

Don Gallo

Bold Books for Teenagers: The Very Best Books for High School Readers

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Editor's note: This *EJ* Extension is a companion to the "Bold Books for Teenagers" column from May 2006, "The Very Best Possibilities, Part Two" (*EJ* 95.5 [2006]: 107–110).

he list of titles below is the result of a survey that I conducted during the summer of 2005. I asked ten of the most knowledgeable people in the field of books for teens to recommend what they believed were the best books published for teenagers between January 2000 and June 2005.

Respondents were asked to name up to three titles in each of the following categories:

- > Books that will interest boys in grades 9 to 12 for personal reading
- > Books that will interest girls in grades 9 to 12 for personal reading
- > Books that will interest both boys and girls in grades 9 to 12 for personal reading
- > Books to teach to boys in grades 9 to 12 for in-common reading
- > Books to teach to girls in grades 9 to 12 for in-common reading
- > Books to teach to both boys and girls in grades 9 to 12 for in-common reading

(Click on any category above to jump to a listing of all titles appearing in that category.)

The same categories were used to ask about books for students in grades 6 to 8.

The ten respondents were a mix of classroom teachers, college educators, school librarians, a public librarian, a book review editor, and consultants. All

ten are extremely well-read individuals, all of them because they love to read, and some of them because they have to, since as members of award committees they are responsible for judging the quality of hundreds of books each year. (See the sidebar for the names and descriptions of those ten notable individuals.)

In each of the categories, titles recommended by more than one individual are listed first, followed by other titles in alphabetical order. Following each title are comments from the book's recommender or recommenders, along with the initials of the person who recommended that title. Each individual was allowed to recommend up to three separate titles for each category.

The Best Books That Will Interest Boys in Grades 9 to 12 for Personal Reading

Books Receiving Multiple Recommendations

Acceleration by Graham McNamee (New York: Wendy Lamb, 2003). Murder, mystery, danger, broken toilets: what more could a reader want? Oh yeah, it also won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for best young adult mystery. (TSL) Suspense that keeps the pages turning and a teen narrator determined to stop a murder are traits that have male readers flying through the pages of this book. (RW) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 6 to 8.]

Feed by M. T. Anderson (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2002). Teens will be fascinated by this all-too-possible future in which computer implants deliver a constant flow of controlled information. (LR) A

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Linda Benson, a former English teacher, stay-at-home mom, and worker in advertising and real estate sales, is the book review editor/managing editor of *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* magazine, which she considers to be the best job in the world. Linda attributes her love of reading YA books to a youthful heart despite her aging years.

Cindy Dobrez, a middle school librarian with West Ottawa Public Schools in Holland, Michigan, has served on the Young Adult Library Services Association's (YALSA) Best Books for Young Adults committee, and recently chaired the 2005 Margaret A. Edwards Award committee for the American Library Association (ALA). She also reviews young adult literature for both *Booklist* and *VOYA*.

Sarah Herz taught English in the high school and middle school of the Westport, Connecticut, school system for twenty-four years and now conducts workshops on young adult literature and reviews articles for *English Journal* and *The ALAN Review*. She is the coauthor of *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded* (Westport: Greenwood, 2005).

Teri S. Lesesne is professor in the Department of Library Science at Sam Houston State University, a book review editor for *Voices from the Middle*, a former president of ALAN (the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE), a member of YALSA's Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers committee, and the author of *Making the Match: The Right Book for the Right Reader at the Right Time, Grades 4–12* (Portland: Stenhouse, 2003).

Walter M. Mayes is library media specialist at the Girls' Middle School in Mountain View, California, and a nationally known presenter of seminars on books for teenagers. He is also the author of *Walter the Giant Storyteller's Giant Book of Giant Stories* (New York: Walker, 2005) and coauthor of *Valerie and Walter's Best Books for Children: A Lively, Opinionated Guide* (2nd ed.; New York: Harper, 2004).

Bill Mollineaux, a retired middle school English teacher, has served as president of ALAN, taught young adult literature courses at Central Connecticut State University and Saint Joseph College, reviewed books for *VOYA*, written "The View from the Middle" column in *Voices from the Middle*, and created "Bill's Books," which contains monthly recommendations for teens on the ALAN Web site (<http://www.alan-ya.org>).

Richie Partington is a former environmental activist, preschool administrator, and retail children's and young adult book buyer who has recently served on the YALSA Best Books for Young Adults committee and currently maintains an extensive schedule of booktalking in Northern California secondary schools while pursuing a degree at San Jose State University's School of Library and Information Science. He is widely respected for his reviews of new books, which are available at <http://richiespicks.com>.

Lynn Rutan, a middle school librarian in Holland, Michigan, is a former coeditor for the *Media Spectrum*, a journal of the Michigan Association for Media in Education, and has served on several ALA/YALSA committees, including Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults. She is currently serving as the chair of the Best Books for Young Adults committee.

M. Jerry Weiss, Professor Emeritus, New Jersey City University, has been one of the nation's most enthusiastic supporters of literature for teenagers. In addition to serving as a columnist for *The ALAN Review*, Jerry has edited a number of books for adolescent readers, including *From One Experience to Another* (New York: Forge, 1997), *Lost and Found* (New York: Forge, 2000), *Big City Cool* (New York: Persea, 2002), and *The Signet Book of Short Plays* (New York: Signet, 2004).

Rollie Welch, a young adult librarian with the Cleveland (Ohio) Public Library, has worked with teens in library settings for twenty-five years. He currently is a member of YALSA's Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers committee, chair of *VOYA*'s Top Shelf for Middle School Fiction committee, and a *VOYA* reviewer.

high-interest title that includes both technology and a look at consumerism in a compelling way without being didactic. (CD) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12 and to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Son of the Mob by Gordon Korman (New York: Hyperion, 2002). Boys will devour this mesmerizing story that will keep them laughing as Vince falls for the daughter of an FBI agent who is investigating his mob-

ster dad. (BM) A hilarious *Romeo and Juliet* story—seventeen-year-old Vince Luca is a son of the mob and his love interest is the daughter of an FBI agent. (SH) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 6 to 8 and for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Whale Talk by Chris Crutcher (New York: Greenwillow, 2001). Because Crutcher is a god, plain and simple, and because he gets boys reading with his

novels of sports, pain, rage, and family. (WM) Crutcher's multiracial narrator will immediately spark the interest of even the most reluctant boy readers with his sarcasm, championship of the underdog, and indefatigable spirit. Tension builds to lessons learned, in typical Crutcher style. (LB) [Also recommended to teach to boys in grades 9 to 12 and to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

You Don't Know Me by David Klass (New York: Farrar, 2001). Since the inception of the Printz Award, I have not read a book that was more deserving of the recognition but did not receive it. The story deals with abuse and other themes that are common enough in adolescent literature but that are written about here with such a compelling and unique voice that it results in this book standing on a shelf all by itself. It includes all those mysteries-of-high school topics, such as hanging out at the mall, the teachers, the dances, and "the secret sorority of pretty fourteen-year-old girls." But the utilization of John's thoughts (as he addresses other characters in his head) for a major portion of the book gives rise to the real story-behind-the-story and also allows for our being enlightened and entertained by the "voices" of several wonderful characters we would otherwise consider to be within the category of inanimate object: John's tuba, which he tells us is really a giant frog pretending to be a tuba, as well as his ornery locker, which "is not at all impressed by correct combinations" (69). (RP) In this stream-of-consciousness novel, fourteen-year-old John's inner thoughts about his life, girls, and school will connect with teenage readers about the agonies of adolescent life. Every teenager could write his or her own version of this story. (SH) [Also recommended to teach to boys in grades 6 to 8.]

Books Receiving Single Recommendations

Black and White by Paul Volponi (New York: Viking, 2005). Male readers, both African American and White, are fascinated by this story of lifelong friends making a terribly wrong decision, leading to serious consequences that will change their attitudes toward each other. (RW)

Blankets by Craig Thompson (Marietta: Top Shelf, 2003). What Craig Thompson does to perfection in *Blankets* is to utilize this illustrated format in order to be able to reveal far more with his combination of words and images than he could possibly have done with words alone. Whether it is the drawings telling part of the story, as when, for example, we view the

series of illustrations in which Craig's hand nervously, anxiously, plays with the curled telephone cord as he tries to "reconnect" with Raina; or whether it is the capability to often have Craig simultaneously saying one thing while thinking another, or the opportunity for the author to transition to extensive dialogue without having to constantly resort to "he said" or "she said," or even the potential of showing Craig's and his brother's drawings rather than having to describe them, I can now really see and understand the potential of writing a novel in this format. I could easily go on and on about other highlights: the power of being able to see those looks passing between Craig and Raina, the joy of being able to watch the bedtime hijinks between the young Craig and his brother, or being able to read an entire story on the face of Raina's father when his discovery leads to contemplation of what has happened in his life. (RP)

Dragon and Thief: A Dragonback Adventure by Timothy Zahn (New York: Tor, 2003). Boys who enjoy space adventure and mystery will love this action-filled tale about fourteen-year-old Jack, who forms a symbiotic relationship with dragonlike Draycos. (BM)

Dunk by David Lubar (New York: Clarion, 2002). Young adult boy works as clown in amusement park, getting dunked in water tank. Describes close friendships, deals with friend's illness, and there's a special girl. (MJW)

The First Part Last by Angela Johnson (New York: Simon, 2003). This 2004 Printz Award-winner will be enjoyed by boys who recognize the story's tough, urban, teen father who decides to take responsibility for his child despite incredible odds against his success. (LB) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 6 to 8, for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12, and to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

The Gospel According to Larry by Janet Tashjian (New York: Holt, 2001). A high-interest title that includes both technology and a look at consumerism in a compelling way without being didactic. (CD)

Heavy Metal and You by Chris Krovatin (New York: Push, 2005). This first novel by twenty-year-old Chris Krovatin is an authentic look at a high school boy and what music, love, sex, and friendship mean to him. Boys won't have to be metalheads to appreciate Sam's use of his loud music to soothe his soul as he navigates the rough waters of first love. (CD)

Hitch by Jeanette Ingold (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005). During the Great Depression, a boy joins the

CCC and learns the responsibilities of providing for his family back home as well as for doing the work his enlistment requires. He matures and cares for others and thinks about his future. (MJW)

Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos (New York: Farrar, 2002). This is one of those books that has to be read in one sitting—how nineteen-year-old Jack Gantos landed in prison and became a writer! (SH) [Also recommended to teach to boys in grades 9 to 12 and to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

I Am the Messenger by Marcus Zusak (New York: Knopf, 2005). The story of aimless, nineteen-year-old cab driver Ed Kennedy who foils a bank robber and then begins to get mysterious messages assigning him to intervene in the lives of strangers will fascinate older teens as they unravel the clues. (LR)

Playing in Traffic by Gail Giles (Brookfield: Roaring Brook, 2004). The established fiction theme of romantic betrayal and manipulation receives a modern upgrade and boys will share this book with their friends and imagine themselves caught up in the same situation. (RW) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Pool Boy by Michael Simmons (Brookfield: Roaring Brook, 2003). Boys will be unable to put down this story about a privileged, funny, obnoxious, self-absorbed fifteen-year-old boy who is reduced to living in poverty because his father was jailed for insider trading. (BM)

Shadow of a Doubt by S. L. Rottman (Atlanta: Peachtree, 2003). A boy, who starts out a loner, soon learns how others perceive him and makes modest changes. Then his world is turned upside down when an older brother who disappeared years ago returns and goes on trial. Gripping characterizations. (MJW)

Soldier X by Don Wulffson (New York: Viking, 2001). War books are among the most requested books for personal reading and this story of a sixteen-year-old German boy drafted and sent to the Russian front in 1943 grabs teens' attention from the first page. It is an interesting new perspective, being from a German soldier's viewpoint. (LR)

Under the Wolf, Under the Dog by Adam Rapp (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2004). Reading Adam Rapp's *Under the Wolf, Under the Dog* is like watching a car wreck in slow motion . . . and it's such an awesome wreck that taking your eyes off of it for even a second is totally out of the question. *Under the Wolf, Under the Dog* is a very personal and often humorous story. We're charmed by a whole sideshow of quirky characters, including Steve's brother's wretched drug buddy,

Dantly; Shannon Lynch, the young man at Burnstone Grove who can stuff \$1.87 in change up his nose; and ten-year-old June, who may haunt my dreams for some time to come. But above all, this is a terrifying and heartbreaking story about a sensitive kid with whom we can so easily identify, who's had so incredibly much to deal with. (RP)

The Best Books That Will Interest Girls in Grades 9 to 12 for Personal Reading

Books Receiving Multiple Recommendations

Dreamland by Sarah Dessen (New York: Viking, 2000). Teen girls who are exploring what it means to be in a relationship will be fascinated by this story of an insecure girl who falls in love with a boy who abuses her. (LR) Dessen again creates a fully realized character in Caitlin, whose tortured love affair with the dangerously handsome Rogerson will appeal to all teen girls who've loved or dreamed about loving a "bad boy." (LB)

A Room on Lorelei Street by Mary E. Pearson (New York: Holt, 2005). Following step by step (or misstep) on Zoe's path, I can't help but feel the pressure in my own chest as I experience this young woman's determination to make the personal finances work out so that she can both maintain the control and security that the room on Lorelei Street provides her and simultaneously try to fill her stomach and gas tank, pay the transportation fee necessary for being on the tennis team, and cover the million other expenses that unexpectedly arise when Zoe is finally on her own and determined to keep it that way at any cost. With the steep price that is being exacted by a vicious teacher and a decidedly uncool grandmother, Zoe has no room for missteps. (RP) The author enhances the theme of a teenage girl escaping a horrible relationship with her alcoholic mother and trying to make it on her own by mixing in stunning and extremely realistic scenes that will rivet teen girls. (RW) Teen girls will be riveted by seventeen-year-old Zoe's story: escaping from an alcoholic mother to a rented room all her own and the overwhelming struggle to somehow manage it all on her own. (LR)

Saving Francesca by Melina Marchetta (New York: Knopf, 2004). Because it is wise, insightful, funny, and poignant. One of the best books about high school since Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*. (WM) Francesca's class of thirty girls is the first in an all-boys' school and she struggles with the dynamics of the dominant male roles while at the same time trying to help her mother

who is suffering from depression. Francesca's wonderful voice is so immediate and her struggle to do the things she dreams of in the male world is of great interest to teen girls finding their place. (LR) [Also recommended to teach to girls in grades 9 to 12.]

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants by Ann Brashares (New York: Delacorte, 2001). Book: before there was the movie. (TSL) Teenage girls will relate to four friends who are separated for their first summer and are supported by a pair of traveling jeans. (BM) Friendship, discovering one's sexuality, first love, tragedy—what more could a female reader ask from a book, especially when characterization is spot-on and the story is well crafted? (LB) [Also recommended for personal reading for girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Books Receiving Single Recommendations

Aimee by Mary Beth Miller (New York: Dutton, 2002). "But what if I had helped, and she lived, and nothing changed? Isn't that worse? I think it would've been. She tried to make others believe her, and no one would. No one except us kids, that is. And because we did, because I did, I get all this righteous shit about helping and how life is always worth living. Let me tell you, surviving isn't the picnic you crack it up to be. Surviving is a piece of shit the size of Montana" (104–05). I don't know what to say about *Aimee* that compares to that pivotal quote from the book. (RP)

Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson by Louise Rennison (New York: Harper, 2000). Girls will devour this hilarious tale about a self-absorbed British teen, her quest for her Sex God, squabbles with her best friend, and her "troublesome" family. (BM)

Freaky Green Eyes by Joyce Carol Oates (New York: Harper, 2003). An abusive father puts his teenage daughter in a horrible situation—she has to make a moral choice. (SH)

Gingerbread by Rachel Cohn (New York: Simon, 2002). The well-deserved word of mouth about *Gingerbread* has yet to let up in our part of the world. (RP)

Gossip Girl series by Cecily von Ziegesar (Boston: Little, various dates). Sure, the knock against this series is that it is trashy, but the books are always checked out and often have to be repurchased due to wear and tear, and girls ask when the next volume will be released. (RW)

A Great and Terrible Beauty by Libba Bray (New York: Delacorte, 2003). The unique mix of historical fiction, fantasy, suspense, and mystery that also features

the main character thrust into a situation as the new girl in school draws teenage girls to this book. (RW)

Light Years: A Novel by Tammar Stein (New York: Knopf, 2005). Israeli girl witnesses suicide bombing which kills her beloved; she then goes to the University of Virginia and finds an entirely different way of life. However, she can't forget Israel, the horrors of losing Dov, and tries to figure out what her future is going to be. (MJW)

The Lovely Bones: A Novel by Alice Sebold (Boston: Little, 2002). A novel that haunts mothers of teenage girls, but it's been embraced by high school girls as a powerful story of loss and grieving told by a dead teen narrator. (CD)

Poison by Chris Wooding (New York: Orchard, 2005). A fabulous addition to the world of fairy tales for older readers (and it will appeal to boys, too). A great heroine, chillingly frightening scenes, and a tribute to the power of storytelling will enchant readers. (CD)

Prom by Laurie Halse Anderson (New York: Viking, 2005). When a teacher steals the money that students have paid for their prom, there are many disappointments. Can alternative plans be made? One character, who couldn't care less, is dragged into a committee by her friends, and it is interesting to see what the committee comes up with. (MJW)

Split Image by Mel Glenn (New York: Harper, 2000). In his usual poetic format, Glenn gives readers a good story about the two worlds of a young adult woman—how school students see her and how she is perceived at home. (MJW)

True Believer by Virginia Euwer Wolff (New York: Atheneum, 2001). Wolff's ambiguity about LaVaughn's ethnicity makes this a book for every girl who knows that life is hard and is working to beat the odds. The short chapters and abundant white space make this book especially appealing to reluctant readers, who may most need its message of hope. (CD)

The Truth about Forever by Sarah Dessen (New York: Viking, 2004). An unusual friend helps Macy accept her father's death by opening up her feelings. A tender story. (SH)

Twists and Turns by Janet McDonald (New York: Farrar, 2003). African American girls will identify with these two sisters from the projects of Brooklyn as they attempt to open a beauty salon. (BM)

Zigzag by Ellen Wittlinger (New York: Simon, 2003). Teenage readers will understand Robin's dependency on her boyfriend, Chris, and will cheer loudly when she liberates herself. (SH)

The Best Books That Will Interest Both Boys and Girls in Grades 9 to 12 for Personal Reading

Books Receiving Multiple Recommendations

The First Part Last by Angela Johnson (New York: Simon, 2003). This book is honest to a fault and never romanticizes teen fatherhood while telling a story so brief, compact, and true to life that boys and girls want to read it. (WM) Both boys and girls are drawn to the story of Bobby and how he came to be a teen father raising Feather on his own. (LR) The beautiful cover art sells the book without any other promotion, but word of mouth from teens who love the heartfelt story of a young man struggling as a teen father sends new readers to seek it out every week. Teens relate to the believable characters and the tough situation realistically depicted by Johnson. (CD) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 6 to 8, for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12, and to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Looking for Alaska by John Green (New York: Dutton, 2005). *The Catcher in the Rye* for the new generation. Witty, whimsical, compelling: all those trite adjectives still apply. (TSL) A shocking story about four rebellious outsiders in a private school that results in tragedy. (SH) This first-time effort is a page-turning study of friendship and coming-of-age through the shared experience of tragedy that is sure to draw older readers with its frank but humorous treatment of many of the edgier sides of teen life. (LB)

Playing in Traffic by Gail Giles (Brookfield: Roaring Brook, 2004). Mystery and intrigue will capture teens as they question the real reason why anonymity-seeking Matt becomes the romantic interest of Goth girl Skye. (BM) A bizarre relationship between a Goth girl and an ordinary boy will demand the reader's full attention to the end of this novel. (SH) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12.]

Stoner and Spaz by Ron Koertge (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2002). What Ben sees in Colleen is that she treats his condition so honestly and matter-of-factly. In turn, he makes her feel like a high school kid, which is in such contrast to the scary world of drugs, clubs, and thugs in which she's immersed. And while this is a uniquely descriptive and extremely fun story, it is no fairy tale. When it's over we're left heavy on the side of unanswered questions. (RP) Because it is hard-hitting and pulls no punches about drug use, teens love

this story about an out-of-control girl who is looking for a relationship and hooks up with an outcast with a physical deformity. (RW) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Books Receiving Single Recommendations

Behind You by Jacqueline Woodson (New York: Putnam, 2004). The effect of Miah's accidental death on Ellie, his parents, and friends is sensitive and touches our consciousness—how does a friend's death affect one's life? (SH)

Breathing Underwater by Alex Flinn (New York: Harper, 2001). This will hit home for all teens, since it will get them thinking about their romantic relationships and how they act toward each other. (BM) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Double Helix by Nancy Werlin (New York: Dial, 2004). Mysteries for teens are slim pickins but Nancy Werlin's novel is an intelligent choice for older teens. Combining bioethics with a medical mystery in a suspenseful story, Eli's predicament will appeal to *CSI* fans. (CD)

Emako Blue by Brenda Woods (New York: Putnam, 2004). Boys and girls both enjoy the voices of the characters that ring true as they relate the mix of lost love, manipulation, and desperate life in the 'hood. (RW)

Fade to Black by Alex Flinn (New York: Harper, 2005). What Alex Flinn does so well here is to create three realistic and complex teen characters, all of whom have some secrets. She also writes so articulately about the elephant in the room: the continued fear and ignorance in America surrounding HIV and AIDS. (RP)

Feed by M. T. Anderson (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2002). It is funny, irreverent, shocking, unpredictable, and it exploits the natural propensity of teens toward outrage and defies them not to take sides. (WM) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12 and to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants by Donald R. Gallo (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2004). Foreigners searching for a better life in America as told by outstanding young adult writers. Each story is a winner. (MJW)

Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices by Walter Dean Myers (New York: Holiday, 2004). Photos blend with poems to reveal stories of the many characters in Harlem. Influenced by *Spoon River Anthology*. (MJW)

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (New York: Scholastic, 2005). The pivotal question of *What would you have done?* will engage teens as they read this story of real teens growing up in Hitler's Germany. (LR) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos (New York: Farrar, 2002). Teens are drawn to the biography of a famous author that made a huge wrong decision as a young man but managed to change his life's direction while in federal prison. (RW) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12 and to teach to boys in grades 9 to 12.]

Raising the Griffin by Melissa Wyatt (New York: Wendy Lamb, 2004). Readers will be mesmerized by what sixteen-year-old Alex has to go through when he discovers he's a future king—adoring fans, the paparazzi, the tabloids, a trashy princess, and an assassination attempt. (BM)

Razzle by Ellen Wittlinger (New York: Simon, 2001). Reading *Razzle*, my favorite Ellen Wittlinger story, got me so pissed off because Kenyon Baker's parents are so clueless. Years later, I'm *still* pissed off at them! (RP)

Son of the Mob by Gordon Korman (New York: Hyperion, 2002) and *Son of the Mob: Hollywood Hustle* (New York: Hyperion, 2004). When the son of a mafia king tries to escape his dad's reputation, all kinds of unexpected events happen to him. Korman is one of the funniest writers we have, and we should cherish him. (MJW) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 6 to 8.]

The Best Books to Teach to Boys for In-Common Reading in Grades 9 to 12

Books Receiving Multiple Recommendations

Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos (New York: Farrar, 2002). Sprinkled with humor, this moving memoir shows teens how wrong decisions can adversely affect their lives and how dedication and self-discipline are required for success. Perhaps Nike says it best with its Just Do It slogan. (BM) It is real, honest, scary, and cautionary, and Gantos never softens a bit of it. His voice grabs you from the start and even the most complacent, cynical nonreader will find it hard to ignore. (WM) Gantos's autobiographical adventures will engage the most reluctant reader with elements of danger,

intrigue, and repentance. Straightforward in his telling, Gantos scores here with an older audience. (LB) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12 and for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Whale Talk by Chris Crutcher (New York: Greenwillow, 2001). After first reading *Whale Talk*, I said, "In a better world this is the kind of book which would be required reading for all parents." If I could have read one contemporary twenty-first-century YA book back in the early seventies, this would have been it. This book should be and is being taught in high schools. And oftentimes it is getting banned. But that's their kids' loss. (RP) By using sports and his wonderful sense of humor, Crutcher brings up a multitude of issues, such as racism, bullying, and child abuse, that will result in lively class discussion. (BM) Issues of anger, independence, bullying, and the healing power of relationships make this story one that will be both powerful and fascinating to boys. (LR) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12 and to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Books Receiving Single Recommendations

Amaryllis by Craig Crist-Evans (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2003). Brothers who have banded together against an abusive father are split apart. Teenage boys are fascinated by the maturation of the younger brother left at home and the deterioration of the older brother undergoing the horrors of war in Vietnam. (RW)

America by E. R. Frank (New York: Atheneum, 2002). Abused boy in therapy, tries to explain in his own time and way his story of horrible events that affected him and led to severe actions. (MJW)

Claws by Will Weaver (New York: Harper, 2003). *Claws* is smart, raw, and gritty. It's exciting, it's adventurous, it's a love story, it's about parents and divorce and seeing parents just screwing up your life. Everything about the story is passionate, from the way it is told to the way the characters behave. Every emotion portrayed is painfully genuine, every move made by the characters is completely convincing. (RP)

Damage by A. M. Jenkins (New York: Harper, 2001). Seventeen-year-old Austin Reid, the football hero in Parkersville, Texas, is severely depressed—his behavior might seem familiar. (SH)

Finding Fish: A Memoir by Antwone Quenton Fisher (New York: Morrow, 2001). Many urban males find this title mirrors their own situations as the author

relates how he managed to change his life's direction, finally escaping abuse and poverty. (RW)

Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet out of Idaho by Jon Katz (New York: Villard, 2000). Most high school boys will relate to failures in today's educational system and the intolerance toward those who are different. (BM)

Jake, Reinvented by Gordon Korman (New York: Hyperion, 2003). Let's hope that adolescents will examine their own motives for friendship after reading this story about Jake's willingness to sacrifice everything for his infatuation with Didi. (SH)

The Land by Mildred D. Taylor (New York: Fogelman, 2001). This sweeping story of a young, mixed-race man trying to overcome racism and injustice would be an excellent choice for classroom reading for boys. (LR) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Left for Dead: A Young Man's Search for Justice for the USS Indianapolis by Peter Nelson (New York: Delacorte, 2002). Combines dangerous survival in shark-infested waters following a World War II torpedo attack on a navy ship with chapters detailing a contemporary student's history project that changes history. Hunter Scott's fight to clear the name of the court-martialed captain proves that research can change lives and that young people can make a difference. (CD) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 6 to 8 and to teach to boys in grades 6 to 8.]

Milkweed: A Novel by Jerry Spinelli (New York: Knopf, 2003). A Holocaust story that shows the horrors of the place and time. (MJW)

Mississippi Trial, 1955 by Chris Crowe (New York: Fogelman, 2002). Teens tune out the sometimes over-saturated lessons of civil rights occurring over fifty years ago. However, this fictional account of the murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till and the white narrator's becoming aware of his family's role in the crime will fascinate teenage males. (RW) [Also recommended to teach to boys in grades 6 to 8.]

Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood by Benjamin Alire Sáenz (El Paso: Cinco Puntos, 2004). The powerful and achingly tragic story Sammy recounts of Juliana Rios and that summer of '68 is but a mere preface in this stunning ode to growing up in the barrio—a neighborhood that some joker has named Hollywood. A tale told in five segments and focusing primarily on the people and events in Sammy's life during the year that begins that summer, I alternately laughed, cheered, and cried as Sammy and his Hollywood friends encounter

the prejudices, the Church, the hormones, the war, the drugs, the violence, the music, the aspirations, and the dress code while making their way through that year both inside and outside of the barrio. (RP) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Shattering Glass by Gail Giles (Brookfield: Roaring Brook, 2002). A devilish plan to make a nerd into a socially acceptable member of the "in" group backfires and results in his death. A forthright novel about conformity, popularity, and cruelty. (SH)

The Sledding Hill by Chris Crutcher (New York: Greenwillow, 2005). Crutcher's finest book to date explores grief, family structure, teaching, and censorship without missing the point or removing the heart of the story. (TSL)

Story Time by Edward Bloor (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004). A story for our time—about the pressures at a school on testing and the effects on students and their actions. (MJW)

Stuck in Neutral by Terry Trueman (New York: Harper, 2000). Open-ended novels are always great for classroom discussion and debate. Terry Trueman introduces us to Shawn, a boy trapped in his body with no way to communicate, and will leave readers wrestling with the ethical issues of euthanasia and the handicapped long after the slim novel is finished, due in part to Shawn's unique voice. (CD)

The Best Books to Teach to Girls for In-Common Reading in Grades 9 to 12

Books Receiving Multiple Recommendations

How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff (New York: Wendy Lamb, 2004). Adventure, survival, and romance combine to make this an unforgettable read. A Printz winner. (TSL) A thoughtful reflection of a young love that endures war and alienation. (SH)

A Northern Light by Jennifer Donnelly (New York: Harcourt, 2003). Three years ago on "Richie's Picks: Great Books for Children and Young Adults," I said:

It's hard enough trying to battle ignorance in 2002! It'll drive you crazy watching and listening to several of these bossy (dare I say stupid) white men from a hundred years ago. And then to also watch Mattie in her weaker moments, battling her raging hormones, is almost too much to bear.

Author Jennifer Donnelly deftly juggles all of these issues, along with the murder of Grace Brown, as we

nervously root for Mattie to somehow make it through those minefields without detonating another foolish male character or her equally foolish Aunt Josie. Young adult readers will so easily relate to Mattie and Weaver despite their having lived a hundred years ago. That Ms. Donnelly is able to achieve this while staying so consistent to the historic fictional setting makes *A Northern Light* a story that will be enjoyed by historic and contemporary fiction aficionados alike. (http://richiespicks.com/users/stories/picks/a_northern_light.html, pars. 11–12)

This is my first choice of a twenty-first-century YA book that could and should be a part of AP reading lists. (RP) Marked by sophisticated writing, this story offers many opportunities to discuss how a teenage girl from a rural background had few chances for improving her life during the early 1900s, and teens will compare that era to their present-day status. (RW) Girls will love the story of determined Mattie, who takes on a murder investigation and yearns to become a writer. (LR) This Printz Honor book will lead girls to discussions about racism, women's rights, education, and early twentieth-century history in a compelling mystery and romance that celebrates a strong vocabulary and love of learning. (CD) [Also recommended for personal reading for girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli (New York: Knopf, 2000). This is a great story of a girl who is independent and does her own thing. Her effects on the rest of the student body are interesting. But her boyfriend wants her to be more like the others. She has to make her decision, particularly after an event at a ball game. (MJW) Girls will relate to Stargirl's plight and the price she pays for being different. (BM) A sensitive riff on nonconformity. (SH) [Also recommended to teach to girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Books Receiving Single Recommendations

19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East by Naomi Shihab Nye (New York: Greenwillow, 2002). Ah, let us not forget poetry. Nye is a national treasure and her collection is worthy of any best-for-teens list. In addition to shedding light on the Arab American community, in addition to writing stunning poetry that is at once intelligent and accessible, Nye reminds us that we can always turn to art for solace and for survival. (CD)

Better Than Running at Night by Hillary Frank (Boston: Houghton, 2002). Girls soon to graduate

from high school will be riveted by Ellie, a first-year college student who becomes aware that art school is different from high school art class and men on campus play by a completely different set of rules. (RW)

The Garden by Elsie V. Aidinoff (New York: Harper, 2004). Surely ruffling the feathers of male readers not in touch with their more gentle side, this title is feminist in its themes while discussing the nature of good and evil. Clueless Adam and questioning Eve will surely interest girls who are up for some serious discussion about gender roles. (LB)

Keeper of the Night by Kimberly Willis Holt (New York: Holt, 2003). Set in Guam, where Isabel has to face the suicide of her mother and the resulting fact that she becomes "the woman of the house." She is young, and the responsibilities at times feel overwhelming. Powerful story. (MJW)

Keesha's House by Helen Frost (New York: Farrar, 2003). Girls will see that poetry can come alive in Keesha's efforts to help teens who have nowhere to find refuge from parents and authorities who don't understand. (BM) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Kira-Kira by Cynthia Kadohata (New York: Atheneum, 2004). A Japanese family moves from Iowa to Georgia so the father can get a better job. A girl sees a different world outside of the Japanese community. She also faces the death of her sister, Lynn. Newbery Award winner. (MJW)

My Sister's Keeper: A Novel by Jodi Picoult (New York: Atria, 2004). Although marketed as an adult title, this absorbing book features several timely themes about family relationships, the right to life, and how it is essential to include teens' opinions in family decisions. (RW)

The Realm of Possibility by David Levithan (New York: Knopf, 2004). This is the exquisite poetry novel we've all been waiting for. It has so many connections (hidden, seen, felt, and implied) that it offers great richness to a teacher willing to shepherd a class through it. (WM)

Remembrance by Theresa Breslin (New York: Delacorte, 2002). High school girls will be surprised at discovering the rigid class system in World War I Scotland and, ironically, how this war provided women with jobs and opportunities unheard of previously. (BM)

Sandpiper by Ellen Wittlinger (New York: Simon, 2005). This story should raise some heated discussion about sexual activities in high school. (SH)

Saving Francesca by Melina Marchetta (New York: Knopf, 2004). Francesca Spinelli's story is so intimate, so emotionally revealing that it sometimes takes on an almost voyeuristic quality. Searching to find her own voice while groping for some key that might help lead her mother back from the abyss, Francesca is one heck of a character in one masterfully written book. Turning on a dime, from the emotional to the revealing to the laugh-out-loud hilarious, *Saving Francesca* is a book that is not to be missed. (RP) [Also recommended for personal reading for girls in grades 9 to 12.]

The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd (New York: Viking, 2002). Fourteen-year-old Lily breaks her "stand-in mother," Rosaleen, out of jail and together they flee Lily's abusive father and angry racists. This lyrical exploration of civil rights, justice, and maternal love will fascinate teens. (LR)

With Courage and Cloth: Winning the Fight for a Woman's Right to Vote by Ann Bausum (Washington DC: National Geographic, 2004). The part of the story that they left out of the *Mary Poppins* movie is when Mrs. Banks is abused by a mob of men and young boys and arrested for causing a disturbance even though she and her sisters-in-arms are quietly assembled—holding banners that quote the US Constitution and the current president's own words—and it's the men who are causing all the disturbance. They also left out the part where Mrs. Banks is abusively dragged into a dark prison, thrown in with rats, common criminals, blankets that get laundered once a year, and a bucket for a toilet. Nor do they show prison employees shoving the hose up Mrs. Banks's nose to force-feed her when she decides to go on a hunger strike. Being able to speak freely is what America is all about, right? But students of American history know that there are times when freedom of speech seems to be reserved for only some Americans, those who agree with the government. This is a unique and exceptional look at an important chapter in American history. (RP)

The Best Books to Teach to Both Boys and Girls for In-Common Reading in Grades 9 to 12

Books Receiving Multiple Recommendations

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon (New York: Doubleday, 2003). This title will open discussion about how emotions and logic are used in writing as the autistic main character at-

tempts to solve a mystery by understanding his emotions. (RW) It has the most distinctive voice most teen readers will have ever encountered. It is a puzzle. You can read it without paying attention to the math and it still works. (WM)

Feed by M. T. Anderson (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2002). This is the book that should have gotten Printz recognition and didn't. *Feed* is a dark, futuristic satire. It's a tale both intense and extreme that pokes fun at our disposable and consumeristic society, at our communications revolution, at the increasing role of corporations in our education systems, and at the diminished vocabulary skills among those people who consistently resort to a particular four-letter word as the adjective of choice in any given situation. When you don't even get a Printz committee with the [guts] to recognize such a powerful work of genius, you can't expect high school teachers to individually go out on a limb to teach *Feed*. Regardless, all teens should get to read it. (RP) Older teens love the mix of science fiction, imagination, and crackling dialogue, and they may possibly relate to the characters becoming aware of major corporations controlling the futuristic society. (RW) Teens will recognize the warning signs of rampant consumerism in today's society and draw frightening parallels to Anderson's dystopian earth, sparking much discussion among readers who see traces of the Feed in media and branding. (LB) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12 and for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

The First Part Last by Angela Johnson (New York: Simon, 2003). One of the few books about teenage parenthood told from the male point of view, this title provides insight on how difficult and challenging it is for a sixteen-year-old to raise a child. (RW) This reality story brings home the problems and difficulties resulting from a teenage pregnancy . . . from the father's perspective, describing what he has to give up to be a good parent. Extremely moving without being preachy! (BM) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 6 to 8, for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12, and for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Keesha's House by Helen Frost (New York: Farrar, 2003). The Printz committee got it right on this one! *Keesha's House* is a gritty, contemporary YA book that is presented in a difficult poetic form but executed so flawlessly that the form is quickly forgotten and the stories of the troubled teen narrators take center stage. (RP) Young adults who left home for various reasons—

pregnancy, abuse, homosexuality, etc.—discover a place to live together. Told in poetry. A moving and provocative look at parenting. (MJW) [Also recommended to teach to girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Books Receiving Single Recommendations

Bambert's Book of Missing Stories by Reinhardt Jung (New York: Knopf, 2004). Want to teach kids about the elements of story and how each is essential and affects the others? This is the collection to do it (and then follow up with Gallo for good measure).

Day of Tears by Julius Lester (New York: Hyperion, 2005). The true story of a slave auction when a man decides he has to sell his slaves to pay his gambling debts. (MJW) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Fagin the Jew by Will Eisner (New York: Doubleday, 2003). Teens love graphic novels and teachers will find this one extremely useful, especially if teaching Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, since Eisner creates a plausible background (based on the history of the times) for Fagin, an approach that students could be asked to use for other fictional characters. (BM)

Geography Club by Brent Hartinger (New York: Harper, 2003). How does it feel to be that 10 percent of the school population that is gay? An after-school club becomes a refuge for gay kids—and attracts some unusual members. (SH)

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (New York: Scholastic, 2005). An example of an outstanding informational title. When asked about nonfiction books at the teen session of BBYA in Chicago, many of the teens reported having read this title and really enjoyed it. They understood what the author was asking of them: "What are you willing to do to prevent such a shadow from falling over you and others?" This book begs to be read and discussed in classrooms worldwide. (CD) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Naughts and Crosses by Malorie Blackman (New York: Simon, 2005). This is the book that should get Printz recognition. *Naughts and Crosses* is a tale of two young, star-crossed lovers amidst the oppression, despair, and violence of institutionally entrenched prejudice and the resultant racial strife. The story so frequently and effectively evokes memories of the historic civil rights movements in the United States and elsewhere that it compelled me to create and steadily

maintain images in my head of the story's characters. The need to do so stems from the fact that in the contemporary alternative reality of *Naughts and Crosses*, it is the Crosses (the Blacks) who are the dominant race, and the Naughts (the Whites) who suffer on a daily basis and whose contributions to history have been completely and effectively obliterated by the dominant race's textbook writers and the teachers who then employ those textbooks. (RP)

On the Fringe edited by Donald R. Gallo (New York: Dial, 2001). This short-story collection provides another way for students to discuss the issue of outcasts. Intriguing stories by the best YA authors, this collection is a great place (for schools brave enough) to start the real dialogue about the feelings that lead to the grim school headlines. (CD) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned by Judd Winnick (New York: Holt, 2000). This moving story of love, loss, friendship, and AIDS awareness is my personal favorite for books that should be taught in every classroom. The emotions portrayed run deeply and the art is compelling. (LB) [Also recommended to teach to boys and girls in grades 6 to 8.]

Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood by Benjamin Alire Sáenz (El Paso: Cinco Puntos, 2004). This is that wonderful combination of well-written and accessible, a poetic masterpiece of coming-of-age literature that will blossom in the hands of a committed teacher and be one of those books teens will remember throughout their lives. (WM) [Also recommended to teach to boys in grades 9 to 12.]

Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie by David Lubar (New York: Dutton, 2005). Every person who attends high school will relate to this hilarious, poignant story, which deals with bullying, stereotyping, and being oneself. For teachers, Scott's English teacher's lessons could be adapted for an exciting year. (BM)

Stoner and Spaz by Ron Koertge (Cambridge: Candlewick, 2002). Opposites can attract—a sizzling story about two unlikely friends, a druggie girl complete with tattoos and a boy with cerebral palsy. (SH) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys and girls in grades 9 to 12.]

Troy by Adèle Geras (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001). The story of the fall of Troy as seen through teen eyes is an intriguing and appealing variation on a classic piece of literature. (LR)

Under the Persimmon Tree by Suzanne Fisher Staples (New York: Farrar, 2005). Set in Pakistan, this

story is about life today with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A young Afghan girl watches the death of her mother as her father and younger brother are led away by the Taliban. This is her search for them. Along the way she meets a caring teacher, an American who has married a Muslim Afghan doctor, who helps her a great deal. One of the best books of the year. (MJW)

Vote for Larry by Janet Tashjian (New York: Holt, 2004). (Sequel to *The Gospel According to Larry*.) Beth convinces Larry to run for president. A good story to get teenagers excited about politics and important issues. Maybe teenagers can raise the consciousness of apathetic voters! (SH)

Whale Talk by Chris Crutcher (New York: Greenwillow, 2001). Despite the growing number of chal-

lenges to this book and the language in capital letters on page 69, Crutcher's story is relevant to teens, contains heroes to emulate, and promotes thoughtful discussion about bullying, prejudice, and injustice. The teens who read this book and come to care about T. J. and his band of misfits get it—even if the censoring adults who can't see beyond the cursing don't. (CD) [Also recommended for personal reading for boys in grades 9 to 12 and to teach to boys in grades 9 to 12.]

A Wreath for Emmett Till by Marilyn Nelson (Boston: Houghton, 2005). This incredible heroic crown of sonnets recounting the tragedy of the murder of Emmett Till is an outstanding choice for all teens to explore in classroom reading. (LR)

Titles by Category

Click on any title in the lists below to jump to the recommendation for that title or click on the category heading to jump to the beginning of that category. Note that some titles appear in multiple categories.

The Best Books That Will Interest Boys in Grades 9 to 12 for Personal Reading

Acceleration by Graham McNamee
Black and White by Paul Volponi
Blankets by Craig Thompson
Dragon and Thief: A Dragonback Adventure by Timothy Zahn
Dunk by David Lubar
Feed by M. T. Anderson
The First Part Last by Angela Johnson
The Gospel According to Larry by Janet Tashjian
Heavy Metal and You by Chris Krovatin
Hitch by Jeanette Ingold
Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos
I Am the Messenger by Marcus Zusak
Playing in Traffic by Gail Giles
Pool Boy by Michael Simmons
Shadow of a Doubt by S. L. Rottman
Soldier X by Don Wulffson
Son of the Mob by Gordon Korman
Under the Wolf, Under the Dog by Adam Rapp
Whale Talk by Chris Crutcher
You Don't Know Me by David Klass

The Best Books That Will Interest Girls in Grades 9 to 12 for Personal Reading

Aimee by Mary Beth Miller
Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging: Confessions of Georgia Nicolson by Louise Rennison
Dreamland by Sarah Dessen
Freaky Green Eyes by Joyce Carol Oates
Gingerbread by Rachel Cohn
 Gossip Girl series by Cecily von Ziegesar
A Great and Terrible Beauty by Libba Bray
Light Years: A Novel by Tammar Stein
The Lovely Bones: A Novel by Alice Sebold
Poison by Chris Wooding
Prom by Laurie Halse Anderson
A Room on Lorelei Street by Mary E. Pearson
Saving Francesca by Melina Marchetta
The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants by Ann Brashares
Split Image by Mel Glenn

True Believer by Virginia Euwer Wolff
The Truth about Forever by Sarah Dessen
Twists and Turns by Janet McDonald
Zigzag by Ellen Wittlinger

The Best Books That Will Interest Both Boys and Girls in Grades 9 to 12 for Personal Reading

Behind You by Jacqueline Woodson
Breathing Underwater by Alex Flinn
Double Helix by Nancy Werlin
Emako Blue by Brenda Woods
Fade to Black by Alex Flinn
Feed by M. T. Anderson
First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants by Donald R. Gallo
The First Part Last by Angela Johnson
Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices by Walter Dean Myers
Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow by Susan Campbell Bartoletti
Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos
Looking for Alaska by John Green
Playing in Traffic by Gail Giles
Raising the Griffin by Melissa Wyatt
Razzle by Ellen Wittlinger
Son of the Mob by Gordon Korman
Son of the Mob: Hollywood Hustle by Gordon Korman
Stoner and Spaz by Ron Koertge

The Best Books to Teach to Boys for In-Common Reading in Grades 9 to 12

Amaryllis by Craig Crist-Evans
America by E. R. Frank
Claws by Will Weaver
Damage by A. M. Jenkins
Finding Fish: A Memoir by Antwone Quenton Fisher
Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet out of Idaho by Jon Katz
Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos
Jake, Reinvented by Gordon Korman
The Land by Mildred D. Taylor
Left for Dead: A Young Man's Search for Justice for the USS Indianapolis by Peter Nelson
Milkweed: A Novel by Jerry Spinelli
Mississippi Trial, 1955 by Chris Crowe
Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood by Benjamin Alire Sáenz
Shattering Glass by Gail Giles
The Sledding Hill by Chris Crutcher
Story Time by Edward Bloor
Stuck in Neutral by Terry Trueman
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