

## Ridge View High School Summer Reading 2010

(For questions about the program, contact Nicole Walker at [nwalker@richland2.org](mailto:nwalker@richland2.org))

### Out of this World

1. ***Hunger Games (Suzanne Collins):*** Starred Review. *Reviewed by* Megan Whalen Turner If there really are only seven original plots in the world, it's odd that boy meets girl is always mentioned, and society goes bad and attacks the good guy never is. Yet we have *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Giver*, *The House of the Scorpion*—and now, following a long tradition of Brave New Worlds, *The Hunger Games*. Collins hasn't tied her future to a specific date, or weighted it down with too much finger wagging. Rather less *1984* and rather more *Death Race 2000*, hers is a gripping story set in a postapocalyptic world where a replacement for the United States demands a tribute from each of its territories: two children to be used as gladiators in a televised fight to the death. Katniss, from what was once Appalachia, offers to take the place of her sister in the Hunger Games, but after this ultimate sacrifice, she is entirely focused on survival at any cost. It is her teammate, Peeta, who recognizes the importance of holding on to one's humanity in such inhuman circumstances. It's a credit to Collins's skill at characterization that Katniss, like a new Theseus, is cold, calculating and still likable. She has the attributes to be a winner, where Peeta has the grace to be a good loser. It's no accident that these games are presented as pop culture. Every generation projects its fear: runaway science, communism, overpopulation, nuclear wars and, now, reality TV. The State of Panem—which needs to keep its tributaries subdued and its citizens complacent—may have created the Games, but mindless television is the real danger, the means by which society pacifies its citizens and punishes those who fail to conform. Will its connection to reality TV, ubiquitous today, date the book? It might, but for now, it makes this the right book at the right time. What happens if we choose entertainment over humanity? In Collins's world, we'll be obsessed with grooming, we'll talk funny, and all our sentences will end with the same rise as questions. When Katniss is sent to stylists to be made more telegenic before she competes, she stands naked in front of them, strangely unembarrassed. They're so unlike people that I'm no more self-conscious than if a trio of oddly colored birds were pecking around my feet, she thinks. In order not to hate these creatures who are sending her to her death, she imagines them as pets. It isn't just the contestants who risk the loss of their humanity. It is all who watch. Katniss struggles to win not only the Games but the inherent contest for audience approval. Because this is the first book in a series, not everything is resolved, and what is left unanswered is the central question. Has she sacrificed too much? We know what she has given up to survive, but not whether the price was too high. Readers will wait eagerly to learn more. *Megan Whalen Turner is the author of the Newbery Honor book The Thief and its sequels, The Queen of Attolia and The King of Attolia. The next book in the series will be published by Greenwillow in 2010.*

2. ***Falcondance* (Amelia Atwater-Rhodes)**

Grade 7-10—The intricate power struggles between various breeds of avian shapeshifters continue in this third book in the series. Nicias, 19, son of Kel and Sebastian, falcons who were stripped of their falcon magic and exiled from their homeland of Ahnmik, is one of the personal guards to Oliza, heir to the avian and serpentine thrones. He is loyal to her despite never having felt at home in Wyvern's Court. He has inherited his parents' magic and it will destroy him unless he can learn to control it. His parents reluctantly send him to Ahnmik to be taught to bind it by his grandmother, the Empress, and her heir, Lady Araceli. Nicias finds himself torn between his duty to Oliza and the political manipulation and newfound power he discovers as a royal heir on Ahnmik. His only ally is Darien, an exiled member of the Empress's royal guard. Despite the many characters in the series (a family tree is included), the personalities are uniquely drawn and the mythological avian world is vividly described. Characters from *Hawksong* (2003) and *Snakecharm* (2004, both Delacorte) return briefly and events from those books are recapped. This title lacks the compelling romance found in *Hawksong*, and focuses more on the history of the avian conflicts.—*Sharon Rawlins, Piscataway Public Library, NJ*

3. ***Brave New World* (Aldus Huxley)**

Aldous Huxley's novel "Brave New World" is both one of the best science fiction books and one of the most brilliant pieces of satire ever written. BNW takes place on a future Earth where human beings are mass-produced and conditioned for lives in a rigid caste system. As the story progresses, we learn some of the disturbing secrets that lie underneath the bright, shiny facade of this highly-ordered world.

Huxley opens the book by allowing the reader to eavesdrop on a tour of the Fertilizing Room of the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, where the high-tech reproduction takes place. Into this seemingly advanced civilization is introduced John, a "savage" from a reservation where old human culture still survives. Thus, BNW is also a tale of "culture shock" and conflict.

Huxley creates a compelling blend of bizarre comedy, serious character study, futuristic extrapolation, and philosophical discussion. His writing style is crisp and witty, and cleverly incorporates references to canonical works of literature. Probably the scariest thing about BNW is the fact that, in many ways, humanity seems to be moving closer to Huxley's dystopian vision.

4. ***Impossible* (Nancy Werlin) (M)**

Starred Review. Grade 9 Up—Werlin combines magic, romance, and a family curse in this 21st-century fairy tale based on the ballad "Scarborough Fair." On the night of her prom, Lucy, 17, is raped by her date and becomes pregnant. She decides to keep the child, and she is supported by her foster parents and Zach, her childhood friend whose love for Lucy changes from platonic to romantic as the story progresses. The teen discovers the curse on the women in her family when she reads her birth mother's diary. Lucy is destined for madness at 18 unless she can perform the three impossible tasks described in the song and break the curse of the Elfin Knight. She is

determined to rid herself and her unborn child of the curse, and her family and Zach help her as she works to solve the riddles. This unique story flows smoothly and evenly, and the well-drawn characters and subtle hints of magic early on allow readers to enter willingly into the world of fantasy. As in *The Rules of Survival* (Dial, 2006), Werlin addresses tough topics. Rape, teen pregnancy, and family madness set the story in motion, but the strength of Lucy's character and the love of her family and friends allow her to deal with such difficult matters and take on the impossible. Teens, especially young women, will enjoy this romantic fairy tale with modern trappings.—*Jennifer D. Montgomery, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green*

**5. *Specials* (Scott Westerfeld)**

*Specials* is the final book in Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy (after *Uglies* and *Pretties*). In this installment, Tally wakes up from surgery and finds herself part of an ultra-cool team of *Specials* (bio-engineered, covert law enforcement personnel) called the *Cutters*. She has snazzy techno-features, like embedded computer chips, unbreakable ceramic bones, and razors that come out of her fingernails. She's the ultimate weapon.

**6. *Firestorm* (David Klass) (M)**

*Starred Review.* Grade 8 Up—Klass enters exciting and provocative new territory with this sci-fi thriller. Seventeen-year-old Jack Danielson's life has always been normal—except that his parents have encouraged him to blend in and not try too hard. But then he learns that he is different, that he has special powers and abilities, and that he is from the future and has been sent back to save the planet. Strangers kill his adoptive parents and come after him, and the teens only hope to survive is to trust in Gisco, a huge dog who speaks to him telepathically, and Eko, a ninja babe whose loyalties are ambiguous. The writing is fluid and graceful in places. The sobering events and tone are leavened with engaging humor, and the characters are multidimensional. The relentless pace, coupled with issues of ecology, time travel, self-identity, and sexual awakening, makes for a thrilling and memorable read. The cliff-hanger ending will make readers hope that Klass's work on book two of the trilogy is well under way.—*Melissa Moore, Union University Library, Jackson, TN*

## **Games We Play**

**1. *Game* (Walter Dean Myers)**

Harlem teen Drew Lawson thinks that he has “the big-money skills” for the NBA. Now a senior, he plans to play his best game, attract scouts, and earn a scholarship that will, he hopes, lead to the pros. Then his coach begins to favor a new, white player, and Drew struggles to overcome his anger and to maintain his drive. Basketball fans will love the long passages of detailed court action, and Myers extends the sports metaphors into Drew's own questions about the future possibilities for himself and his peers, particularly the struggling young men in his neighborhood, whom he sees as “a bunch of guys in a game. They were falling behind every minute that passed, but they had lost interest in the score.” Myers explores his themes with a veteran writer's skill. Passages that could have read as heavy-handed messages come

across, instead, as the authentic thoughts of a strong, likable, African American teen whose anxieties, sharp insights, and belief in his own abilities will captivate readers of all backgrounds. Grades 8-12. --Gillian Engberg --*This text refers to the [Hardcover edition](#).*

**2. *Yellow Flag* (Robert Lipsyte)**

Grade 6–10—A *Contender* (HarperCollins, 1987) for racing fans. Born to a multigenerational racing family, 17-year-old Kyle Hillebrand gave up driving for his trumpet and his brass quintet. However, as his family struggles to get back into big-time racing, he is pulled between his love of music and his responsibility to his family. An injury to his brother, the heir apparent to the racing dynasty, puts Kyle back in the driver's seat in an attempt to continue the team's success in hopes of luring sponsorships that could lead back to NASCAR's Busch and Nextel Cup racing series. Kyle drives well in his substitute role and the team lands the sponsor, which leads to his family's planning a second car so that he can continue racing alongside the now-healthy Kris, forcing a decision by Kyle. His choice is complicated by pressure from his family and by friction with members of his quintet, who resent his time away to help out the racing team, as well as by two potential love interests, one in the quintet and the other an employee of the racers. Lipsyte maintains a good level of tension, leaving it unclear throughout most of the book which road Kyle will choose as he finds he enjoys both. Racing scenes are engaging and generally plausible, and they provide a good setting for the relationship issues and suspense inherent in a teen's choice between his desires and his family's expectations.—*Jeffrey A. French, formerly at Willoughby-Eastlake Public Library, Willowick, OH*

**3. *Gym Candy* (Carl Deuker)**

Having grown up in the shadow of his father's failed NFL career, high-school football player Mick Johnson is determined not to make the same mistakes. But when he's tackled just short of the goal in a pivotal game, he decides that vitamin supplements aren't enough and begins purchasing "gym candy," or steroids, from the trainer at his local gym. His performance starts breaking records and his father couldn't be more proud, but along with gains in muscle, he suffers "roid rage," depression, and unsightly acne. When his secret finally comes out, he attempts suicide. Even after therapy, Mick is left wondering if he'll continue to be tempted by steroids. Deuker skillfully complements a sobering message with plenty of exciting on-field action and locker-room drama, while depicting Mick's emotional struggles with loneliness and insecurity as sensitively and realistically as his physical ones. Pair this solid addition to the sports fiction shelf with John Coy's *Crackback* (2005). Hubert, Jennifer --*This text refers to the [Hardcover edition](#).*

**4. *Bean Ball* (Gene Fehler)**

Grade 8–9—A high school athlete is seriously injured by a wild pitch, and he, his family and friends, teachers, coaches, and eyewitnesses share their reactions and feelings about the incident in free-verse monologues. Luke "Wizard" Wallace is a determined, talented player, and a leader on the field and off. Then, in a game versus their archrivals, he leans into a fastball thrown by Kyle Dawkins and is hit by a pitch

that leaves him blind in one eye. This plot-driven, brief novel is a page-turner, though its protagonist and supporting characters are one-dimensional. Most are defined chiefly by their relation to Luke: the sympathetic coach; the "win at all costs" coach; his loyal friends and family. Fehler's straightforward story may appeal to die-hard sports fans, but Scott Johnson's *Safe at Second* (Philomel, 1999) and Carl Deuker's *High Heat* (Houghton, 2003), two novels that also deal with sports accidents and their aftermath, offer both compelling story lines and memorable characters.—*Marilyn Taniguchi, Beverly Hills Public Library, CA*

**5. *My Losing Season* (Pat Conroy) (L)**

"Loss is a fiercer, more uncompromising teacher, coldhearted but clear-eyed in its understanding that life is more dilemma than game, and more trial than free pass," writes bestselling author Conroy in his first work of nonfiction since *The Water Is Wide* (1972). Conroy is beloved for big, passionate, compulsively readable novels propelled by the emotional jet fuel of an abusive childhood. *The Lords of Discipline*, *The Great Santini*, *The Prince of Tides* and *Beach Music* are each informed by a knowledge of pain and heartache taught to him by a Marine pilot father whose nickname was "the Great Santini." Here, in a re-creation of the losing basketball season Conroy and his team endured during his senior year at the Citadel, 1966-1967, Conroy gives readers an intimate look at how suffering can be transformed to become a source of strength and inspiration. "I was born to be a point guard, but not a very good one," he admits. Drawing on extensive interviews with his teammates, he chronicles, game by game, their talent and his sheer determination and grit. In Conroy's hands, sports writing becomes a vehicle to describe the love and devotion that can develop between young men. Toward the end of this moving work, Conroy explains that writing books became "the form that praying takes in me." But readers will see how basketball can also be a way of reaching for something finer than a winning score. What emerges is a portrait of a young man who isn't a soldier but a knight with a great and chivalrous heart. Anyone who was a son or knows a son will be touched by this book.

**6. *Uncommon* (Tony Dungy)**

Super Bowl-winning coach and #1 *New York Times* best selling author Tony Dungy has had an unusual opportunity to reflect on what it takes to achieve significance. He is looked to by many as the epitome of the success and significance that is highly valued in our culture. He also works every day with young men who are trying to achieve significance through football and all that goes with a professional athletic career—such as money, power, and celebrity. Coach Dungy has had all that, but he passionately believes that there is a different path to significance, a path characterized by attitudes, ambitions, and allegiances that are all too rare but uncommonly rewarding. *Uncommon* reveals lessons on achieving significance that the coach has learned from his remarkable parents, his athletic and coaching career, his mentors, and his journey with God. A particular focus of the book: what it means to be a man of significance in a culture that is offering young men few positive role models.

## Connections of the Heart

### 1. *Fancy White Trash* (Marjetta Geerling)

Grade 8 Up—Fifteen-year-old Abby Savage has always thought of herself as the "normal" one in a household that more closely resembles a soap-opera cast than a real family. It's the summer before sophomore year, and, with her best friend Cody's help, Abby is determined to follow her One True Love Plan (formulated to avoid the mistakes of her sisters Shelby and Kait). Then Mom announces that she is pregnant by her new husband, Steve, a younger man who also happens to be the father of Kait's unborn child. Things become even more complicated when Cody's older brother, Jackson, returns home. Last spring, Abby thought she was falling in love with him, but she now distances herself because she's obsessed by the possibility that he could be the father of Kait's child (Kait dated Jackson before Steve). This somewhat farcical account of the Savage women is told in a witty, toned-down Meg Cabot style. The novel moves breathlessly from one family drama to the next—often in front of the neighbors—and touches on some heavy topics along the way, most notably Cody's attempt to come out of the closet. While there's no fairy-tale ending, the story's central romantic conflict is tied up a bit too tidily. Still, the likable main character and fast-paced storytelling will appeal to fans of Aimee Friedman's *The Year My Sister Got Lucky* (Scholastic, 2008) and Meg Cabot's *Pants on Fire* (HarperCollins, 2007).—Amy S. Pattee, *Simmons College, Boston*

### 2. *Enter Three Witches* (Caroline Cooney)

Inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, this novel follows the events of the play through the eyes of Lady Mary, the 14-year-old ward of Lord and Lady Macbeth. Quiet Mary is in a position to engage with various characters--from the kitchen staff to the witches to the Scottish royalty--and observe what goes on around her. After her father is killed as a traitor, Mary becomes vulnerable to the maelstrom of ambition and violence that sweeps through the Scottish court. Cooney writes an involving story that is laced with quotes from the play, but she isn't slavishly bound to the drama. Readers who know *Macbeth* will find this a fascinating, humanizing sidelight on the characters, while those new to the story will find Lady Mary's adventures reason enough to enjoy this unusual historical novel. In the appended author's note, Cooney comments on both the historical Macbeth and Shakespeare's play and instructs her audience "Now read Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." Given this reader-friendly introduction to the story, they might actually do so. *Carolyn Phelan*

### 3. *Lay That Trumpet in Their Hands* (Susan McCarthy)

Basing her first novel on real events in central Florida in 1951, McCarthy offers an evocative if overly familiar picture of the racist South at the start of the civil rights movement. She tells her story through the eyes of 12-year-old Reesa McMahan, whose transplanted Yankee parents are relative newcomers in the small community of Mayflower. The local Opalakee Klan terrorizes and murders young black citrus picker Marvin Cully, who works for the McMahons' growing and shipping company. Aware that the local police are corrupt Klan members, Reesa's father decides to contact the FBI. Soon, NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall is called in to the case,

and barely escapes with his life when the Klan attempts to abduct him. Bombings of black housing projects and Jewish congregations occur in other parts of Florida. When the leader of Florida's NAACP and his wife are murdered in Miami, there are indications that the Opalakee Klan is involved. Because he decides to cooperate with the FBI investigation, Reesa's father puts the family into danger. Reesa is an engaging narrator, obsessed with the murder of her friend Marvin, slowly becoming aware of the virulent hatred and bigotry that coexists with their neighbors' generosity, good manners and Baptist spiritual fervor. As McCarthy establishes the domestic and social routines of an inbred community, she also takes pains to render Reesa as an impressionable preadolescent, though she credits her with insights beyond her age. Still, the sincerity of her tale and its simple telling would make the book as interesting to young adult readers as it will be to those who remember or want to learn about the tangled moral questions of the '50s. Agent, Lane Zachary. (Feb.)sealed for 40 years.

**4. *Before I Die* (Jenny Downham)**

*Before I Die* by Jenny Downham was the most difficult book I've ever had to read. Ever harder to review. I finished it a month ago, but it's taken me this much time to allow some of the ache to go away before I could get it down. It's the story of Tessa, who is 17 and dying of cancer. She lives with her father and younger brother and occasionally sees her estranged mother. Tessa has made of a list of the things that she wants to do before she dies. Many of the things on the list are stereotypical of the average teen: have sex, try drugs. Others are deeper: fall in love, not say no to anyone for an entire day. She completes much of her list, but the ramifications of some of them aren't what she hoped for. Sex with someone she doesn't know or love doesn't fulfill her; drugs are strange and take away what little happiness she has in life. Tessa's father struggles with his daughter's impending death. He feeds her organic food and vitamins in the unspoken hope that somehow, something will change. He and Tessa fight each other as she tries to live what little life she has left to the fullest and he tries to protect her. How do you put limits on or ground a teenager who is going to die? How can you keep her from experiences when all she wants is to feel? She swoops in and out of depression, refusing to leave the bed for days, then suddenly wanting adventure. Her best friend gets pregnant, her parents start moving closer to each other, she falls in love with the boy next door; all sorts of exciting experiences show themselves just as she can't be there to see how any of it turns out. I was shocked to find out that the author of this book was a middle-aged woman; she speaks so authentically as a teenage girl. This book is heartbreaking and uplifting all at once. Tessa is so real that I found myself hoping against hope that somehow the ending would change. But her peace and acceptance toward death was moving. As Tessa's soul drifts away on the final page, so do the words. As the mother of teenage children, this was an especially hard read, but I'm glad I did. Tessa discovers that life is worth living the best you can, even if the best you can is only 17 years.

**5. *Tending to Grace* (Kimberly Fusco)**

Grade 7-9-Cornelia Thornhill wears neglect like a pall. She avoids eye contact with others, stutters badly, is presumed to be slow at school, and likens herself to a stone, hard and strong way down inside. Taken out of school during ninth grade by her

shiftless mother, she is dropped off at the rural New England home of Great-aunt Agatha while mother and her boyfriend depart for places out west. This lonely, virtually invisible girl both misses and resents her absent parent. The short, image-rich, first-person chapters echo Cornelia's anger and stubbornness as she describes her new living situation with the folksy, forthright Agatha. They argue, stop talking, and Cornelia even packs her bag to run away. What brings these unlikely companions back together is their grudging interdependence and Cornelia's recognition that nature-loving Agatha, locally dubbed the Crow Lady, has been as misunderstood as she. Cornelia begins to see her aunt's kindness through the eyes of Bo, a local girl whose nonjudgmental friendship helps Cornelia to grow. Subtle clues indicate that Agatha has been good at hiding the fact that she's illiterate, much as Cornelia has hidden the fact that she is a voracious reader. Agatha allows her niece to teach her to read using a butterfly handbook as a primer. The depiction of Bo's father as a fearsome, controlling man is the only false note in a novel that poetically portrays the human potential to fly after emerging from a cocoon of neglect.

**6. *Persuasion* (Jane Austen)**

PERSUASION, the last novel that Jane Austen completed before her death in 1818, tells the story of one Anne Elliot, the second daughter of a baronet who has spent his waythrough his fortune and has nothing but his title to lean on.

When she was 21 years old, Anne fell in love with and was engaged to Frederick Wentworth, a young captain in the Navy. Her belated mother's best friend, Lady Russell, disapproves of the match as being below Anne, due to Anne's claim to nobility, and Anne cancels the engagement, much to her and and Captain Wentworth's grief.

Nearly eight year's have passed since she broke off her engagement to Captain Wentworth when she, Lady Russell, and a Mr. Shepherd, a friend of her father's, are forced to pose and intervention and tell her father that he must quit his estate and find someone to lease it to, or he will be sent tot he poorhouse. Her father, his only pride being in his social position and personal appearance, relents, but only if they can find suitable tenants - which they do in Admiral Croft and his wife, the sister of Captain Wentworth.

Anne thinks that her broken heart has mended, until she sees him again. unfortunately, he is now attached to another . . . and yet Anne sees clues in his behavior that he may be hers once again. Anne and Wentworth must negotiate their past, their different social classes, and proper behavior to find their way back to one another.

**Teen Issues**

**1. *Mexican White Boy* (Matt de la Pena)**

Grade 9 Up—No matter where he lives, 16-year-old Danny Lopez is an outsider. At his private high school in wealthy northern San Diego County, "nobody paid him any

attention...because he was Mexican." It didn't matter that he was half white. But when he visits the Mexican side of his family in National City, just a dozen miles from the border, Danny feels "Albino almost" and ashamed. He doesn't even speak Spanish. Rather than learning to blend in, Danny disengages from both worlds, rarely speaking and running his mind in circles with questions about how he might have kept his absent father from leaving the family. He decides to spend the summer in National City, hoping to get closer to his dad's roots and learn how to be "real" and stop feeling numb. Instead, he finds that, by the end of the summer, he has filled the void through unexpected friendship and love. In this first-rate exploration of self-identity, Danny's growth as a baseball pitcher becomes a metaphor for the conflicts he must overcome due to his biracial heritage. Dialogue written in a coarse street vernacular and interwoven with Spanish is awkward to read at first—like Danny, readers are made to feel like outsiders among the hard-edged kids of National City. But as the characters develop, their language starts to feel familiar and warm, and their subtle tenderness becomes more apparent. A mostly linear plot (with occasional flashbacks), plenty of sports action, and short chapters make this book a great pick for reluctant or less-experienced readers.—*Madeline Walton-Hadlock, San Jose Public Library, CA*

## 2. ***Good Enough* (Paula Yoo)**

How to make your Korean parents happy:

1. Get a perfect score on the SATs.
  2. Get into HarvardYalePrinceton.
  3. Don't talk to boys.\* Patti's parents expect nothing less than the best from their Korean-American daughter. Everything she does affects her chances of getting into an Ivy League school. So winning *assistant* concertmaster in her All-State violin competition and earning less than 2300 on her SATs is simply *not good enough*. But Patti's discovering that there's more to life than the Ivy League. To start with, there's Cute Trumpet Guy. He's funny, he's talented, and he looks exactly like the lead singer of Patti's favorite band. Then, of course, there's her love of the violin. Not to mention cool rock concerts. And anyway, what if Patti doesn't want to go to *HarvardYalePrinceton* after all? Paula Yoo scores big in her hilarious debut novel about an overachiever who longs to fit in and strives to stand out. The pressure is on!
- \*Boys will distract you from your studies.

## 3. ***Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac* (Gabrielle Zevin) (L)**

Contemporary realism, set askew, is the silver streak of Zevin, whose *Elsewhere* (2005) depicted a teen's experiences in the afterlife. This equally sensitive, joyful novel, her second for YAs, tackles the slippery nature of human identity, deceptively tucked within a plot familiar from TV soaps. After high-school junior Naomi conks her head, she can't remember anything that happened since sixth grade. She is by turns mystified and startled by evidence of her present life, from the birth-control pills in her bedside table to her parents' astonishing, rancorous split. Eventually, the memories return, leaving Naomi questioning the basis of a new, intense romance, and

wondering which of her two lives, present or former, represents her most authentic self. The amnesia device could have been more convincingly played, but Zevin writes revealingly about emotions and relationships. Especially vivid is the Hepburn-Tracy bond Naomi shares with yearbook co-chief Will, whom she wounds with her lurching self-reinvention even as she discovers deeper feelings: "I had thought the way I felt about Will was just a room, but it had turned out to be a mansion." Pulled by the heart-bruising love story, readers will pause to contemplate irresistible questions: If the past were a blank slate, what would you become? Does the search for one's truest identity necessarily mean rejecting all that has gone before? Mattson, Jennifer --*This text refers to the Hardcover edition.*

**4. *13 Reasons Why* (Jay Asher) (M)**

When Clay Jenson plays the cassette tapes he received in a mysterious package, he's surprised to hear the voice of dead classmate Hannah Baker. He's one of 13 people who receive Hannah's story, which details the circumstances that led to her suicide. Clay spends the rest of the day and long into the night listening to Hannah's voice and going to the locations she wants him to visit. The text alternates, sometimes quickly, between Hannah's voice (italicized) and Clay's thoughts as he listens to her words, which illuminate betrayals and secrets that demonstrate the consequences of even small actions. Hannah, herself, is not free from guilt, her own inaction having played a part in an accidental auto death and a rape. The message about how we treat one another, although sometimes heavy, makes for compelling reading. Give this to fans of Gail Giles psychological thrillers. Dobrez, Cindy

**5. *Twisted* (Laurie Anderson) (M)**

Grade 9 Up--Socially inept Tyler Miller thinks his senior year of high school is going to be a year like no other. After being sentenced to a summer of character building physical labor following a graffiti prank, his reputation at school receives a boost, as do his muscles. Enter super-popular Bethany Milbury, sister of his tormentor, Chip, and daughter of his father's boss. Tyler's newfound physique has attracted her interest and infuriated Chip, leading to ongoing conflicts at school. Likewise, Tyler's inability to meet his volatile father's demands to be an asset, not a liability adds increasing tension. All too quickly, Tyler's life spirals out of control. In the wake of an incident at a wild party that Bethany has invited him to attend, he is left feeling completely isolated at school and alienated at home, a victim of twisted perception. Tyler must tackle the complex issues of integrity, personal responsibility, and identity on his own as he struggles to understand what it means to be a man. His once humorous voice now only conveys naked vulnerability. With gripping scenes and a rousing ending, Anderson authentically portrays Tyler's emotional instability as he contemplates darker and darker solutions to his situation. Readers will rejoice in Tyler's proclamation, I'm not the problem here...I'm tired of feeling like I am. Teenage concerns with sex, alcohol, grades, and family are all tackled with honesty and candor. Once again, Anderson's taut, confident writing will cause this story to linger long after the book is set down.--*Erin Schirota, Bronxville Public Library, NY*

**6. *Angel of Death* (Alane Ferguson)**

Being a coroner's assistant means that Cameryn has seen more gore than your average seventeen-year-old. But even Cammie is shocked when Kyle O'Neil, the most popular guy in school, discovers the gruesome corpse of their English teacher murdered in his own bed. As Cammie gets involved in the case, she finds herself drawn to Kyle, and considers trusting him with the secret that she can't even tell her father. But when their relationship starts to move toward romance, the struggle to solve the case of her teacher's death intensifies. Will Cameryn be too preoccupied to identify the killer in time?

## Reality Reads

### 1. *Little Brother* (Cory Doctorow) (M)

Starred Review. Grade 10 Up—When he ditches school one Friday morning, 17-year-old Marcus is hoping to get a head start on the Harajuku Fun Madness clue. But after a terrorist attack in San Francisco, he and his friends are swept up in the extralegal world of the Department of Homeland Security. After questioning that includes physical torture and psychological stress, Marcus is released, a marked man in a much darker San Francisco: a city of constant surveillance and civil-liberty forfeiture. Encouraging hackers from around the city, Marcus fights against the system while falling for one hacker in particular. Doctorow rapidly confronts issues, from civil liberties to cryptology to social justice. While his political bias is obvious, he does try to depict opposing viewpoints fairly. Those who have embraced the legislative developments since 9/11 may be horrified by his harsh take on Homeland Security, Guantánamo Bay, and the PATRIOT Act. Politics aside, Marcus is a wonderfully developed character: hyperaware of his surroundings, trying to redress past wrongs, and rebelling against authority. Teen espionage fans will appreciate the numerous gadgets made from everyday materials. One afterword by a noted cryptologist and another from an infamous hacker further reflect Doctorow's principles, and a bibliography has resources for teens interested in intellectual freedom, information access, and technology enhancements. Curious readers will also be able to visit BoingBoing, an eclectic group blog that Doctorow coedits. Raising pertinent questions and fostering discussion, this techno-thriller is an outstanding first purchase.—*Chris Shoemaker, New York Public Library*

### 2. *Lakia* (Nick Abadzis)

Laika was the abandoned puppy destined to become Earth's first space traveler. This is her journey.

Nick Abadzis masterfully blends fiction and fact in the intertwined stories of three compelling lives. Along with Laika, there is Korolev, once a political prisoner, now a driven engineer at the top of the Soviet space program, and Yelena, the lab technician responsible for Laika's health and life. This intense triangle is rendered with the pitch-perfect emotionality of classics like *Because of Winn Dixie*, *Shiloh*, and *Old Yeller*. Abadzis gives life to a pivotal moment in modern history, casting light on the hidden moments of deep humanity behind history. Laika's story will speak straight to your heart.

3. ***War Is* (Patty Aronson)**

Grade 9 Up—Aronson and Campbell have collected an outstanding array of essays, interviews, blog posts, articles, song lyrics, short stories, and letters from people directly involved in war. The book is broken into sections called "Deciding About War," "Experiencing War," and "The Aftermath of War." A former soldier writes an open letter to young enlistees, hoping they will scrutinize their reasons for joining up. The U.S. military recruitment contract is minutely examined by a high school social studies teacher. World War II reporter Ernie Pyle's articles on D-Day are reprinted. An essay about women soldiers who served in Iraq is excerpted from Helen Benedict's forthcoming book, *The Lonely Soldier*. And a memoir by poet Fumiko Miura, survivor of the atomic bomb at Nagasaki, is included. The volume closes with a short play and a short story about the aftereffects of war. The editors make it plain that they are antiwar, but they have made an effort to convey a variety of experiences. Overall, however, war is shown to be brutal, life-changing (not for the better), and ongoing. Aronson notes that humans have gone to war for all of recorded history and show no signs of stopping now. Many books about war for young people make it seem glamorous, exciting, and noble. This powerful collection shows its inglorious, perhaps more realistic side.—*Geri Diorio, The Ridgefield Library, CT*

4. ***Audacity of Hope* (Barack Obama)**

Illinois's Democratic senator illuminates the constraints of mainstream politics all too well in this sonorous manifesto. Obama (*Dreams from My Father*) castigates divisive partisanship (especially the Republican brand) and calls for a centrist politics based on broad American values. His own cautious liberalism is a model: he's skeptical of big government and of Republican tax cuts for the rich and Social Security privatization; he's prochoice, but respectful of proliferers; supportive of religion, but not of imposing it. The policy result is a tepid Clintonism, featuring tax credits for the poor, a host of small-bore programs to address everything from worker retraining to teen pregnancy, and a health-care program that resembles Clinton's Hillary-care proposals. On Iraq, he floats a phased but open-ended troop withdrawal. His triangulated positions can seem conflicted: he supports free trade, while deploring its effects on American workers (he opposed the Central American Free Trade Agreement), in the end hoping halfheartedly that more support for education, science and renewable energy will see the economy through the dilemmas of globalization. Obama writes insightfully, with vivid firsthand observations, about politics and the compromises forced on politicians by fund-raising, interest groups, the media and legislative horse-trading. Alas, his muddled, uninspiring proposals bear the stamp of those compromises. (*Oct. 17*)

Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --*This text refers to the [Hardcover](#) edition.*

5. ***Blood Brothers* (S. A. Harazin)**

Without his job at the hospital, Clay would be lost. The hard work, the struggles of the patients, the drama in the ER—it makes his days worth something, and gives focus to his dream of someday becoming a doctor. Clay can't afford to go away to college like the rest of his graduating senior class, but what other 17-year-old has delivered a

baby or helped save a life?

Still, Clay wishes his life could be more like his best friend Joey's. Joey has it all—a great family, a good college waiting for him at the end of the summer, money, a car. Clay has to bike everywhere, and the miles are starting to wear him down.

But Joey's golden future shatters one day when he overdoses at a party. Now he's clinging to life at the hospital where Clay works, and Clay may even be implicated in Joey's injuries. Tension and emotion rise as those who love Joey gather and wait. Clay will do whatever he can to find out what happened at the party, and to help Joey recover. But to survive this ordeal Clay must draw on a strength he never knew he had.

## 6. *Outliers* (Malcolm Gladwell)

Signature Reviewed by Leslie Chang In *Outliers*, Gladwell (*The Tipping Point*) once again proves masterful in a genre he essentially pioneered—the book that illuminates secret patterns behind everyday phenomena. His gift for spotting an intriguing mystery, luring the reader in, then gradually revealing his lessons in lucid prose, is on vivid display. *Outliers* begins with a provocative look at why certain five-year-old boys enjoy an advantage in ice hockey, and how these advantages accumulate over time. We learn what Bill Gates, the Beatles and Mozart had in common: along with talent and ambition, each enjoyed an unusual opportunity to intensively cultivate a skill that allowed them to rise above their peers. A detailed investigation of the unique culture and skills of Eastern European Jewish immigrants persuasively explains their rise in 20th-century New York, first in the garment trade and then in the legal profession. Through case studies ranging from Canadian junior hockey champions to the robber barons of the Gilded Age, from Asian math whizzes to software entrepreneurs to the rise of his own family in Jamaica, Gladwell tears down the myth of individual merit to explore how culture, circumstance, timing, birth and luck account for success—and how historical legacies can hold others back despite ample individual gifts. Even as we know how many of these stories end, Gladwell restores the suspense and serendipity to these narratives that make them fresh and surprising. One hazard of this genre is glibness. In seeking to understand why Asian children score higher on math tests, Gladwell explores the persistence and painstaking labor required to cultivate rice as it has been done in East Asia for thousands of years; though fascinating in its details, the study does not prove that a rice-growing heritage explains math prowess, as Gladwell asserts. Another pitfall is the urge to state the obvious: No one, Gladwell concludes in a chapter comparing a high-IQ failure named Chris Langan with the brilliantly successful J. Robert Oppenheimer, not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone. But who in this day and age believes that a high intelligence quotient in itself promises success? In structuring his book against that assumption, Gladwell has set up a decidedly flimsy straw man. In the end it is the seemingly airtight nature of Gladwell's arguments that works against him. His conclusions are built almost exclusively on the findings of others—sociologists, psychologists, economists,

historians—yet he rarely delves into the methodology behind those studies. And he is free to cherry-pick those cases that best illustrate his points; one is always left wondering about the data he evaluated and rejected because it did not support his argument, or perhaps contradicted it altogether. Real life is seldom as neat as it appears in a Malcolm Gladwell book. (Nov.) *Leslie T. Chang is the author of Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China (Spiegel & Grau).*  
Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**M= Some mature themes, sensitive content or language**

**L= Some mature language**