

# Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers 2007



THE 2007 VOYA TOP SHELF FICTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS COMMITTEE consisted of four Los Angeles school librarians from Palms Middle School, Orville Wright Middle School, Rabbi Jacob Pressman Academy, and Harvard-Westlake School, as well as a public librarian from the Encino-Tarzana branch of the Los Angeles Public Library. Our students are economically and ethnically diverse, ranging from the wealthiest, high-achieving, private-school students to recent immigrant, ESL students, reading diligently to improve their vocabularies at the public schools. In total, 163 students wrote 274 reviews, with some continuing to trickle in after the deadline. Students are already asking if they can do it again next year.

We chose 30 titles from 217 publisher submissions that included realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, and historical fiction. Recurring themes involved dead protagonists or protagonists who communicated with the dead and mothers who were either dead or otherwise unavailable due to alcoholism, drug abuse, or jail. At one point, one committee member shouted, "I can't take another alcoholic mother!" While trying to balance the list with regard to student opinion, diversity, genre, and literary merit, we still ended up with historical fiction about séances, **A Drowned Maiden's Hair**; two differing views on what may happen after death, **Everlost** and **The Innocent's Story**; and one of the students' absolute favorites, the traditional ghost story, **Deep and Dark and Dangerous**.

We also received several high-interest, low-reading-level submissions, which because of the format were not strong enough to beat out the titles that eventually made it to the list. Nevertheless two of these books remained in contention for more than one elimination round because they really succeeded as lower-level reading titles for middle school. So if you are looking to add high/low titles to your collection, **South Side Sports: First and Ten** by Jeff Rud (Orca, 2007) and **Paintball Blast** by Jake Maddox (Stone Arch Books, 2007) are great choices. The price of purchasing the entire Top Shelf list in trade cloth is \$498.43.

Overall we learned a lot and slept very little. Students liked giving their opinions, and if the books had been submitted earlier—and not just under the wire—we would have had even more student input. The teachers we worked with were happy to

tie the books to assignments, and several gave extra credit for student reviews. The best parts by far were seeing how much it meant to our students that we were taking their opinions seriously, hearing them express interest in the books that they had read, and asking whether their favorite books were going to make the cut. Titles preceded by an asterisk (\*) are the cream of this year's crop, the *Top of the Top Shelf*, marked by a special blend of popularity and literary quality.

And now, the list:

Applegate, Katherine. **Home of the Brave**. Feiwel and Friends/Holtzbrinck, 2007. 249p. \$16.95. 978-0-312-36765-7. VOYA August 2007. 4Q 4P M JS



*Kek, an African immigrant in the United States, is overwhelmed by his new country's bounty in this powerful and funny novel in verse, in which Kek shows readers how much is taken for granted. Lea (8th grade) told us, "It is not only a moving and wonderful book, it also teaches about kindness, hard work, and most important, friendship."*

\* Carman, Patrick. **Atherton: The House of Power**. Little, Brown/Hachette, 2007. 330p. \$16.99. 978-0-316-16670-6. VOYA April 2007. 4Q 4P M J



*In the divided, artificial world of Atherton, resources are controlled by the ruling few at the highest of the three planes, but only Edgar is strong and brave enough to climb among the three levels to find out the truth. About this book that is laced with lessons regarding natural resources, literacy, and ruling classes, Joye (7th grade) says, "You could see the future of the earth in a new perspective."*

De Palma, Toni. **Under the Banyan Tree**. Holiday House, 2007. 185p. \$16.95. 978-0-8234-1965-4. VOYA February 2008. 3Q 3P M



*When Irena runs away to Key West to escape an intolerable home situation, she forms a new family with the people of the Banyan Tree Motel. Sara (6th grade) wrote, "It was suspenseful. I didn't want to put the book down."*

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**PUBLISHERS: HOW TO NOMINATE YOUR BOOKS FOR VOYA'S NEXT TOP SHELF FICTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS**

If your new fiction publications for middle school readers fulfill this list's selection criteria, please nominate them as follows:

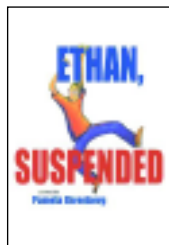
1. Select your finest fiction published between October 2007 and September 2008. You are limited to five titles from each imprint.
2. Send six copies (either finished copy or ARC) of each nominated 2008 title to our selection committee chair: Melissa Potter, Chair, Top Shelf Fiction Committee, Encino-Tarzana Branch Library, 18231 Ventura Boulevard, Tarzana, CA 91356.
3. Be sure that the committee receives your books as early as possible but no later than **August 31, 2008**. Time constraints mean that books received closer to the deadline are less likely to be considered.
4. Winning selections will be featured in the next edition of *Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers*, an annotated booklist, in the February 2009 issue of **VOYA**.
5. Refer procedural inquiries to **VOYA** Managing Editor/Review Editor Linda Benson by phone at (301) 459-3366, ext. 5702, or by e-mail to lbenson@voya.com.

NOTE: Submitting a nomination does not mean that you are also submitting the title for review. Please send review copies separately to **VOYA** Review Editor, 4501 Forbes Blvd., Suite 200, Lanham, MD 20706.

**SELECTION CRITERIA FOR TOP SHELF FICTION 2007**

- Themes and subject matter are of particular interest to readers aged eleven through thirteen or in grades six through eight.
- Titles have special appeal to this age group as both outstanding companions to middle school curriculum and free reading choices.
- Fiction books published between October 2007 and September 2008 are eligible.
- The final list reflects the geographic, ethnic, racial, intellectual, and economic diversity of North American middle school readers.
- The final list reflects top quality books for middle school readers—"best" books that stand out among the rest, that take old plots and make them new and original, and that have something different to say and say it well.
- The list is limited to thirty titles or fewer.

Ehrenberg, Pamela. **Ethan, Suspended**. Eerdmans, 2007. 266p. \$16. 978-0-8028-5324-0. **VOYA** August 2007. **3Q 3P M**



*Suspended from his junior high, Ethan is sent to live with his grandparents and attend a new school where he is the only white student, but his civil rights project and his new friends teach him a lot about race relations in the United States as well as who he is and who he wants to be. Jazmin (8th grade) felt this book should be recommended*

*"because it teaches you to be strong during hard times and to always be thankful for what you have."*

Ellis, Ann Dee. **This Is What I Did**. Little, Brown/Hachette, 2007. 169p. \$16.99. 978-0-316-01363-5. **VOYA** December 2007. **5Q 4P J S**  
*Through images and flashbacks, readers learn what went wrong at Logan's last school and also see his new classmates spreading rumors and bullying him mercilessly before a new friend and a therapist help Logan to slowly find strength and himself. Imani (8th grade) recommends the book "because it talks about real issues and true friendship and what that takes." Rachel (6th grade) says, "I would recommend this to someone who has hardships at school. This will teach them to work things out."*



Ellis, Deborah. **Jakeman**. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2007. 201p. \$16.95. 978-1-55041-573-5.

*Jake and his sister rarely see their mother in prison, but when the inmates' kids are abandoned by an abusive and drunken bus driver on a prison visit, Jake must muster the courage of his comic book character "Jakeman" to make his own political statement. "I like that even when there were hard times, he believed in himself," wrote Amanda (6th grade).*

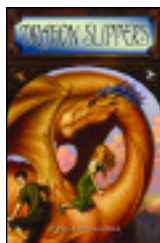


Erskine, Kathryn. **Quaking**. Philomel, 2007. 236p. \$16.99. 978-0-399-24774-3. **VOYA** June 2007. **5Q 4P M J S**

*Matilda is sent to live in a foster home with a Quaker couple and their adopted special-needs child, where a pro-war teacher, attacks on the local anti-war organizations and churches, her history of abuse,*

*and a new loving family combine to help Matt learn to stop quaking and stand up for what she believes. Lea (8th grade) wrote, "I liked that this book is realistic and very relatable. We all have the same problems that Matt has—fitting in, bullies, racism, and religion. Teenagers will like this one a lot."*

\* George, Jessica Day. **Dragon Slippers**. Bloomsbury, 2007. 324p. \$16.95. 978-1-59990-057-5. **VOYA** June 2007. **4Q 4P M J**



*Creel had no idea that dragons were collectors, nor did she know when she chose a gorgeous pair of slippers from a dragon's shoe collection that she was actually getting magic slippers that give the power to control dragons, or that the slippers would help to plunge the kingdom into war. Boyu (6th grade) says, "This book is just right because the vocabulary is perfect and the story line is so well thought out." Elizabeth (8th grade) says, "I would recommend this book to someone who believes in hope and true love."*

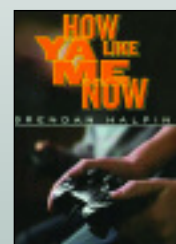
Hahn, Mary Downing. **Deep and Dark and Dangerous: A Ghost Story**. Clarion, 2007. 187p. \$16. 978-0-618-66545-7.

*Ali is thrilled to babysit her cousin at the lake but is puzzled about why her mother is so upset over her going, until she meets a creepy girl named Sissy who keeps trying to change Ali's cousin and endanger her. Paulin (8th grade) says "I would recommend this book to all middle school students who like to be astonished, spooked, and shocked." Randy (6th grade) claimed, "It is the greatest ghost story I ever read! Sorry, R. L. Stine, but you're second on the list."*



Halpin, Brendan. **How Ya Like Me Now**. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007. 201p. \$16. 978-0-374-33495-6. **VOYA** June 2007. **5Q 4P M J S**

*Having practically taken care of himself for the last year before his mother enters rehab, Eddie now must fit into a new urban school and his cousin Alex's world where, uncomfortable with his situation and minority status, he nevertheless bonds*



with his classmates over video games while trying to forgive his mother and get a girlfriend. Sidney (7th grade) feels this selection is appropriate “because this book is very funny, and a lot of people like to laugh.”

Harley, Bill. **The Amazing Flight of Darius Frobisher.** Peachtree, 2006. 160p. \$14.95. 978-1-56145-381-8.



When Darius is forced to live with his mean Aunt Inga, his only solace comes in trying to repair a bicycle, leading him to neighbor Daedalus and his quirky world of odd characters and flying bicycles. Sigourney (6th grade) thought that this book should be on the list “because it has a little Greek mythology in it, and you learn Greek mythology in middle school.”

Jordan, Rosa. **The Goatnappers.** Peachtree, 2007. 209p. \$14.95. 978-1-56145-400-6.

After Justin sells his goat to buy a bicycle, he is racked with guilt when he finds that the new owner is abusing the animal, so he enlists younger siblings and their friends to find a way to get the goat back. Sienna (7th grade) wrote, “I would recommend this book to people who like or love animals and a happy ending because this is what the book has.”



Korman, Gordon. **Schooled.** Hyperion/DBG, 2007. 208p. \$15.99. 978-0-7868-5692-3. VOYA October 2007. 4Q 4P M



When Capricorn’s grandmother is injured and there is no one to take care of him on the commune, he is set up in a foster situation and sent to a public middle school where the popular crowd decides to elect him president and torment him, not expecting that he will become a hero as tie-dyeing quickly becomes fashionable. Eliana (7th grade) wrote that “people hear of hippies in one way and think only of

that, but when you read **Schooled** you learn how there’s more to them than tie-dyed shirts and peace signs.”

LaFevers, R. L. **Theodosia and the Serpents of Chaos.** Houghton Mifflin, 2007. 344p. \$16. 978-0-618-75638-4.

Sleeping in a sarcophagus at night and battling Egyptian curses by day, Theodosia accidentally makes her cat demonic and learns that she must retrieve an artifact and return it to Egypt before England is struck with pestilence and death.



Leland (8th grade) writes, “I would recommend this book to any fantasy lover or Egypt maniac who is ready to step out of Middle Earth and into world history or to anyone who likes a good protagonist and mummies.”

Landy, Derek. **Skulduggery Pleasant.** HarperCollins, 2007. 392p. \$17.99. 978-0-06-123115-5. PLB \$18.89. 978-0-06-123116-9. VOYA August 2007. 4Q 5P M J S



After Stephanie is attacked on the first night in her inherited home, she partners with Skulduggery Pleasant, a wise-cracking skeleton brought back to life to perform magic and work as a detective, to catch the bad guys in the magical realm. “I especially loved (and you will too) the witty, egotistical, and outrageously

funny Skulduggery, whose banter, one-liners, and acts of stupid courage keep the story feeling fresh,” writes Leland (8th grade).

\* Lubar, David. **True Talents.** Starscape/Tor, 2007. 313p. \$17.95. 978-0-7653-0977-8. VOYA June 2007. 4Q 4P J

In this engrossing, fast-paced sequel to **Hidden Talents**, superhero-types Trash, Cheater, Martin, Lucky, and Torchie, who met at an alternative



school, now band together to save Trash from an evil, ex-military madman who wants to turn him into a weapon. Christopher (6th grade) thought this book should be on the list “because it tells how kids overcome their problems.”

Lupica, Mike. **Miracle on 49th Street.** Philomel, 2006. 246p.



\$17.99. 978-0-399-24488-9. Puffin, 2007. 256p. \$7.99 Trade pb. 978-0-14-240942-8. VOYA October 2006. 3Q 3P M

Just before her mother dies, Molly learns that her father is a Celtics basketball star so she invents ways to meet him and has only until Christmas to convince him that she is really his daughter. Sofia (6th grade) says, “I didn’t really dislike anything about this book because I like basketball and I could

compare myself to the girl Molly Parker.” Rita (6th grade) says it should be on the list because, “It is a very fun book and it’s definitely for middle-schoolers.”

\* Mass, Wendy. **Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life.** Little, Brown/Hachette, 2006. 289p. \$15.99. 978-0-316-05829-2.

For his thirteenth birthday, Jeremy Fink receives a mysterious locked box from his deceased father so he and his best friend, Lizzy, search all over New York for the box’s special keys, along the way meeting new people and growing up. Zakir (8th grade) says, “This book has so many messages that I can’t name them all. It’s so deep, and in my opinion, better than Harry Potter!” Anissa (8th grade) writes, “I loved the whole journey to find the keys to the box.”



Oppel, Kenneth. **Darkwing.** Eos/HarperCollins, 2007. 420p. \$16.99. 978-0-06-085054-8. PLB \$17.89. 978-0-06-085055-5. VOYA December 2007. 5Q 3P M J S

Flying chiropter Dusk must save his family and colony from enemy Carnassial, a felid who breaks from his pack to hunt rather than scavenge, in this story where thoughts of animals and their interactions within groups and among different species brings evolution into perspective. Elliot (7th grade) would recommend this book “if you are looking for an adventurous, cool, exciting, and slightly mysterious novel.”

\* Pinkwater, Daniel. **The Neddidiad: How Neddidi Took the Train, Went to Hollywood, and Saved Civilization.** Houghton Mifflin, 2007. 307p. \$16. 978-0-618-59444-3.



When Ned moves to California in the 1940s, a shaman gives him a magic turtle carving that enables its possessor to keep ancient evil from rising and creating a new ice age, so Ned teams up with a quirky cast of characters, including an actor and his son, a ghost, a circus owner’s son, a Native

American in a furry Viking hat, and the daughter of a Western film hero to protect the sacred turtle. Leland (8th grade) reported, “I especially liked the humor and how silly the book was, with mammoths, ghosts, and magic not even given a second glance.”

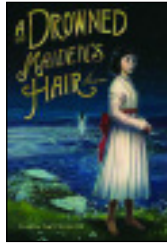
Resau, Laura. **Red Glass.** Delacorte, 2007. 275p. \$15.99. 978-0-385-73466-0. PLB \$18.99. 978-0-385-90464-9. VOYA August 2007. 5Q 4P M J

When Sophie, her aunt, the aunt’s boyfriend, his son Angel, and Pablo, a young Mexican immigrant whose parents perished while crossing the border, take a trip to Pablo’s village, Sophie’s life changes dramatically as she gets over her anxieties to save Angel and let Pablo choose where he wants to live. Janelle (7th grade) said “I loved how the author mixed so many emotions and details into one book. I have not found one book to top that.”



Riordan, Rick. **The Titan's Curse.** *Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book Three.* Miramax/Hyperion/DBG, 2007. 312p. \$17.95. 978-1-4231-0145-1. **VOYA** April 2007. **4Q 4P MJS**  
*Percy and friends need to rescue Artemis and Annabeth from the Titans who are trying to take control back from the Olympians as they reassemble their powers in San Francisco in this stand-alone story, a contemporary, cross-country odyssey full of Greek mythological characters. "I'd recommend this book to anyone who likes mythology and adventure," says Thomas (7th grade).*

Schlitz, Laura Amy. **A Drowned Maiden's Hair: A Melodrama.** Candlewick, 2006. 389p. \$15.99. 978-0-7636-2930-4. **VOYA** February 2007. **4Q 4P M**



*Maud is thrilled to be freed from her horrible orphanage until she realizes that her adoptive benefactor is using her to assist in fake séances because she is small enough to fit into cabinets and act as a ghost child in this historical novel. Eléonore (8th grade) explains that "the story is about courage, telling the truth and what surprises lie out there."*

Sharenow, Robert. **My Mother The Cheerleader.** Laura Geringer Books/HarperCollins, 2007. 289p. \$16.99. 978-0-06-114896-5. PLB \$17.89. 978-0-06-114897-2.



*Louise's alcoholic mother keeps her out of school and hurls insults daily at new student Ruby Bridges, but Louise is oblivious to the racism until Morgan Miller comes to stay at their boarding house and sheds light on the situation. Tiana (9th grade) says that "it offers an interesting and different perspective on the beginning of integration in schools." LaVern (7th grade) recommends it "because it shows a great deal of courage [from] a young girl."*

Shusterman, Neal. **Everlost.** Simon & Schuster, 2006. 313p. \$16.95. 978-0-689-87237-2. Pulse/S & S, 2007. 384p. \$6.99. 978-0-689-87238-9. **VOYA** October 2006. **4Q 4P JS**



*When Nick and Allie do not make it into the "light" after a car accident, they must adjust to the rules of their spirit existence in Everlost, a dead place parallel to the living world where many spirits congregate at the sacred twin towers under the control of Mary, who might not have their best interests at heart. Maya (8th grade) recommends it "because it teaches some great life lessons, and is extremely engaging."*

Singer, Nicky. **The Innocent's Story.** Holiday House, 2007. 218p. \$16.95. 978-0-8234-2082-7. **VOYA** August 2007. **4Q 4P MJS**

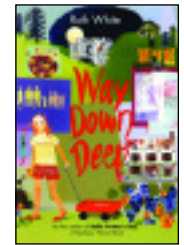


*Killed during a terrorist bombing, Cassina becomes a para-spirit, able to hear the thoughts of the brains she inhabits, but she needs to find a way to make a physical impact before the terrorists strike again. Rakeisha (8th grade) says, "It's one of those books that you can't put down." Andrea (8th grade) said, "I would recommend this book to people who like thrillers and suspense."*

Stewart, Trenton Lee. **The Mysterious Benedict Society.** Illus. by Carson Ellis. Megan Tingley Books/Little, Brown/Hachette, 2007. 486p. \$16.99. 978-0-316-05777-6. **VOYA** February 2007. **4Q 4P MJ**

*This absolute student favorite is summarized best by Boyu (8th grade): "This book is about four children who, after passing a series of tests . . . go on a secret mission to a place called 'The Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened' to stop the evil that the place holds." "If I was an alien, I'd give it five thumbs up, but since I'm not, I suppose I'll have to grudgingly go with two," wrote Thomas (7th grade). Danni (8th grade) commented, "It was a page-turning, captivating book I just couldn't stop reading until the very last page."*

White, Ruth. **Way Down Deep.** Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007. 197p. \$16. 978-0-374-38251-3. **VOYA** June 2007. **4Q 3P MJ**



*Ruby appeared in the town of Way Down when she was a toddler, and the townspeople took her in and made her one of their own, but when she finds her biological family, she figures out what family really means and where she belongs. Mika (6th grade) explains that "it makes you feel your emotions coming out of you and makes your mind become part of the book." Kiana (6th grade) says, "I would recommend this book to someone because it's funny, sad, and happy all at the same time."*

Wolf, Joan M. **Someone Named Eva.** Clarion, 2007. 200p. \$16. 978-0-618-53579-8. **VOYA** October 2007. **4Q 3P MJ**



*After being separated from her family in Czechoslovakia and chosen by the Nazis to live with a German family as an adopted daughter, Milada manages to hold on to a pin that her grandmother gave her as a constant reminder of who she really is and the family to which she hopes to return when the war is over. "I liked how it showed another side of the Nazi horrors. Usually Holocaust books are about the concentration camps, but this one is different. Although it is less harsh than many other books on the Holocaust, it affected me most because I can almost understand her fear and confusion. This book is that emotional and effective," said Sudeshna (6th grade)*

Wulffson, Don L. **The Golden Rat.** Bloomsbury, 2007. 168p. \$16.95. 978-1-59990-000-1.

*When Baoliu is convicted of his stepmother's murder and another man suffers the death penalty in his place, Baoliu becomes a "Golden Rat," shunned by his own family and community, so he sets out to prove his innocence in this historical mystery set in China in 1199. "I would highly recommend this book to any reader who likes mysteries," wrote Andrei (6th grade). "I liked how the book told so much about China's past customs and daily life, and also the amazing twists, which made the story so unpredictable," said Sudeshna (6th grade).*

#### TOP SHELF FICTION SELECTION COMMITTEE 2007

- Caroline Gill is the Library Media Teacher at Palms Middle School and also serves on the California School Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee, is a past president of the Los Angeles School Library Association, leads a book discussion group for the Los Angeles Unified School District, and is president of the Los Angeles Public Library's Friends of Children and Literature group.
- Amy Goldenberg has worked in independent schools and public libraries throughout the Los Angeles area over the past eleven years, and is currently the Librarian at the Pressman Academy, a pre-K through eighth grade independent school. She also serves on the Advisory Committee of the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California.
- Maxine Carvalho Lucas received her MLS degree from UCLA and has been an independent school librarian for fifteen years. She is currently a school librarian at Harvard-Westlake Middle School where she is also the young adult literature specialist and faculty advisor for a seventh through ninth grade book discussion group.
- Suzanne Osman has been in education for the last sixteen years. She taught ESL, remedial reading, and English for eight years before becoming the library media teacher at Orville Wright Middle School, in Los Angeles.
- Chairperson Melissa Potter has been a young adult librarian in public libraries for the past eight years. A former **VOYA** reviewer, she was recently made branch manager at the Encino-Tarzana Branch of Los Angeles Public Library, but she has continued to work with teens throughout this project. ■