

YA Book Group Meeting
May 10, 2006
Schoharie High School

Between Mom and Jo by Julie Ann Peters (2006)

Nick describes growing up in a same sex family of two moms -- from his fondest early memories to difficulties at school and a final crisis in grade 7. Lots of love and lots of friction.

Your Eyes in Stars by M. E. Kerr (2006)

Jessica relates a most memorable summer in the 1930's, when she was best friends with a new girl, in her upstate NY town, who moved across the street from her. Sharing secrets and a fondness for prisoners from the local prison, it looks as if their friendship will be destroyed by the Nazis. Elisha's return to Germany ends their contact, but never Jessica's allegiance to Elisha.

BLACKTHORN WINTER by Kathryn Reiss

A rather conventional mystery, set in a small artists' colony in rural England. Good read, but a bit too plodding for a reluctant reader. Grades 6 to 9.

5,000 Miles to Freedom: Ellen and William Craft's Flight From Slavery by Judith and Dennis Fradin.

An outstanding book for all ages. The incredible tale of two slaves from the deep south who in the 1840's managed to escape against all odds, traveling in trains and on ferries for more than 1,000 miles. The wife was disguised as a white gentlemen, with her husband traveling as her man servant.

Onward : a Photobiography of African American Explorer Matthew Henson by Dolores Johnson.

Another tale of beating the odds. Very good for middle school.

Swear to Howdy by Wendelin Van Draanen.

Two young adolescent boys, one with an abusive father, cement their friendship with frequent doses of blood brotherhood and swear-to-howdy oaths not to divulge their pranks. This works out until a couple of the pranks have serious, then tragic consequences. Young teens will be pulled in by the humor (e.g., frog pooping in big sister's lingerie drawer), but there is plenty of thematic meat to make this a good read with a group. What does it mean to be a true friend? When is it imperative to break a promise? Why is it healthy to forgive?

Soldier X. Don Wulffson

For older teens, Soldier X recounts the story of a sixteen-year-old drafted into the German army and shipped to the Russian front during World War II. Thanks to his Russian grandparents, the young soldier is able to speak passable Russian. Thus, when he is wounded behind enemy lines, he is able to steal the uniform of a dead Russian soldier and pass himself off for several months of recovery. Lots of gore and suspense, believable narrative appeal to teens who enjoy gritty war stories, nail-biting plots, or historical fiction.

Emako Blue. Brenda Woods

This slim but powerful read revolves around the death of the title character, a gifted young singer who opts out of her tough school in South Central LA to attend a safer school in a racially diverse middle class neighborhood. It is narrated by four of her classmates, three close friends and a rival. Readers share in the hopelessness of Emako's senseless death and her inability to escape the old neighborhood. No happy endings, but a compelling book for its strengths in narrative voice and characterization.

Witch's Boy by Michael Gruber

Lump is a foundling child that is left on the doorstep of a witch in the woods. The witch is not exactly maternal, but decides to raise the child anyway with the help of a she-bear and a djinni as his tutor. Lump is not

a likeable character, perhaps due to his ugliness and he wears a mask to hide this fact. In his adolescence, they are raided by humans who chase them out of their home. Now, they are faced with making a living and end up going from one medieval town to the next performing their circus act. Along the way, they meet Hansel and Gretel, Little Red and other familiar fairy tale characters. The author weaves several fractured fairy tales into the story of Lump's magical adventures and provides a real transformation of this character in the end.

The Akhenaten Adventure by P.B. Kerr (Children of the Lamp)

When the twins, John and Philippa, both have their wisdom teeth out at the tender age of 12, the dream they have under anesthesia opens the doors to their heritage as true members of the order of "djinn" or genies, as they are commonly called in the West. Their adventure, as the title implies, truly begins when they are whisked off to London to join their Uncle Nimrod, who is a powerful djinn on the side of good. They must defeat, or try to prevent, the evil djinn, the Ifrit, from upsetting the balance of power in the world. The plan is to find the lost tomb of Akhenaten before Iblis, head of the Ifrit, does. They are whisked off to Cairo, get transformed into camels, spend some time in a glass bottle, and meet mummies. Expect two more volumes in the Children of the Lamp trilogy as the twins continue their adventures in this fun series.

Uglies by Scott Westerfeld

The story of a world where everyone is surgically transformed into a beautiful person at 16. But it's not so simple when Tally decides not to go along, for the operation does more than make a person model-beautiful. This anti-utopian novel reminded me of the *Giver*. It has been very popular with my students. There was a waiting list for the sequel, *Pretties*. Several students have also requested the third book in the series, *Specials*, which is coming out this month.

Refugees by Catherine Stine

This tells the parallel stories of Dawn, a teenage runaway in New York City in September 2001, and Johar, an Afghani refugee in a Pakistani refugee camp. I found it to be a very moving depiction of the distressing events of the fall of 2001. It also might be useful for social studies classes where novels are used as a supplement. I haven't purchased it at my school yet, so I don't know what students will think.

Tending to Grace by Kimberly Newton

This is the story of Cornelia, an unwanted 14-year old girl who stutters, taken to live with her great-aunt Agatha in the middle of nowhere. The story depicts how Cornelia comes out of her shell. I really liked and I think it will appeal to reluctant readers, especially those with less than competent parents.

Pirates! by Celia Rees

An adventure involving a sheltered English girl whose life is turned around when her father dies and she is sent off to Jamaica and the family plantations. She finds much beauty and harshness there, and she and a slave girl run away when they get into trouble and end up joining a pirate ship as female crew members. They enjoy their adventures but find that they can't outrun their problems. Lots of historical information in an exciting package with a good cover. A sequel seems likely. Will appeal to older students but could work for better younger readers.