

**MULTIETHNIC BOOKS
FOR THE MIDDLE-SCHOOL CURRICULUM**



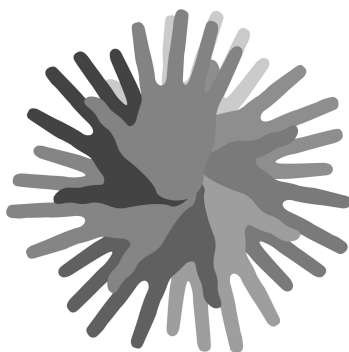
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MULTIETHNIC BOOKS

~~~~~ *for the* ~~~~~

**MIDDLE-SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

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**CHERRI JONES**

*and* **J. B. PETTY**

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editions

An imprint of the American Library Association • Chicago • 2013

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Printed in the United States of America

17 16 15 14 13     5 4 3 2 1

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ISBNs: 978-0-8389-1163-1 (paper); 978-0-8389-9476-4 (PDF); 978-0-8389-9477-1 (ePub); 978-0-8389-9478-8 (Kindle). For more information on digital formats, visit the ALA Store at [alastore.ala.org](http://alastore.ala.org) and select eEditions.

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jones, Cheri, compiler.

Multiethnic Books for the Middle-School Curriculum / Cheri Jones and J. B. Petty.

pages    cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8389-1163-1 (alk. paper)

1. Middle school students—Books and reading—United States. 2. Junior high school students—Books and reading—United States. 3. Multiculturalism in literature—Bibliography. 4. Reading (Middle school)—United States. 5. Young adult literature—Bibliography. 6. Cultural pluralism in literature—Bibliography. 7. Ethnic groups in literature—Bibliography. 8. Minorities in literature—Bibliography. 9. Teenagers—Books and reading—United States. 10. Middle school libraries—United States—Book lists. I. Petty, J. B., compiler. II. Title.

Z1037.A1J69 2013

028.5'5—dc23

2012040938

Cover design by Kimberly Thornton. Images © Shutterstock, Inc.

Text design by Adrianna Sutton in Adobe Garamond Pro and Eames Century Modern.

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*We dedicate this book to the countless librarians and teachers  
who are strongly committed to introducing children and young adults to  
“the right book at the right time.”*



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We have so many librarians and teachers to thank, but first and foremost we'd like to thank Dea Borneman, head of the Haseltine Library at Greenwood Laboratory School, Missouri State University (MSU) and an associate professor of library science, for her unflagging support and the many booktalk sessions she presented with us. Emily Furtak, supervisor of the Curriculum Resource Center, Meyer Library, MSU, and our student assistants helped track down many titles and, along with numerous other colleagues, held down the fort during Cherri's sabbatical. All were immensely patient as we met, discussed, and wrote reviews for titles we were reading. Ellie Mason painstakingly created a helpful and comprehensive list of series book titles. Teachers, librarians, and administrators in the Springfield (Missouri) Public Schools provided advice and gave us direction. Although they are more numerous than we can count, we especially thank Catia Gilpin, teacher at Phelps Center for Gifted Education for her encouragement and her close reading of the "Social Studies" chapter; Ann Wollenmeyer, district science facilitator; Margaret Butler, middle school librarian, Cherokee Middle School; Denise Kelly, district English–language arts facilitator; and Jennifer Renegar, district mathematics facilitator. Members of the Missouri Association of School Librarians and the Southwest Region Association of School Librarians in Missouri have listened to, discussed, and critiqued our reviews for over a decade, and we thank them for their thoughtful input. Steve Hinch, MSU associate professor in Reading, Foundations, and Technology; Judy Gregg, MSU adjunct professor in Reading, Foundations and Technology; Mara Cohen-Ioannides, MSU senior instructor in English; Suzanne Walker-Pacheco, MSU professor of Sociology and Anthropology; and Liliias Jones Jarding, professor of Environmental Studies and Political Science, Oglala Lakota College, all offered suggestions and answered questions along the way. Jim Coombs, associate professor and Meyer Library Maps librarian, offered solid geography advice for the social studies chapter. Professor Linda Esser of the School of Information Science and Learning Technologies, University of Missouri–Columbia, has provided ongoing support and encouragement when we couldn't see the end of the project. Our thanks go to Meyer Library's Circulation and Interlibrary

Loan staff, the staff of the Library Center, Brentwood, and Midtown Branches of the Springfield–Greene County Library District, and the staff of the Oak Bend Branch of St. Louis County Public Library for their cheerful assistance as we requested and picked up literally hundreds of books in the past few years! Our deep gratitude goes to our editor, Stephanie Zvirin. Without her support, vision, and suggestions the book probably would not have come to fruition. Finally, we'd like to thank our families for supporting this project, giving us time to work, providing suggestions, and maneuvering around the stacks of books that often took over our households!

# INTRODUCTION

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The purpose of this book is to make it easier for teachers and librarians to infuse curricula with multiethnic literature. We provide a vetted list of recommended multiethnic titles for grades 5–8, organized by curricular area. Why multiethnic literature? Aside from the positive benefits attributed to multicultural and multiethnic literature by scores of researchers (see appendix C), promoting understanding and empowerment through books is a long-standing passion for both of us. We've talked with countless educators during the preparation for this book and have consistently heard the comment, "We need a sourcebook like this."

Issues in defining multicultural/multiethnic literature are many and complex. As have others (see appendix C) through the years, we struggle with our own definition. However, when we examined national curricular standards, we found ethnic diversity most nearly fit the meanings behind the standards. Thus, for the purposes of this book we decided to focus only on diverse ethnic groups in the United States and various places around the world.

Junko Yokota's yardsticks for authenticity have guided our selections. These include "richness of cultural details, authentic dialogue and relationships, in-depth treatment of cultural issues, and the inclusion of members of 'minority groups for a purpose.'"<sup>1</sup>

We are aware of the controversy concerning authors who write outside their own culture. We believe that personal experience, immersion, or extensive research can allow authors to do so. Therefore, we have included such titles. We looked for source notes and/or qualified advisors for both fiction and informational books to ensure accuracy and authenticity. At times, we contacted authors to request background information.

We have read a large percentage of the multicultural children's and young adult books published since 2000, preparing countless booktalks for teachers and librarians. Because of our combined experience in research and in reading multicultural books for children and young adults, we trust (mostly) our choices. Even as we realize some of our selections (and omissions!) will be criticized, we believe they represent an array of books with broad appeal to tweens and younger teens.

**WHO WE ARE**

Cherri, of Finnish and Icelandic descent, remembers the first year of busing for school integration in Denver, Colorado, where she grew up in the 1960s. She couldn't understand the fuss; she rode a bus to school, what did it matter that African American kids rode a bus to her school, too? Then in high school she tried to convince an African American friend that, of course, he'd be welcome in her home. "Maybe," he said, "but would I be welcome if I were to come to pick you up for a date?" That one simple question brought home the subtleties of racism.

J. B. grew up in the segregated South in the 1940s and 1950s. When she was 4, her father bought a small neighborhood grocery in Camden, Arkansas. The family lived in quarters at the back of the store. The African American family that lived behind them had a daughter her age. Not allowed to go into one another's yard to play, the girls played with their dolls through the fence. J. B.'s question was, "Why?"

Each of us grew up in white middle-class families. We were avid readers and read widely. The adults around us viewed the world one way; the characters in our books often gave us another perspective. We found our way into librarianship, where we saw the power of even one story to change a life. We each kept up with new research on the positive effects of a well-developed program of multicultural education. J. B. even focused her doctoral dissertation on how school librarians in Arkansas promoted multicultural understanding in their schools. When we met in 1998, we were new to the library science department faculty at what is now Missouri State University. It took us about five minutes to realize we were destined for a long friendship! We soon found ourselves regularly presenting booktalks on multicultural children's and young adult books. In 2001, we decided to narrow our focus on that difficult, transitional period in a child's life: preadolescence. This book, then, stems from our years of research and reading for ages 11 through 14.

Between us, we have read over two thousand books from the years 2005–2011 to find the titles we recommend here. We have read every book for which we have a review.

**WHAT WE INCLUDED***Organization*

We organized this book with teachers and school librarians firmly in mind; this arrangement can also benefit public librarians. Titles are placed in chapters where we, our advisors, and our editor felt they most readily fit with the cur-

riculum; a quick look at the table of contents will give readers a place to start. For example, titles with themes such as bullying, sexual orientation, and sex roles are in chapter 1, “Health”; titles in which a particular sport plays a key role are in chapter 4, “Physical Education.” Readers are encouraged not only to look for subjects in their specific curricular areas, but to utilize the index to find additional titles on a subject that might be listed under another curricular area.

### *Bibliographic Information*

For most books, we include the title, author, copyright date, number of pages, publisher, designation as fiction (F) or nonfiction (NF), and grade levels. Although in the bibliographic statement we use (NF) Grades or (F) Grades to indicate the category of the book, in the body of a review we chose to use the term *informational books* rather than *nonfiction* because this is the term used by teachers and national content area associations. We do not include the ISBN because we know online sources readily provide all available book versions, from paperback to trade to library binding.

### *Series Books and Informational Titles*

As we began exploring series books, we realized not every book in a series fit our chosen parameters. For example, from the current list of 107 titles in one series, only twenty-nine could be termed multiethnic; and of these twenty-nine, only some are appropriate for the middle school curriculum. We found that not all books in a series are created equal. Quality varies by author. Sometimes we were not able to find or read all in a series. If we read all the titles in a series that fit one curricular area, and could recommend all, we wrote a review for that series to conserve space. We encourage teachers and librarians to explore individual titles of series before making blanket purchases of an entire set.

We deemed some series titles to be *report books*, but if their content was valuable and appealing enough for classroom use we included them. We are heartened by some publishers’ recent new standards requiring source notes, photograph and illustration credits, and author information. We’ve noted these areas (or the lack thereof) in our reviews. A complete lack of documentation led us to eliminate titles that otherwise were appealing.

### *Grade Levels*

As most of us know, assigning grade levels to books can be tricky. We decided to err in the direction of breadth. We debated, but opted to include the best of the

picture books we read for this age group. We know many middle school social studies teachers use picture books in their classes to introduce specific topics; other teachers use them as prompts for student writing or art.

We recognize books that reach into high school interest areas (particularly fiction) appeal to many seventh and eighth graders. We read and liked many of the books that fit this age range, but chose to include only a limited number. We opted instead to focus on titles more suited for a broader middle school audience. Informational (nonfiction) books were a bit trickier. We included a few nonfiction titles that would be appropriate for a middle school library reference collection; students might not read the entire volume, but could use it as a source for reports.

### *Review Style*

We chose to write our reviews in a booktalk review style that includes both a summary and an evaluation. Why? Because we know teachers and librarians can't possibly remember (we often don't!) the details of a book or story at the very moment of need. Usually, these moments involve selling a book to a student or collecting titles for a curricular unit. Although shorter reviews are great for the book selection process, they don't give much to go on for a one-minute booktalk. Also, we wanted to give enough detail about a book to allow teachers or librarians to see how the title might fit into their curricular units.

We followed standard reviewing procedures in evaluating the format of each book. Are the typeset, font, and spacing appropriate for grades 5–8? Do the photographs and illustrations complement the text on the page? Do text boxes work with the overall layout, or are they distracting? Are the pages easy to digest, or overly busy in their graphic layout? We considered these questions when choosing titles. Also, because so many art teachers collaborate with other content area teachers, we have noted or identified the style of art in many titles. In this manner, both art and subject teachers can readily mesh the book with other curricula.

### *Content Area Standards*

We chose to identify and review books in the major curricular areas most U.S. middle schools offer: health, language arts, performing arts (dance, music, and theater), physical education, science and mathematics, social studies, and visual arts. Using 2011 national content standards (see appendix A for organizations, websites, and standards), we aligned each title to applicable curricular areas and standards. A title's major curricular area might be visual arts, but the book could also fulfill standards in language arts or social studies. For example, the full annotation and review for *Sweethearts of Rhythm: The Story of the Greatest*

*All-Girl Swing Band in the World* by Marilyn Nelson is in “Performing Arts,” chapter 3. However, because the book is written using individual poems and focuses on a specific time period in U.S. history, it would be appropriate in either the language arts or social studies classroom. Thus, it is important to consult the index by subject; by using the index, teachers and librarians can find *all* applicable titles related to a subject, no matter where the full annotation and review might appear.

A word about format of the content area standards: each national association makes its own choice between numbering its standards with Roman numerals and cardinal numbers (for example, LA1 or SSIV). We follow the format used by the associations. Some associations provide abbreviated lists of their standards; others give detailed descriptions for each of theirs. Again, our list of standards in the appendix reflects the work of the associations.

We are aware of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21)<sup>2</sup> and the Common Core State Standards<sup>3</sup> initiatives. Most states have formally adopted these initiatives and are incorporating them into their curriculum. Organizations and associations that produce content area standards are working to mesh P21 and the Common Core State Standards with their standards. This is a time of flux for educational standards; however, we are confident the books we include readily meet many of these standards and will help students achieve learning objectives set forth by their school districts.

### *Cultures*

Early in our research and reading, we focused on ethnic groups in the United States. However, we realized by doing so we weren't including books related to middle school world history topics or areas of interest, such as current issues, mythology, or world folktales. We then expanded our reading to incorporate a variety of historical periods and countries. The question became, Where do we draw the line? We decided to include books that focus on major areas of conflict between ethnic groups around the world. These conflicts are an important part of the social studies curriculum.

We also have included informational books that present what we term an *awareness of diversity* (AOD). Although these books are not truly multicultural, their inclusion of multiethnic characters or photographs of multiethnic people is better than the image of a “white world” that we have unfortunately discovered in many middle grade science, math, and series books. We hope editors and publishers will note this omission and take steps to correct it. We're heartened by the number of fiction titles that feature protagonists from a variety of cultures; we could not find many of these ten years ago.

To denote specific cultures we have done the following. Where possible, we've noted specific American Indian groups. We've chosen to use *Latino* rather than *Hispanic Americans*, and *Muslims* rather than *Moslems*. Within our reviews we use the term that the book's author used. We have chosen not to hyphenate cultural groups, because we see hyphenation as a means of diminishing the status of a group. For titles that cover ethnic groups around the world, we have used the term *Global*.

### *Keywords*

We adapted most of the keywords from Library of Congress Cataloging-In-Publication information on the MARC record. We omitted words such as *juvenile*, *schools*, or *friendship* because these could apply to many titles.

### *Graphic Novels and Picture Books*

Many multiethnic picture books, graphic novels, and folktale books not only express art from their respective cultures, they also showcase a specific artistic style.

### **WHAT'S NOT HERE**

Despite our best efforts, we realize we have missed some great titles. We consulted numerous bibliographies, databases, review sources, and award lists during the course of our research. We considered diverse audiences, from rural to suburban to urban, realizing while one title might not be appropriate for one audience, it might fit the needs of others.

We read some books with excellent content, but we eliminated them based on the layout or format. If we struggled with reading the books, we felt students in these grades would not read them, even with encouragement.

### **HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

Readers will find books in one of several ways: by looking in a specific curricular area and by consulting the index by subject, keyword, or title. Each full entry for a title is annotated as below:



*Annotation Key*

|                                                                                             |           |                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Annotation Key</i>                                                                       |           |                                                                |
| TITLE                                                                                       | →         | <i>The Ancient Chinese World</i>                               |
| SERIES TITLE                                                                                | →         | (The World in Ancient Times series)                            |
| AUTHOR(S)                                                                                   | →         | By Terry F. Kleeman and Tracy Barrett.                         |
|                                                                                             |           | 2005. 174 pages. Oxford University Press.                      |
|                                                                                             |           | (NF) [Fiction or Nonfiction] <b>Grades 5–10</b> [Grade Levels] |
| <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>                                                   |           |                                                                |
| <b>Social Studies LA1, SCI II, SSI, SSII, SSIII, SSV, SSVI, SSVII, SSVIII, SSIX Chinese</b> |           |                                                                |
| ↑                                                                                           | ↑         | ↑                                                              |
| CURRICULAR AREA                                                                             | STANDARDS | ETHNIC GROUP(S)                                                |

NOTES

1. Junko Yokota, "Issues in Selecting Multicultural Children's Literature," *Language Arts* vol. 70 (March 1993): 159–60.
2. See the Partnership for Learning 21st Century Skills website, [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org). For a quick overview, see "P21 Framework Definitions," [www.p21.org/documents/P21\\_Framework\\_Definitions.pdf](http://www.p21.org/documents/P21_Framework_Definitions.pdf) (accessed August 29, 2012).
3. See the Common Core State Standards Initiative website, [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) (accessed August 29, 2012).



# 1 HEALTH

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In the context of health class, students discuss a host of issues, including peer pressure, family issues, clash of cultures, substance abuse, physical abuse, gender roles, sexual identity, bullying, lying, diseases, and more. Many contemporary fiction problem novels address these issues. We organized this chapter around these topics because the books are appropriate for health classes. School counselors who work with individual students or student groups will also find these titles helpful.

## **DECISION MAKING (DRUGS, LYING, FAMILY ISSUES, GRIEF)**

### *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

By Sherman Alexie. 2007. 229 pages. Little, Brown. (F) Grades 7–12

---

Alexie pulls no punches as he describes Arnold, aka Junior, a bright kid who begins life with several strikes against him. Born with hydrocephalus (water on the brain) and getting poor care at the Indian Health Service, growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation with poor parents, attending an inadequate reservation school, and being teased every day almost defeat him. Yet he perseveres. At 14, he transfers to the all-white Reardan High School off the reservation and feels like he becomes a part-time Indian. Some days he wonders how he'll get to or from school. Some days he wonders why he left the reservation and lost his best friend, Rowdy. However, attending Reardan means meeting his first girlfriend, making the basketball team, making friends, and having opportunities for college. Told in first-person in Junior's voice and illustrated with cartoonlike drawings (with captions that sound like they come from a 14-year-old), the book is definitely for older middle school readers. Health, Language Arts H2, H5, H6, LA1, SSII, SSIII, SSIV, SSV, VA1, VA4, VA6 American Indians, Spokanes

*Bird*

By Zetta Elliott. 2008. Illus. No page numbers. Lee & Low. (F) **Grades 4–7**

---

Mehkai has a talent for drawing. He draws to escape his grief about his older brother's drug addiction and death and his grandfather's death. He and Uncle Son, his grandfather's friend, spend many hours after school in the park where Mehkai identifies and draws birds. Using free verse, color illustrations, and pen-and-ink drawings, Elliott and illustrator Shadra Strickland take the reader into Mehkai's confusion and sadness as he comes to peace with the losses of two people he truly loved. The book is short but powerful in its expression of despair and hope for the future. **Health, Visual Arts H2, H5, LA1, SSIV, VA4, VA5, VA6 African Americans**

*Blessing's Bead*

By Debby Dahl Edwardson.

2009. 178 pages. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (F) **Grades 6–9**

---

Based on true events, this book alternates between the early-1900s story of Nutaaq and the late-1980s tale of her great-granddaughter, Blessing. When Nutaaq's family goes to the annual trade fair on mainland Alaska, Nutaaq is heartbroken when her sister, Aaluk, marries a handsome Siberian and goes to live in his country. The next year, Nutaaq's village is ravaged by the 1918 influenza epidemic, and her life takes a drastic turn. The book then moves to 1989 and the story of Nutaaq's great-granddaughter, Blessing. Blessing's alcoholic mother is undergoing treatment, and Blessing and her brother are taken in by relatives. Fitting in is not easy, but as she learns about her family's fractured past she finds her own place in this new world and begins to heal. First-person narrative filled with dialect and the smooth insertion of Iñupiak history and customs adeptly bring the reader into both stories. **Health H1, H2, H4, H5, LA1, LA9, SSII, SSIII, SSIV, SSV, SSIX American Indians, Inupiat**

*The Broken Bike Boy and the Queen of 33rd Street*

By Sharon Flake. 2007. 132 pages. Jump at the Sun/Hyperion. (F) **Grades 4–6**

---

Fifth-grader Queenie reveals her own foibles as she tells the story of the new boy, Leroy, who smells bad, rides a broken old bike, and tells his classmates he's a prince from Senegal. Her mean-spirited comments, which she interprets as

“telling the truth,” ensure that she has no friends at school. Queenie is an adept liar, can usually manipulate her parents, and is determined to prove that Leroy is a fake. When she sneakily learns that he is helping an old man, Queenie begins to see that truth can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Queenie’s realistic view of how others see her may help readers better analyze their own relationships. Health H2, HE4, H5, H6, LA1, LA9, SSIII, SSIV, SSV African Americans

### *Confessions of a Closet Catholic*

By Sarah Littman. 2005. 193 pages. Dutton. (F) **Grades 6–8**

Justine Silver is Jewish, and a middle child who thinks her parents love her less than they do her siblings. The family has just moved; Justine’s new best friend, Mary Catherine, is Catholic, so Justine decides she wants to be Catholic, too. She searches for her identity, her religion, and her place in her family, all while dealing with the death of her beloved grandmother. When she goes to confession at Mary Catherine’s church, she is surprised when the wise priest suggests she explore her own Jewish faith. In this funny yet serious novel, Littman addresses one of the important issues preteens and teens face—how, or if, they will follow in the religious traditions of their parents. She provides the venue for readers to explore their own feelings about several issues: growing up, a sense of insecurity, death, and relationships with boys. Health HE2, HE5, LA1, SSIV Jewish Americans

### *Ethan, Suspended*

By Pamela Ehrenberg. 2007. 266 pages. Eerdmans. (F) **Grades 5–8**

When he is sent to stay with his old-fashioned, frugal grandparents in Washington, DC, eighth-grader Ethan Oppenheimer has no idea he will actually live with them and go to the nearby inner-city school. He’s been suspended from his affluent suburban school, and his divorcing parents simply can’t cope. Now Ethan faces new challenges as the sole Jewish kid among street-savvy black and Hispanic groups at Parker Junior High. Slowly, he finds his place with the help of new friends and the jazz band teacher, Mr. Harper. He also discovers more about his mom’s family and how the 1968 race riots affected them. The first-person narrative is packed with dialogue and underscores Ethan’s confusion and small joys as he matures. Health, Social Studies H2, H5, LA1, LA9, SSIII, SSIV African Americans, Jewish Americans, Latinos

*Finding Family*

By Tonya Bolden. 2010. 181 pages. Bloomsbury. (F) **Grades 4–8**

---

Twelve-year-old Delana has lived with her wealthy grandpa and great aunt Tilly since her mother's death after childbirth. She memorizes stories about her extended family as she and her aunt line up family photos and talk about each person's character and life. When her mysterious cousin Ambertine secretly visits her, Delana is stunned to learn most of the stories aren't true. As she uncovers the truth about her mother—and missing father—Delana must decide if she's strong enough to break free from her sheltered, highly controlled existence. Inspired by the faces on old photographs in her personal collection, Bolden spins an intriguing tale set at the turn of the century in Charleston, West Virginia. Delana's first-person narrative adds to the mystery of the story. **Health H2, H5, LA1, SSII, SSIII, SSIV African Americans**

*Freshman Focus*

By Carla R. Sarratt. 2007. 292 pages. Outskirts Press. (F) **Grades 7–10**

---

Freshmen Kendra, Lamar, Destiny, and Steven are all excited to start school at Carter G. Woodson High in Charlotte, North Carolina. Reflecting the author's experiences in a predominantly black high school in suburban Cleveland, the story is a tribute to the Sweet Valley High series she loved as a girl. Readers follow Kendra's experiences as she and Destiny (whom she can't stand) are courted by older girls to join an exclusive, secret club. At the same time, popular class clown Lamar is having difficulty buckling down regarding the rigors of high school academics, and Steven, new to the school, is adjusting to a foster family while he attempts to distance himself from his past. Filled with believable dialogue, warm family interactions, and detailed descriptions of the freshman experience, this is a highly readable novel, if at times somewhat choppy written. Readers will look forward to hearing more about the characters in *Just Be* (2008). **Health HE2, HE5, LA1, SSIII, SSIV, SSV African Americans**

*Jimi & Me*

By Jaime Adoff. 2005. 329 pages. Jump at the Sun/Hyperion. (F) **Grades 7–9**

---

When his father dies in a convenience store shooting, Keith James thinks this is the worst thing that could ever happen. However, his life is uprooted even more

when he and his mother move from Brooklyn, New York, to Hollow Falls, Ohio, to live with his aunt. They have no money; Keith is the only biracial guy in his school; and he can't figure out why his mother is so sad all the time. He especially misses playing Jimi Hendrix tunes with his father. He isn't prepared for the unexpected turn of events that leads him on an angry search for a family member he never knew existed. Adoff's free verse, short sections, and use of first person bring Keith's personality to life. The book may sound depressing, and it is—and it isn't. Health H2, H5, LA1, LA9, SSII, SSIII, SSIV African Americans, Mixed-Race Americans

### *Keeping the Night Watch*

By Hope Anita Smith and Earl B. Lewis. 2008. 73 pages. Holt. (F) Grades 5–9

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In this sequel to *The Way a Door Closes* (2003) readers again meet 15-year-old C. J. His family is dealing with raw emotions as they adjust to the father's reappearance. Their trust was broken when he left; now each must come to terms with his return. The family pretends everything is fine; but, individually that isn't the case. C. J. in particular is angry at his father and doesn't want to be hurt again. As he lets go of his anger, readers find hope that father and son will rebuild their relationship. Smith's powerful free verse poems and Earl B. Lewis's illustrations portray a family rebuilding itself. Health H2, H5, LA1, SSIII, SSIV African Americans

### *Little Divas*

By Philana Marie Boles. 2006. 164 pages. HarperCollins/Amistad. (F) Grades 5–7

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With her mother in Ghana for a year, 12-year-old Cassidy lives with her father and spends her time with her bossy cousin, Rikki. Both girls can't wait for seventh grade to begin, but when Cassidy discovers her divorced parents plan to send her to a snooty private school, the summer seems ruined. Worse, class cutup Travis Jones simply won't leave her alone. She's been mad at him for ages, but he's gotten really cute; what if he really does like her? Guided by Mary, Rikki's sister, who regularly sneaks out to see her boyfriend, the girls plan to attend a forbidden pool party where they hope to set their new reputations as divas—cool girls who are also nice. The first-person narrative is full of dialogue and flows smoothly. Strong family connections, a positive depiction of contemporary African American life and language, and details involving fashion, boys, and a girl's place in the world make this a great read. Health H2, H5, LA1, LA9, SSIII, SSIV African Americans

*The Other Half of My Heart*

By Sundee T. Frazier. 2010. 296 pages. Delacorte. (F) Grades 4–7

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Everyone in their town knows 11-year-olds Keira and Minni are twins—despite the fact that Keira is cinnamon brown with dark, curly hair and Minni is pale white with reddish blond hair. Minni has noticed racist attitudes toward her sister but has pushed aside her worries. Then her grandmother Minerva enters the girls in the “Miss Black Pearl Preteen” beauty pageant in North Carolina, and Minni experiences, for the first time, what it is like to stand out because of skin color. She realizes this is what Keira faces at home, and bristles when her prickly grandmother tries to make her sister appear more “white” for the pageant. When Keira accuses Minni of feeling superior to her, Minni’s worst fear seems about to come true. Exploring issues of race, prejudice, and self-concept with a compelling plot and a deft, sometimes humorous touch, this is a solid tale. Health H2, H5, LA1, SSIII, SSIV African Americans

*Outside Beauty*

By Cynthia Kadohata. 2008. 265 pages. Atheneum. (F) Grades 7–12

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Thirteen-year-old Shelby and her three sisters adore their mother, Helen. She has given them a strong sense of independence while teaching them all the ways they can use their looks to attract a rich man. The sisters have developed close bonds as they cope with their mother’s narcissistic personality and peripatetic lifestyle. When Helen must recover from a car accident, the girls are sent to their respective fathers. Shelby goes to Arkansas, where her dad runs a gum company. She misses her city lifestyle, but as she gets to know her father, she begins to appreciate this new parent. When she discovers her younger sister, Maddy, is in trouble, it takes the power of all the sisters to figure out how to reunite their family. Shelby’s first-person narrative tells a thought-provoking and fast-paced tale. Health H2, H5, H8, LA1, SSIV, SSVII Japanese Americans, Mixed-Race Americans

*The Road to Paris*

By Nikki Grimes. 2006. 153 pages. Putnam. (F) Grades 4–7

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Paris Richmond and her brother, Malcolm, flee their alcoholic mother’s abuse and are placed in foster care. Malcolm ends up in a home for boys, and Paris is



sent to live with the Lincolns, a white middle-class family. She becomes friends with a white girl in the neighborhood. However, in a cruel outburst about Paris's ethnicity, the girl's father forbids his daughter from seeing her. Although she loves the Lincolns, Paris misses Malcolm. In a too-tidy ending, Paris and Malcolm are reunited with their mother, who has successfully completed a rehabilitation program. Despite its choppy nature, the book presents a positive picture of a foster family. It would mesh nicely with a study of individual growth or interaction of individuals and groups. Health H2, H5, LA1, SSIII, SSIV, SSV African Americans, Mixed-Race Americans

### *Secret Saturdays*

By Torrey Maldonado. 2010. 195 pages. Putnam. (F) Grades 5–8

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Middle schoolers Justin and Sean have always been close friends. They live in the same building in the rough Red Hook projects in Brooklyn. Sean's mother frequently reminds him to fight with words, not fists. Now Sean has become a bully; when he disses other students, his words are hurtful; and his fists become active as well. His grades suffer, and he begins hanging with the wrong crowd. Justin is worried—particularly when he sees Sean and his mother leave the building very early on Saturday mornings. Where do they go? With urban dialect and rapping, Justin tells the story from his perspective. Having grown up in the Red Hook projects, Maldonado applies his “firsthand knowledge of youth, fatherlessness, and poverty” to create the story. Health H2, H5, H8, LA1, LA9, SSIII, SSIV African Americans

### *Shanghai Messenger*

By Andrea Cheng. 2005. Illus. No page numbers. Lee & Low. (F) Grades 4–7

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Visiting her relatives in China for the first time, Xiao Mei doesn't understand Chinese ways and feels just as out-of-place with her mixed-race heritage in China as she does in America. But many aspects of China touch and charm her, from the warm acceptance of her grandmother Nai Nai's extended family to participating in tai chi exercises with the ladies in the park. Each page is framed by strong, orange-red patterns resembling gates, giving the perception of entering another world. The free-verse format is offset by Ed Young's soft pastel, ink, dye, charcoal, and crayon illustrations, bringing to life the experiences—and

decisions—of Xiao Mei. A pronunciation glossary is included at the beginning of the book. Health H2, H5, LA1, LA9, SSIII, SSIV, VA1, VA4, VA6 Chinese Americans, Mixed-Race Americans

*Sweet Thang*

By Allison Whittenberg. 2006. 149 pages. Delacorte. (F) **Grades 5–7**

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Life changed drastically for 11-year-old Charmaine Upshaw when her Aunt Karyn died, leaving her 3-year old son, Tracy John. Devastated by her favorite aunt's death, Charmaine worried about Tracy John's fate. Now, at 14, Charmaine knows where Tracy John lives—with her family. As she tells her own story, readers understand the sense of injustice she has felt. Charmaine shares her room with Tracy John and thinks it's unfair. Her family dotes on Tracy John, as do strangers on the street. However, Charmaine stewes with frustration bordering on anger until she babysits him. Slowly she realizes she, too, loves the spoiled little boy, nicknamed "Sweet Thang." In this coming-of-age novel, Whittenberg explores the feelings of younger adolescent girls who often say, "Life isn't fair." The fully developed characters could almost be the family next door. Health HE2, HE5, LA1, LA9, SSIII, SSIV African Americans

*The Trouble with Tessa*

By Ofelia Dumas Lachtman.

2005. 122 pages. Piñata Books/Arte Público. (F) **Grades 4–6**

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Eleven-year-old Tessa del Campo is surrounded by her family, including a lively group of extended relatives. As she tries to make her way through a boring summer, she finds yellowing pages in the bottom of a junky trunk and thinks she has found directions for magic spells. She begins her "magic" by casting a spell to prevent her little sister from calling her "Tess"—and can't believe her luck when the magic spell seems to work. Tessa's belief in her developing powers hits a major roadblock when she thinks she has cast a spell that will cause her parents to divorce. Suddenly, everything is changing. Short diary entries accompany the third-person singular narrative, giving insight as to Tessa's motives and adding interest to the text. A sprinkling of Spanish words and details about Tessa's extended family let readers know about her Latino heritage, but the focus stays on Tessa's highly imaginative view of the world. Health, Language Arts HE2, HE5, LA1, SSII, SSIII, SSIV Latinos

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