

Some of the Best New Novels and Nonfiction

Compiled and Annotated by:

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Slices of Life From Realistic Fiction

Balliett, B. (2008). *The Calder Game*. (B. Helquist, Illus.). New York: Scholastic. (Grades 5-8)

Mystery sleuths will appreciate this cleverly written tale about a missing boy, his pentominoes, a stolen sculpture, and a fat black cat. Balliett engages readers on several levels as the events unfold in the English countryside where Calder Phyllay has traveled with his father who is attending a special conference. Calder unexpectedly disappears shortly after arrival along with the famous sculpture in the town square. His father seeks the help of Calder's two friends from Chicago who travel to England to help local authorities search for their friend. Readers will be guessing who is guilty all the way to the end. An added incentive to reading with a close eye is clues to a message hidden in the illustrations. Art enthusiasts also get a chance to learn a little more about the famous sculptor, Alexander Calder.

Clements, A. (2008). *Lost and Found*. (M. Elliott, Illus.). New York: Atheneum. (Grades 3-5)

Jay Grayson heads for sixth grade as a newcomer. He is pleased with the way his first day goes, but is surprised that no one has called his twin brother's name during role call all day. He begins to enjoy being known for who he is instead of one of the identical twins, so he doesn't turn in the note his mother sent explaining Ray's absence. When Ray is ready to return to school on Wednesday, Jay tells him about the mix-up. They decide to continue the deception. Unfortunately, the boys have different abilities, so they don't perform the same way in all of the classes, nor are they good in the same sports. Then, there is the issue of cute Melissa, Ray's science lab partner. Eventually the ruse is discovered, and there are consequences for the boys' behavior. However, everyone gets the message that the boys want

to be considered for who they are and no longer just part of an identical duo.

Lee, I. (2008). *Dog Lost*. New York: Scholastic/Chicken House. (Grades 4-6)

Eleven-year-old Mackenzie has lost his mother. His short-tempered father has turned to drinking and gambling as a way to deal with the loss. Then, his older half-brother leaves home to get away from incessant arguments. When his father dumps a puppy on his bed one night, winnings from his recent gambling, Mac is filled with joy. The two form an immediate bond. Neighbors and strangers are not supportive because Cash is a pit bull. Trouble compounds itself when his father takes Cash away in a fit of rage, dumping her far from home. Time passes as Cash and Mac look for each other, a quest complicated by Darren, a trouble-maker, who wants the dog for pit bull fights. Public opinion about this controversial breed is threaded through a story of the love between a boy and his dog.

Monniger, J. (2008). *Hippie Chick*. Honesdale, PA: Front Street/Boyd's Mills Press. (Grades 6-9)

Fifteen-year-old Lolly is a reasonably knowledgeable sailor. However, accidents can still happen, even when she is sailing an unsinkable Boston Whaler. During a moment of inattention, she is caught by surprise when the boat tips drastically, and she must jump to safety. When she tries to find a safe place to cling to the upended boat, the swinging boom knocks her out and back into the water. Amazingly, she is rescued by a manatee. She rides on its back accompanied by two smaller manatees to a secluded mangrove key in the Everglades. There she struggles to remember her survival skills and forms a bond with her rescuers. She faces a crucial decision when the manatees leave the area. Does she stay put and hope for rescue or go with them because they have been her key to survival up to this point?

Books That Invite Readers into Fantasy and Science Fiction

Appelt, K. (2008). *The Underneath*. (D. Small, Illus.). New York: Atheneum. (Grades 4-6)

Readers quickly sympathize with Ranger, a lonely hound chained by his malicious owner, and a pregnant calico cat that seeks shelter under the

sagging porch near the hound. Before long there are two inquisitive kittens that make up this rather unlikely family. Gar Face, a hate-filled man, has retreated to this East Texas bayou to nurse his anger against the world. The animals fight to survive the cagey, hard-drinking man who cares nothing for their lives and other creatures lurking in the shadows. An interwoven tale from the past, the magic knowledge of the trees, and the love of family create a haunting story about the consequences of love and hate. This beautifully written book would be excellent to use to study an author's style.

Gutman, D. (2008). *Nightmare at the Book Fair*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Grades 4-5)

On his way to the first lacrosse practice, Trip Dinkleman is asked to help the president of the PTA for a short time. She needs someone to move heavy crates of books that have arrived for the upcoming book fair. Trip can't believe he's doing this task because he simply hates to read. When a shelf of books topples on him, he is knocked into a highly imaginary realm, briefly traveling through the genres in one amusing chapter after another. He returns to the real world with his head filled with unforgettable adventures and a new appreciation for the possibilities in books.

Haddix, M. P. (2008). *Found: The Missing*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Grades 5-8)

Fans of Margarite Haddix will welcome the first book in a new series centering on a number of children who have all been adopted at about the same time. Thirteen-year-old Jonah knows he is adopted, but he can't get his parents to talk much about it. Then, he meets a new boy, Chris. When both of the boys discover they have received the same letters of warning, Chris first learns that he is also adopted. Along with Jonah's sister, the boys try to discover more about the mysterious circumstances surrounding their own adoptions and others on a list of names they have accessed. The ending leaves readers surprised and wanting more.

Kibuishi, Kazu. (2008). *The Amulet: Book 1*. New York: Graphix/Scholastic. (Grades 4-7)

After losing their father in a car accident, Emily and Navin must move to their great-grandfather's home with their mother. The dark home in the middle of nowhere is definitely a "fixer-upper." It also has secrets. It hides a tentacled creature that steals their mother away beyond a doorway that leads to a sinister world. A mechanical rabbit and an amulet of their great-grandfather's may be the only help the two have in finding their mother and returning to the real world. This graphic novel is sure to be popular with its excellent colorful illustrations and fast, imaginative pace.

Riordan, R. (2008). *The Battle of the Labyrinth*. New York: Hyperion. (Grades 5-8)

The fourth book in the Olympians series finds Percy Jackson teaming up with his demigod friends and a talented mortal to defend Camp Half-Blood from an invasion by the evil Kronos's army. Their quest takes them into the mythological Labyrinth filled with twists, turns, and deadly surprises that most other visitors have not survived. Success depends on their ability to use their individual gifts wisely plus a little help from unexpected places. Written with plenty of suspense and a liberal dose of humor, readers will sail through the latest book in this engaging series. You might compare this author's style with Kathi Appelt's book, analyzing the effectiveness of each one.

Notable Nonfiction

Anderson, L. H. (2008). *Independent Dames: What You Never Knew About the Women and Girls of the American Revolution*. (M. Faulkner, Illus.). New York: Simon & Schuster. (Grades 4-7)

In this engaging picture book for older readers, colorful cartoon-like illustrations flesh out carefully researched tidbits about women who made a difference in history and how they did so. A time line of key events during the American Revolution is placed along the bottom of the pages for easy reference. This book will be a catalyst for learning more about brave and bright women who were not sitting home while history was being made. Readers might find out more about a person of interest by reading primary documents by them or about them on the Library of Congress's American Memory site: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>.

Jankéliowitch, A. (2008). *50 Ways to Save the Earth*. (P. Bourseiller, Photographer). New York: Abrams. (Grades 3-7)

The message of this book with its beautiful photographs is that each person is responsible for making the earth a better place in which to live. Even doing small things is effective like eliminating some of the numerous throwaway items and replacing them with reusable items, printing on both sides of the paper, not littering, and remembering to recycle, recycle, recycle. Use this book to start a conversation about making a difference that begins in your classroom. Set an example that other teachers and students might follow as they devise their own plans. This book is an important reminder that everyone truly can impact the environment in a positive way.