early 1900s, Sarah and her older sister, Mattie, are sent to the Carlisle School in southern Pennsylvania. Headed by the hate-filled Mrs. Dwyer, the girls get a rudimentary education while learning the basics of sewing and other tasks that the white culture deems important for girls. Though the girls make friends and a few adults are kind, a mean older girl makes Mattie's life difficult, and the drudgery of the daily routine wears on all the children. After she is falsely accused of theft, Mattie runs away, leading to a tragic ending to a bleak yet highly moving tale. Through each girl's voice, alternating chapters in different typeface describe, in free verse, the harsh conditions and cruel attitudes they encounter on a daily basis. Mohawk words scattered here and there (the girls aren't allowed to speak anything but English in the school) convey the girls' longing for home, while their inner thoughts poignantly reveal their love for one another, their grief over their mother's death, and their loneliness as they endure life in a strange and hostile culture. This has no happy ending, but is highly recommended for its unstinting and personal view of one of the less redeeming chapters in American history.

*Cheng, Andrea. The Lace Dowry. 2005, Front Street, Ages 12 and up, \$16.95, 113 pp.*

Mama insists that twelve year old Juli have a dowry, but Juli resists saying, “Mama, it is 1933 and I don't need a dowry. Nobody in Budapest has a dowry anymore.” Mama is not deterred and contends that Juli must have a handmade lace tablecloth for her dowry. She plans their first train trip to the lace maker in Halas, and Julie reluctantly goes along. During this first visit, Juli meets Roza, the daughter of the lace maker. The girls are the same age, but come from very different socio-economic situations. As Juli and her

mother make their bi-monthly trips to Halas, Juli, who has many educational opportunities, and Roza, who has few, become true friends. In fact, at one point when it appears the tablecloth will not be finished, Juli just wants to thank her mother for helping her find the only friend she ever had. In her author's note, Cheng, whose parents were Hungarian Jewish immigrants, explains the history of Halas lace and uses the story of her aunt's lace tablecloth as the basis for this book.

Durbin, William. *El Lector*. 2006, Wendy Lamb/Random House, Ages 10 to 13, \$15.95, 193 pp.

Thirteen year old Bella has grown up with her grandfather's stories and desperately wants to grow up to be a *lector*, just like him. Grandfather is an important man in their immigrant community; he is paid to read in Spanish daily to the workers in the cigar factory. From classics such as *Don Quixote* to national and international newspapers, his resonant voice both entertains and informs – especially about union issues. But factory owners in Florida's Ybor City want to crush the tobacco union and its impending strike. They fire Grandfather, and Bella's school career ends as she takes her place in the cigar factory where her aunt works. The third person singular narrative allows Durbin to give background information necessary to understanding Bella's life; while at times this slows the story's pace, it effectively paints a picture of the hot Florida town in which Bella's widowed mother is trying to raise her two children in the midst of the Depression. Bella's character is convincing as we learn of her aspirations, her frustration with her veering out of control brother, Pedro, her fear when her Tía Lola is unjustly arrested and jailed, and her eventual plan to her family back on its feet. This is solid historical fiction based on true events. Those exploring racism, the labor movement, and the role of Spanish, Cuban, and Latin American immigrants may find this an enjoyable way to learn more about this slice of American history.

Himmelblau, Linda. *The Trouble Begins*. 2005, Delacorte Press, Ages 8 to 12, \$14.95, 200 pp.

"I'm angry because my dad finds something bad about everything I do and I'm sad too because I know he's disappointed in me." No matter what he does, fifth grader Du always seems to find trouble. He is newly arrived from the Philippines, where he has lived since infancy with his grandmother in a Vietnamese refugee camp. There his street smarts and active ways helped them survive. In America he can't seem to fit in, doesn't have quick comebacks to bullies' taunts, and only his school counselor and grandmother seem to believe in him. The first person narrative brings home Du's many predicaments, and a cast of wholly believable characters – from the grouchy old man next door who ends up a friend to the nice kids in school who involve him in soccer to the classmate who falsely accuses him of stealing a bike – involves the reader and keeps the plot moving briskly. Du's lack of English and subsequent mishaps as well as the tensions within his family may help readers understand more about the immigrant experience.

Jones, Veda B. *Laura's Victory*. 2006, Barbour, Ages 8 to 12, \$4.97, 144 pp.

During WWII, ten-year-old Laura Edward lives with her brothers, sisters, and parents. Her family owns and runs a hotel that is located in Seattle, Washington. Laura experiences a number of worries in the story. Her brother Eddie, is one-year-older than

Laura and contracts polio at the beginning of the story. Laura's family also worries about her older brother, Bruce. Bruce is in the Army and fighting in Europe. Laura's best friend is Yvonne Dreger. Yvonne also had an older brother, but he was died at Pearl Harbor. Yvonne hates anyone who is Japanese. Laura struggles with this idea of absolute hate. The Wakamutsu family used lived at her family's hotel. They were Japanese, but they were also good friends to Laura's parents. In 1942, the Wakamutsu family was sent to a relocation center and then an internment camp. Towards the end of the war the Wakamutsu family returns to Seattle. There are no vacancies at the hotel, so Laura's parents invite the Wakamutsu family to stay with them. When they arrive, they have a girl named Miyoko with them. At first Laura can't believe this girl is staying in her home, let along in her bedroom. Laura is suspicious and resentful. In time she learns about Miyoko's life and realizes her prejudices have been unfair. Miyoko's mother died from pneumonia in the internment camp and her father is away fighting for the U.S. Army in Europe. Laura grows to admire Miyoko's strength in the face of persecution. This book includes an underlying theme of Christianity and prayer. This book is from the series, *Sisters in Time*. A website that accompanies the series is available at [www.SistersInTime.com](http://www.SistersInTime.com).

Jones, Veda B. *Nellie the Brave: The Cherokee Trail of Tears*. 2006, Barbour, Ages 8 to 12, \$4.97, 140 pp.

Nellie Starr is a young Cherokee girl from 1838. Her life is caught in the upheaval of the America expansion to the west. Nellie and her family are forced by U.S. soldiers to leave their home in Tennessee. They have to make their way to a new home in what would later become the state of Oklahoma. The forced journey of her family and thousands of other Cherokees became known as the "Trail of Tears." During an early part of the trip, Nellie is bitten by a copperhead snake. She doesn't take long to heal and she always seems to be blessed with good health. Because of her physical strength, she ends up nursing ill members of her family and close friends. Nellie also becomes familiar with death, as many die from the harsh condition and "the sickness." Nellie's best friend is Morning Star, a bright and cheerful young girl. The happy lightness of this character ends, when she dies on the trail after suffering from a high fever for many days. Nellie tries to learn to forgive the people that have caused her so much heartache and loss. Ultimately she decides that she must have a happy heart and this will only happen if she follows the path of forgiveness. This book uses historical events as a backdrop and includes an underlying theme of Christianity. The book is from the series, *Sisters in Time*. A website is available at [www.SistersInTime.com](http://www.SistersInTime.com).

Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower*. 2006, Atheneum, Ages 11 and up, \$16.95, 272 pp.

Sumiko and her younger brother, Tak-Tak live with their extended family on a carnation farm in southern California. Her story begins on Friday, December 5, 1941, when she receives an invitation to a classmate's birthday party. When she arrives at the party on Saturday, the girl's mother won't let her come into the house. Devastated, she asks for her gift back and flees. Little does she realize that the next day, December 7, the Japanese would bomb Pearl Harbor and her life would change forever. It is not until mid-May, however, that Sumiko's family is told to leave their farm. After spending a few weeks at the San Carlos Race Track, they are relocated to a camp near Poston, Arizona.

There Sumiko meets her first real friend, an Indian boy named Frank. The remainder of the story takes the reader through the daily routine and the techniques of survival that the Japanese Americans used to endure their time in the concentration camp. Kadohata makes the sad, lonely Sumiko come alive, showing the hope that keeps her and the other detainees pressing onward. In many ways this book is much better than her Newbery Award book, *Kira Kira*.

Lasky, Kathryn. *Broken Song*. 2005, Viking, Ages 10 and up, \$15.99, 154 pp.

In this companion book to her award-winning *The Night Journey* (1981), Lasky describes the life of violin prodigy Reuven Bloom, and the terrible night when Cossack troops invade his modest home, murder the townspeople, and change his life forever. Dressed like an old peasant woman with his two year old sister, Rachel, riding in a basket on his back, Reuven escapes to Poland, where he sees Rachel off to safety in America and becomes the best demolition man for the Bund, the underground Jewish Workers' Federation. Reassigned, he saves the family of his future wife, Sashie (the protagonist of *The Night Journey*), and ultimately decides to leave his violent life and join Rachel and her adoptive family in America. While the adventurous plot is compelling, it is Lasky's skillful characterization of Reuven and his oh-so-feisty sister that bring the story into focus. Plenty of dialogue, unobtrusive explanations of the historical context of the story and a happy (if improbable) ending make this a good fit for the middle school set.

Lee, Milly. *Landed*. 2006, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Ages 8 to 12, \$16.00, 38 pp.

The picture book format of this book belies its content. Most children learn about Ellis Island and the immigrants who came through the processing center there. Rarely do they learn about Angel Island and the Chinese immigrants who came through its center. The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed by Congress in 1882, made it almost impossible for Chinese to enter the country. Sun's father, an international merchant, travels between the two countries frequently and has older sons working with him in his business in San Francisco. Now it is time for twelve-year-old Sun to join them. In preparation for his immigration Sun must study arduously for months. He must know even the minutest details about his house in China, how many steps between his house and his school, and the direction that the cemetery is from his house. All this information, plus much more, is included in each immigrant boy's "coaching book." The boys study these until they reach San Francisco, and then they destroy them before they disembark. Sun, who is directionally challenged, has to go before the immigration board three times because he cannot remember the direction that his bedroom faces. Finally, with the help of a compass that his father slips to him in a package of cookies, Sun is able to give the correct answer and learns that he is "landed." In her author's note, Lee gives further details about the difficulties the Chinese faced coming to America. She explains that the term "landed" was used to let the immigrants know that their entrance to America was complete. She based her story on the life of her father-in-law, Lee Sun Chor.

Lester, Julius. *Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue*. 2005, Hyperion Books, Ages 14 and up, \$15.99, 177 pp.

In his author's note, Julius Lester writes, "On March 2 and 3, 1859, the largest auction of slaves in American history took place in Savannah, Georgia. Some accounts put the number of slave sold at 429, while others put it at 436." Pierce Butler must sell his slaves to pay off a large gambling debt. Through dialogue and interludes, flashbacks and flash-forwards, Lester presents the heart wrenching stories of the people whose lives were affected forever by this sale. Using first person narratives, Lester draws the reader into each person's life. The stories are powerful. Emma, the 12-year-old slave girl, and Sarah, the owner's younger daughter play significant roles in the book. Each reminisces about that time and mourns the loss of their friendship. Lester has written many powerful books, but this one may top them all! The stories are made even more powerful by the heavy rain that fell during those two days of the sale. Lester states that "soon after the auction ended, the rain stopped and the sun came out. The sale became known as 'the Weeping Time.'"

Moses, Shelia P. *The Return of Buddy Bush*. 2006, McElderry Books, Ages 12 and up, \$15.95, 143 pp.

At the end of *The Legend of Buddy Bush*, Pattie May's grandfather has died. Everyone, but particularly Pattie May, is sad that Buddy Bush is not at the funeral. Buddy had just escaped from the Klan when they broke into the jail to try to hang him; now no one knows where he is. *The Return of Buddy Bush* begins as twelve year old Pattie May puts Grandpa's obituary in the wooden chest where the family has kept obituaries for generations. She wonders about all of these folks, but wonders more about her Uncle Buddy and hopes that he has escaped for sure. Following the funeral, Pattie May is sent to Harlem with her older sister, BarJean. It is there that Pattie May begins her sleuthing. Sneaking out of the apartment, she searches for people who might have known Uncle Buddy. At last she finds him, and convinces him to come with her to BarJean's apartment, where they talk for hours. Pattie May learns that Uncle Buddy was at Grandpa's funeral, but he was dressed as one of the grave diggers. Uncle Buddy then surprises her when he says he is going back to see Ma Jones and face whatever trial awaits him. After a warm homecoming, Uncle Buddy is taken into protective custody until his trial, which is cut short by the governor's pardon. The story ends with Uncle Buddy and Pattie May visiting Grandpa's grave and Uncle Buddy telling the family he is going back to Harlem and will never come further south than Baltimore. When readers finished reading *The Legend of Buddy Bush*, they were left hanging. Moses says she received many letters from readers asking her to finish the story. She explains in her author's note that she needed to finish the story that her grandmother told her. So, through research, she learned about Buddy Bush's trial and acquittal and his disappearance from North Carolina and those who loved him so much.

Mwangi, Meja. *The Mzungu Boy*. 2005, House of Anansi Press, Ages 10 to 12, \$15.95, 150 pp.

The setting for this story is the early 1950's in Kenya. As the concluding notes in the book explain, much of the land was held by European settlers and native Kenyans were relegated to working as tenant farmers. Against this backdrop is the story of two twelve year old boys, Kariuki and Nigel. Kariuki is a native Kenyan and lives for his favorite part of day, walking home from school through the beautiful forests and plains that surround his impoverished village. In the forest he can escape the bullying of the headmaster at school and his mother's constant list of chores. The landscape around the village is beautiful, rough and very wild. Nigel is visiting from England. He has come to Kenya in order to spend time with his grandfather, a wealthy land owner, or bwana. Kariuki's father works on the farm that Nigel's grandfather owns. The boys begin to fish, swim, hunt, and to explore together. They also forge a quick and strong bond of friendship. In the background, a much more serious matter is brewing, the brutality of the colonial system. Kariuki's brother Hari has joined a group of rebels that live in the forest. The rebels are plotting an uprising. Their plan is to throw Nigel's family and all the other white settlers off the land. Eventually Nigel is captured by the rebels and Kariuki comes looking for him; he, too, is kidnapped. Hari comes to the aid of the captured boys and helps them make a late night escape. As Nigel and Kariuki head back home, Kariuki pleads with Hari to go with him, but Hari refuses. He tells Kariuki that he must remain with his "brothers" of the forest. The rebels extract a quick revenge and Hari is found dead the next day. This story shows both the beauty and violence of the land, describing a part of history with which most American children are not familiar.

Napoli, Donna Jo. *The King of Mulberry Street*. 2005, Wendy Lamb, Ages 8 to 12, \$15.95, 245 pp.

In 1892, nine year old Dom awakens one morning to his mother's singing. She tells him that they must hurry because of a surprise that awaits him. They go to the cobbler shop where she has had shoes made for him; then she tells him to not go to school, but see Napoli and visit all the people he knows. The following morning his mother awakens him with the softest touch and tells him to stay quiet as she dresses him in his best synagogue pants and shirt AND his new shoes. At first, Dom doesn't understand as they walk quickly through Napoli and come to the docks. Here his mother makes him promise that he will get an education and take care of himself. They walk up the gangplank where his mother bargains with the sailor to hide Dom, which he does. Not until they are at sea does Dom realize that his mother is not on the cargo ship bound for America. The remainder of the book is a survival and success story. Getting through immigration at Ellis Island without an adult proves to be rather tricky, but with some help Dom is successful. But now what? Where must he go? He spends his first night in New York in a barrel. His shoes become his most prized possession, and he guards them almost with his life. The year in New York is hard. Dom finds harsh reality and hunger are always with him, yet he also finds kindness with an Italian grocer, a widow woman who rents Dom and his new friends a room. When one of his friends is killed by his padroni, he realizes that he must follow his mother's wish that he get an education if he wants to succeed. The book closes with Dom buying a larger pair of shoes and giving his to a younger boy with none.

Pearsall, Shelley. *Crooked River*. 2005, Knopf, Ages 10 to 14, \$15.95, 249 pp.

In Ohio in 1812, white settlers have encroached upon Ojibwa Indian territory. The whites live on one side of Crooked River; the Indians on the other. Tensions between the two groups are high. The Indians want peace, a home, and a treaty that will be honored. This is not to be, however, and the lives of 13-year-old Rebecca Carver and her 17-year old sister Laura are changed forever. The girls, their two brothers, and their father have a small farm, where each child has specific responsibilities. Since Ma died, Pa has become meaner, and the children know that he is up to some no-good act. Early in the story, Pa brings an Indian into their home. The Indian is tied and roughly forced up to the loft of the cabin. The girls are told to guard him and tend to him. Rebecca is angry to see the Indian treated so harshly. White men accuse the Indian of murdering a shifty trapper, but Rebecca befriends the Indian, even to the point of risking her life for him. The story is told in alternating voices – Rebecca’s in first-person narrative; Amik’s in poetry. This format engages the reader in the unfolding drama. In her author’s note, Pearsall explains how she came to write the story, the thorough research she conducted, and how the voices of Rebecca and Amik took on personalities of their own. She includes a selected bibliography of related non-fiction books for young adults, and two museum resources that she found very helpful. The book will add its own particular exciting flavor to a fiction collection depicting life in the Ohio territory in the early 1800s.

Roy, Jennifer. *Yellow Star*. 2006, Marshall Cavendish, Ages 9 to 14, \$16.95, 227 pp.

Of the 270,000 Jews forced into the Lodz ghetto by the Nazis, only 800 survived. Twelve were children. The author’s aunt, Sylvia (Syvia) Perlmutter, was one of them. Through extensive interviews, Roy has recast Syvia’s story into a first person, free verse poetic narrative that effortlessly weaves day to day incidents in with a broader view of life in Poland during the Holocaust. “Yellow/is the color of/ the felt six-pointed star/that is sewn onto my coat./...I wish I could/rip the star off/ (carefully, stitch by stitch, so as not to ruin/my lovely coat),/because yellow is meant to be/a happy color,/not the color of/hate.” Each small incident is given a bold-face heading --*They’re Here, Escape, The Hole*—that helps move the story along. Syvia’s story is compelling and harrowing; there are many narrow escapes, and the way the children finally survive is by living in a cellar found by Syvia’s father and hidden from the soldiers’ searches. Written in chronological order, the story is separated into five parts, each prefaced by a short, explanatory chapter that describes what was going on in the war during that time. The author’s introduction and final note give further information on Syvia’s family; a time line at the end of the book gives a broad view of major events of World War II. Highly recommended.

Salisbury, Graham. *House of the Red Fish*. 2006, Random House, Ages 12 and up, \$16.95, 288 pp.

Continuing the story of Tomi Nakaji told in *Under the Blood-Red Sun*, this details Tomi’s efforts to raise the *Taiyo Maru*, his father’s fishing boat. Sunk by the U.S. Army after his Papa was arrested, it is sitting in the Ala Wai canal; how can a 14 year old possibly raise it? When his mother’s employer’s son, Keet, warns him off the project, Tomi is more determined than ever to have the boat afloat by the time his father gets home, whenever that will be. The story is rich in many respects; Salisbury details the

impact of the attack on Pearl Harbor on Hawaii, from nighttime curfews and blackouts to the need to carry a gas mask and identification at all times. The first person narrative allows Tomi to give background on his friends and family in a seamless fashion, giving the characters depth. The cast of characters is memorable: Tomi's teacher, Mr. Ramos, looks after all his kids; stubborn Grampa Joji and his girlfriend Fumi support Tomi's efforts in surprising ways; and Tomi's friends slide in and out of scrapes with humor as well as fear. The dialogue includes Hawaiian and Japanese words (a glossary is appended), and Tomi and his friends switch from "proper" English to their own type of street language. Most importantly, Tomi's determination and his friends' loyalty in the face of racism engendered by the war bring home the theme that seeing past the surface is the way to keep a community safe.

Wyss, Thelma H. *Bear Dancer: The Story of a Ute Girl*. 2005, McElderry Books, Ages 8 to 12, \$15.95, 181 pp.

Based on the life of Susan Carroll Johnson, this is a lesser known account of her life as a child. The story is set in the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains and is divided into three sections; the first occurs from 1860-1861; the second from 1861-1863; and, the third in 1863. There is great unrest and fighting between the Utes, the Arapahos and the Cheyenne, much of it caused by the white soldiers and settlers who are trading with the Arapahos. The Utes live in the mountains; the Arapahos in the plains, but the Arapahos are invading the Ute territory, taking their horses, and their women. However, for 12 year old Elk Tooth Dress (called Elk Girl), life is rich, with hunting expeditions with her father and brother and racing her pony with a close friend. Life changes when her brother asks her to go north to live with the White River Utes and help the old chief and his wife. Shortly after she arrives, she is captured by two Cheyenne men and taken as a slave for their people. She spends a year with the Cheyenne and is "rescued" by some white settlers. Through the kindness of Uriah Curtis, who is taking a treaty to her brother, Chief Ouray, Elk Girl goes home. Third person narrative with believable dialogue moves the story along smoothly.

### **Biography/Autobiography**

Bausum, Ann. *Freedom Riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the Front Lines of the Civil Rights Movement*. 2006, National Geographic, Ages 8 to 12, \$18.95, 79 pp.

Living in the south and being in high school during the early years of the Civil Rights Movement, I knew that those who participated in the Freedom Rides were attacked, humiliated and imprisoned, but I learned so much from this book. I thought I was reading a biography of John Lewis and Jim Zwerg, but the book was much more than that. Lewis and Zwerg were key players in the Freedom Rides, but beyond discussing their involvement, Bausum presents a realistic picture of the hatred and grave dangers that these brave people faced each time they got on a bus. She uses authentic photographs to augment the clear text. The format of the book helps engage the reader's attention from cover to cover.

Borden, Louise. *The Journey That Saved Curious George*. 2005, Houghton Mifflin Company, Ages 9 to 13, \$17.00, 70 pp.

Curious about the details of their escape from war time France in 1940, the author consulted a number of primary and secondary sources to help recount the adventures of Hans and Margret Reyersbach, known worldwide for their *Curious George* books. Told in free verse that is surrounded on each page by illustrations in the style of the 1940s, the layout is inviting, and photographs of the times, reprints of some of Hans' artwork, and photographs of Hans' diary and of other primary source documents add interest to an already fascinating tale. Both of the Reys grew up in well to do families in Hamburg, Germany; both found their way early in their careers to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where they formed a working partnership (Margret was a photographer) and soon married. They were living and working at the Hotel Terrass in Paris in June, 1940, when the Nazi's invaded. On June 12, along with more than 5 million other people, they fled south to escape the German invaders. With their most precious possessions in their bike baskets, including the original manuscript and drawings for *Curious George*, they pedaled by bicycle to the south of France, where they caught a train for Bayonne and eventually reached Lisbon, Portugal, where they boarded a ship for Brazil. An Afterward gives information on the Reys' subsequent move to the United States and a short synopsis of their life here. The book also includes a partial bibliography of the Reys' works.

Burleigh, Robert & Young, Ed. *Tiger of the Snows*. 2006, Atheneum, Ages 7 to 10, \$16.95, 28 pp.

On May 29, 1953, Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary, chosen "because of their experience and bravery," made the final ascent up Chomolungma, what Westerners call Mount Everest. This short biography of Norgay begins when he is "...the boy on a steep hillside./Tending the belled yaks,/Spring in his blood,/ Wandering through patches of rhododendrons./And as ever,/ Looking up..." The free verse exposition of Norgay's story gives the book an almost dreamlike feel, while Ed Young's lush pastel illustrations capture the grandeur of the Himalayas and the ice and snow and cold faced by the climbers. An afterword gives basic information on the expedition.

Crow, Joseph Medicine. *Counting Coup: Becoming a Crow Chief on the Reservation and Beyond*. 2006, National Geographic, Ages 14 and up, \$15.95, 128 pp.

With the traditional storyteller's sense of timing, joie de vivre, and no little sense of humor, this autobiography gives readers a fresh look at tribal life with the Absarokee and within the white world. Joseph Medicine Crow is a member of the Whistling Water Clan, one of 10 clans of the Crow Nation. Born in 1913, he spent much time as a child with his many grandparents on the reservation in Montana. "Although times were tough for the old people, for us kids, life was good. We played lots of games and had no worries." As he progresses through his life Joseph Medicine Crow presents the reader with anecdotes, history, conditions of the times, and descriptions of people to give a rounded view of his world. The first person narrative brings the story alive, and the framing element of counting coup (the elders counted his successful completion of leading his men on a harrowing assignment in WWII as his first war deed) sets the tone for learning about the Crow traditions he describes throughout the book.

Davis, Sampson., George Jenkins and Rameck Hunt with Sharon Draper. *We Beat the Street*. 2005, Dutton, Ages 14 and up, \$16.99, 194 pp.

In alternating chapters, written in the third person with a good deal of dialogue, the “Three Doctors” relate their stories of growing up in the tough neighborhoods of Newark, New Jersey. Each chapter ends with a short “conversation with” section in which the adult doctor reflects on that section of his life. [“Let me tell you about the boys I used to hang out with. Two of them were murdered. Two of them are strung out on drugs. One of them is in jail. I have lost contact with the others.”] Drugs, gangs, and life in the projects often come close to claiming the boys’ future, but – often by what seems to be pure luck – each manages to make it to the next step on the way to becoming a physician. The three meet at Newark’s prestigious University High School, and in the eleventh grade they make a pact to try for Seton Hall University’s program, which was designed to bring more minority students into the medical and dental professions as doctors. The matter of fact tone of the book makes it all the more inspirational; these are real stories that will connect with many teens, no matter what their life circumstances.

Engle, Margarita. *The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano*. Art by Sean Qualls. 2006, Henry Holt, Ages 12 and up, \$16.95, 183 pp.

Juan Francisco Manzano was born into slavery in 1797. Their owner, Doña Beatriz de Jústiz, La Marquesa, sets his mother free and allows her to marry Juan’s father; however, Juan must remain her slave. He becomes her poodle, her pet, and learns to bark and sit on command and memorizes poetry and play lyrics so that he can perform for her friends. Just before she dies, La Marquesa tells Juan’s mother that he will be freed upon her death. This doesn’t happen. He is transferred to La Marquesa de Prado Ameno, who treats him cruelly. More times than not, she has him beaten and locked in the cellar for the least little infraction. Juan’s mother buys his freedom, but he is not freed. The La Marquesa simply keeps the money. Juan finally escapes, and the book ends. The author’s historical note book gives a bit more information about Juan’s life. After his escape, he spends several years in hiding in Havana. While there, he married Delia, although her parents objected to the marriage. Eventually, Juan is able to purchase his freedom. No one knows if he wrote any more poems in the remaining years of his life because none were published and second half of his autobiographical notebook was lost. His work is the only known autobiographic account of Latin American slavery. Margarita Engle states that when she read the poetry of Manzano, she knew she could only write the biography in poetic form. Her choice was excellent. Using alternating voices for the poems makes the book more dramatic. Highly recommended.

Engler, Mary. *I. M. Pei*. 2006, Raintree, Ages 10 to 12, \$9.49, 64 pp.

In this biography for reluctant readers, Engler presents the life and accomplishments of I. M. Pei, the world renowned architect. Pei grew up in China, but came to the United States for university. He earned his undergraduate degree from MIT and his masters from Harvard. He had always hoped to return to China, but political situations disallowed that. After working for a large real estate group many years, Pei founded his own architectural firm so that he could have more control over the projects that he chose. His modern architectural styles enhance the skyline of many cities world wide. Pei’s work is not without criticism, but the breath and life he gives to buildings is

astounding. Although simple, this biography gives a well-rounded picture of I. M. Pei. The book is part of Raintree's *Asian American Biographies* series, and would be a good addition to middle school library collections.

Ford, Carin T. *Roberto Clemente: Baseball Legend*. 2005, Enslow, Ages 8 to 12, \$16.95, 128 pp.

Roberto Clemente grew up loving the game of baseball and dreaming of playing for a major league team. At 19, he signed a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers, but that lasted for only one year. He was then drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates, and thus began a brilliant career for the Puerto Rican. Born into a poor but caring family, Clemente never forgot the sacrifices that his parents made for him and spent his career trying to pay them back. At the end of the 1972 season, Clemente went home to Puerto Rico and became active in a drive to collect supplies for earthquake victims in Nicaragua. On New Year's Eve, as he was delivering the supplies to the victims, his plane crashed, killing all aboard. Clemente is remembered as a giant in baseball, but is more honored for the work he did to better the lives of children in Puerto Rico. Carin presents Clemente as a gentle man with a drive to succeed. His character is a strong point in the book. The book is part of Enslow's *Latino Biography Library* series and is suitable for middle or high school age readers. It includes photographs, a table of contents, an index, chapter notes, a list of further reading, and related Web sites.

Menchú, Rigoberta. *The Girl From Chimel*. 2005, Groundwood, Ages 9 and up, \$16.95, 54 pp.

Reading this book is like sitting across from Rigoberta Menchú and listening as she tells about her life in Chimel, the Guatemalan town in which she grew up. Written with Dante Liano, the voice here is direct, unsentimental, and very much in the here and now, which gives a storyteller's flair to the many tales within. "Years later, when I was a little girl and if I were ill, my mother would force me to drink herbal teas made from the weirdest plants." The book is a series of short chapters, each a story that might contain other tales, which are often from the Maya tradition. Menchú begins with the story of how her grandfather carried off her willing grandmother on a "beautiful brown stallion with a golden mane." Woven throughout her tellings are explanations of some of the traditions and religious beliefs of the Maya. The book is richly illustrated in deep, vivid colors by native Mexican artist Domi. This gives a warm picture of life in Guatemala before it was torn apart by the conflict and brutal genocide that set Menchú on the path of activism that would eventually win her the Nobel Peace Prize.

Millman, Isaac. *Hidden Child*. 2005, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Ages 8 to 12, \$18.00, 73 pp.

Isaac Sztrymfman was a happy child whose parents loved and cared for him. Life changed one afternoon in 1941 when his father was ordered to register his family as Jews. A few days later, Isaac's father was taken to an internment camp at Pithiviers, France. Seven-year-old Isaac and his mother were allowed to visit only once; that was the last time he saw his father. Soon thereafter, persecution of Jews in Paris became such that Isaac's mother used the last of her money to have Isaac and her taken to safety in the countryside. However, their guide and the small group traveling with him were

imprisoned. Isaac doesn't remember how long they were there, but he does remember his mother giving one of the prison guards her jewelry. He later learned that she gave the jewelry to pay for Isaac's safekeeping because she knew that they would be separated. His mother was deported, but Isaac was not. Life for him was not easy. After being kept by one French couple for a few months, he was taken in by the Widow Devolder who cared for him and saw that he went to school. He remained with her from late 1942 until the liberation in 1945. He was then taken to a temporary home for displaced Jewish children. Not until 1948 was he adopted by a Jewish couple in America. At the age of 15, he left France to begin a new life with a new name. He later learned that of his extended family, only one cousin, one uncle and he had survived the Holocaust. Millman brings closure to the story of his childhood by telling about his happy adult life.

Rosinsky, Natalie M. *Sarah Winnemucca: Scout, Activist, and Teacher*. (Signature Lives.) 2006, Compass Point, Ages 12 and up, \$9.95, 112 pp.

One of the Kuyuidika-a band of the Northern Paiute, Sarah Winnemucca, named Thocmetony, or "Shell Flower," grew up in the Great Basin of western Nevada. When thousands of whites flooded the area upon the discovery of the Comstock Lode, her people's lifestyle changed drastically. Due to her grandfather's belief that whites and Paiute could co-exist, Sarah was educated in the ways of the white culture, and began her work as a spokeswoman for her people, who were herded from their land to various "reservations" administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Sarah's protests over these injustices led her from the vaudevillian stage to the homes of influential suffragettes. She eventually wrote a book detailing her criticisms of corrupt Indian agents and the reservation system. Rosinsky tells Sarah's story through a well written and easy to follow narrative peppered with quotes from documented primary and secondary sources. She makes it clear that while her efforts for her people were unstinting, Sarah's personal life suffered due to her poor marriage choices and the fact that she was not always accepted by the Paiute or the white culture in which she often moved. The book's layout is pleasing, with black and white, color and sepia photographs and illustrations on every double page spread. Vaudeville style signs give brief facts and short stories that complement the text and add to the reader's knowledge of the period.

Russo, Marisabina. *Always Remember Me: How One Family Survived World War II*. 2005, Atheneum, Ages 6 and up, \$16.95, 40 pp.

At first glance *Always Remember Me* appears to be a picture book; however, taking a second look, one realizes that the book can be used for a wide variety of ages. The author bases the story on the family stories that she heard growing up. Oma, her grandmother was raising her three daughters alone in the years leading up to World War II. They, like most Jews, thought the war would not last as long as it did. Just before Oma planned to leave Germany and bring two of her daughters to America, she was sent to a concentration camp. She didn't know if her daughters, now grown, would survive the Holocaust, but miraculously all four did. When Oma was released she made her way back to her village to retrieve the photographs that she had hidden in the wall of their house. Using those photographs, Russo weaves the story of how her mother, grandmother and aunts were reunited in America following the war. The book would be a good read aloud for middle school students in their study of World War II.

Whiteman, Dorit Bader. *Lonek's Journey: The True Story of a Boy's Escape to Freedom*. 2005, Star Bright, Ages 12 and up, \$15.95, 141 pp.

The book begins, "On a sunny day in August, 1939, in his hometown of Jaroslaw, Poland, eleven-year-old Lonek was cheerfully walking home." Lonek's happiness was short-lived, however. When he arrived home, his father greeted him in a way that scared Lonek; and, rightfully so, his father was leaving to join the Polish army. Being Polish Jews, Lonek's family was targeted by the German army. After escaping from the Germans, Lonek was captured and taken to a Siberian labor camp. He was able to escape from the Siberian camp and make his way to Palestine. This moving story takes place over a two year period in which Lonek traveled thousands of miles. The author states that it represents a little-known part of the Jewish escape to Palestine, one that resulted in the freedom of nearly 1000 children and their escape to Palestine. The book includes maps, black and white photos, a glossary, and an explanation of what happened to Lonek's family after their being separated for those 2 years.

### **Poetry**

Nelson, Marilyn. *A Wreath for Emmett Till*. Illustrated by Philippe Lardy. 2005, HMCO, Ages 8 to 10, \$17.00, 40 pp.

In her note at the beginning of the book, Marilyn Nelson says that because of the impact that Emmett Till's death had on her as a child, she knew she would write a book about him; she also explains that the book is a heroic crown of sonnets. "A crown of sonnets is a sequence of interlinked sonnets in which the last line of one becomes the first line, sometimes slightly altered, of the next. A heroic crown of sonnets is a sequence of fifteen interlinked sonnets, in which the last one is made up of the first lines of the preceding fourteen." By using this format she formed a protective cocoon around herself in order to write about this tragic event. Her powerful text and Lardy's equally powerful drawings combine to produce beauty out of despair. Although in picture book format, the book is quite appropriate for middle and high school age young people. In notes at the end of the book, Nelson provides explanations on each sonnet, and Lardy provides explanations on his choice of illustrations. Also included are related books and a related Web site.

Norman, Lissette. *My Feet Are Laughing*. Illustrated by Frank Morrison. 2006, Farrar Straus Giroux, Ages 8 to 11, \$16.00, 32pp.

Sadie, a young Dominican American girl living in Harlem, dances through this musically illustrated book as she describes her life with her family. Although her parents are divorced, the family still loves one another, and Sadie's sassy descriptions of herself are amusing and enlightening. The illustrations complement Sadie's stories perfectly. Recommended.

Roessel, David & Rampersad, Arnold. *Langston Hughes*. Illustrated by Benny Andrews. 2006, Sterling, Ages 11 and up, \$14.95, 48 pp.

Roessel and Rampersad have collected 26 of Langston Hughes most famous poems, illustrated with bright, incredible paintings from Benny Andrews. Probably more because of Andrews' art, the book will appeal to middle schoolers through adults. Roessel is the editor of several collections of American poetry, some with Rampersad. Andrews received the Abby Award for life-time achievement in the arts and has his work in permanent collections in more than 30 major museums. The introduction to the volume gives a brief, but detailed, biography of Hughes; and, accompanying each poem is a brief introduction and explanation of any perhaps unfamiliar terms or people mentioned in the poem. This collection belongs in any library's collection.

### **Nonfiction**

Bartoletti, Susan C. *Hitler Youth*. 2005, Scholastic, Ages 12 and up, \$19.95, 176 pp.

Hitler's power of brainwashing with charisma is chilling. From its founding in 1926 until its height in 1939, Hitler Youth increased its membership from 6,000 to 7,287,470. These young people, some as young as 10, were trained in survival techniques, fighting, and hate. They were crucial members of Hitler's forces during the fighting of World War II. Very few young people were willing to stand up to the regime; few of those who did lived. Bartoletti has composed a thought-provoking account of the control that one man could have over the people of his country. The book may not be one that students would read for pleasure, although it is compelling. I'd recommend the book for any young adult library collection.

Fitzgerald, Stephanie. *The Little Rock Nine: Struggle for Integration*. 2007, Compass Point, Ages 10 and up, \$31.93, 95 pp.

In 1957, ten brave African American students tried to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, AR. In spite of many obstacles, nine of the students were finally allowed to enroll and attend classes that first year. In the 1958-59 school year, Little Rock Public Schools closed all their schools, hoping to force the Black students to withdraw. With the help of a dynamic woman, Daisy Bates, the students found strength to continue their quest. Of the nine, only two actually graduated from Central, but they had broken the barrier that would lead to integration in Little Rock. The book is readable and would be useful in a middle school library as part of a collection on the Civil Rights era. Fitzgerald's use of archival photographs and informational side-bars adds interest to the otherwise straightforward text. The book has a table of contents, an index, a timeline, chapter notes, a selected bibliography, and further reading, a glossary, and photo credits. The book is part of the *Snapshots in History* series.

Haski, Pierre. *The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl*. 2004, Harpercollins, Ages 11 and up, \$16.99, 166 pp.

In May of 2001, 13 year old Ma Yan is in her 7<sup>th</sup> year of schooling – rare for a girl in her remote corner of China. The first foreign journalists to visit since the 1930's, Pierre Haski and his team were given Ma Yan's diary by her mother; they were so intrigued that they returned to interview her. Her story captured the hearts of French teenagers; a fund now supports over 300 students in Ma Yan's province. The diary gives an unprecedented

glimpse of the hardships endured by many Chinese families in order to give their children an education. Ma Yan recounts daily life both at school (she and her brother walk 12 ½ miles through hilly country, a 4 or 5 hour trek) and at home. Her thoughts and worries sometimes parallel those of other schoolagers, making this accessible to Western students. It is her focus on her family members and the day to day occurrences of her life that make this come alive, however. Her fierce determination to succeed often prompts self-talk: “Everything the teacher said today will stay etched on my mind. If I follow his advice, I think I’ll be able to overcome my difficulties.” Interspersed throughout the diary are short chapters that help readers understand more about Ma Yan’s life: Ma Yan’s grandparents, the poverty in her region, how the schools work, harvesting *fa cai*, a wild grass, and more. Footnotes also help clarify references that Western readers may not understand. Black and white photographs and a simple page design add appeal. Highly recommended.

Morris, Ann and Heidi Larson. *Tsunami: Helping Each Other*. 2005, Millbrook Press, Ages 9 to 12, \$18.95, 32 pp.

Focusing on two brothers, 12 year old Chaipreak and 8 year old Chaiya, the authors tell how the tsunami of 2004 devastated the town of Khao Lak, a popular tourist destination on the west coast of Thailand. Glossy pages feature photographs from before and after the event, and highlight the great variety of people and organizations that came from around the world as well as from throughout Thailand to help the residents and the families of tourists during their time of need. Buddhist monks ministered to relatives of the deceased and missing; UNICEF and Red Cross personnel from around the world helped with relief and rebuilding, and volunteers assisted members of the Thai army to rebuild the boys’ school. Although they found their mother, the boys’ father has never been found. A web site set up by the International School of Bangkok describes their Tsunami Relief Network, organized to “to make a significant difference in the lives of the poorest children who were tsunami victims in Thailand.” Although the format of this nonfiction work follows that of a picture book, the small print and packed pages make it most suitable for students in the middle grades.

Myers, Walter D. & Miles, Bill. *The Harlem Hellfighters: When Pride Met Courage*. 2006, HarperCollins, Ages 12 to 15, \$17.89, 150 pp.

In 1916 America still carried the deep wounds of slavery; poverty for African Americans was a reality; equality was only a dream; for some men, joining the armed forces seemed a way to address all three. Proving themselves as men – men worthy to serve their country – was an important thing. However, the Army was still mostly a whites-only group. The first totally-black regiment, the 15<sup>th</sup> New York National Guard was formed in mid-1916. The 359<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment evolved out of the 15<sup>th</sup>; and, after their heroic efforts fighting alongside the French in one of the bloodiest battles of World War I, the men became known as the Harlem Hellfighters. Myers and Miles have compiled an excellent history of the roll of African American soldiers in all the wars in the United States, but particularly as exhibited in World War I. Using primary source documents and photographs, readers journey through the long struggles the African American soldiers faced in America. The book presents the horrors of war and the

heroics of these soldiers, but an index would have made the book much more useful for readers.

Oppenheim, Joanne. *Dear Miss Breed*. 2005, Scholastic, Ages 14 and up, \$22.99, 287 pp.

In what must be one of the most comprehensive books about the internment experience from the eyes of children and young adults, Joanne Oppenheim brings the life of librarian, Clara Breed, onto center stage. This is not where Breed would have wanted it because all she was interested in was offering some sort of small hope to the Japanese American children who were trapped in the camps. Clara Breed received many letters from children in camps around the country. To the children, she was a solid rock in their shifting world. Oppenheim stumbled across Clara Breed's contributions as she was attempting to locate some of her high school classmates for their reunion. From interviews with the adults who wrote the letters to Miss Breed, the articles that Clara Breed wrote for *Hornbook* and *Library Journal* about her experiences, and from the children's letters that Clara had kept for so many years, Oppenheim presents a clear picture of a true "lifeline" that Clara Breed was for these children.

Smith, James. *The Boys of San Joaquin*. 2005, Atheneum Books, Ages 12 and up, \$16.99, 231 pp.

Twelve year old Paolo is the middle of the 10 children. His father is from Appalachia, and his mother is Italian. Paolo has five older siblings – two brothers and two sisters; he has four younger siblings, three sisters and one brother. And, he has an eight year old deaf cousin, Billy. Paolo's maternal grandparents also live with them. Oh, they also have a big dog named Rufus. Now, with this crowd, anything can happen, and does. As the story opens, Rufus comes into the yard with part of a \$20 bill hanging out of his mouth. Paolo tells Billy that surely there is more "where this came from." This begins their quest to solve the mystery. In a rollicking, action-packed book, readers will delight at the activities of the O'Neil kids. The boys do solve the mystery of the money, and the surprise culprit is Terence Gaston, a rich boy who is also very lonely. Smith paints such a descriptive picture of the hubbub of activity that must surely surround a family of this magnitude. The book is geared toward a younger audience, but may appeal to a large number of middle school boys.