

Author: Pfeffer, Susan Beth

Title: Life as We Knew It

Publisher: Harcourt

Date: 2006

ISBN: 0152058265

Price: \$17.00

#of pgs: 352

Call number: FIC PFE

Annotation: A frighteningly plausible tale of an asteroid hitting the moon and throwing the Earth off its axis causing violent earthquakes, massive tsunamis, an increase in volcanic activity and millions of deaths. The book follows Miranda, a high school aged girl and her family as they prepare for the worst. The world as we know it is changed. Miranda is no longer worried about the everyday concerns of a normal teenager as she now has to fight the elements, starvation, and disease in a daily struggle for survival. Journal writing keeps Miranda focused and keeps the reader enthralled waiting to see if there is a future for this family and others.

Strength: Well depicted characters and believable plot development.

Author: Wolf, Allan

Title: Zane's Trace

Publisher: Candlewick Press

Date: 2007

ISBN: 9780763628581

Price: \$16.99

#of pgs: 177

Call number: FIC WOL

Annotation: Zane's Trace is the story Zane Guesswind, a young man whose teenage years are made all the more difficult by the fact that his family is troubled by mental illness, substance abuse and suicide. To make matters worse, Zane has epilepsy, is an outsider in school and has to live with his aging and crotchety grandfather who treats Zane, at best, with contempt. As a way of working through his pain and expressing how he feels, Zane writes and draws obsessively with permanent markers all over his bedroom walls until one day his frantic scribbles seem to start coming true. First, the bully at school, who won't give Zane a break, suddenly moves away the day after Zane wishes, (in writing on his wall), that he'd just disappear. The story quickly changes gears, however, when, believing he has similarly caused the death of his grandfather, Zane steals his father's car, (a 1969 Plymouth Barracuda), and begins a 300+ mile trek to Zanesville, Ohio. There, Zane plans to shoot himself at his mother's graveside, using the heirloom pistol that she used to kill herself when Zane was only a child. Along the way, he picks up a mysterious hitchhiker, Libba, and meets motley, and even ghostly, cast of characters, each of whom helps Zane come to terms with which he is and the hand that life has dealt him.

Strength: Written almost entirely in free verse, this novel is fast paced, funny and poignant. It handles serious subject matter with intelligence and honesty without becoming maudlin. The characters are realistic, easy to relate to and readers instantly care what happens to them.

Weakness: Limited profanity and serious subject matter. However, all topics are handled tastefully.

Author: Smith, Roland

Title: Peak

Publisher: Harcourt

Date: 2007

ISBN: 978-0-15-202417-8

Price: \$15

#of pgs: 246

Call number: FIC SMI

Annotation: Peak Marcello is 14 and has a passion for climbing, so much so that he is arrested for scaling tall buildings. His family makes a deal with the judge to send him to live with his father, who is preparing for a Himalayan expedition to climb Mount Everest. Peak could be the youngest climber to reach the summit. His father's motives for wanting to join the group are less than fatherly as he is using the trip for financial gain and publicity. While preparing for the climb Peak works under a Sherpa for training and befriends Sun-jo, a Nepalese boy his own age. As the climbers are about to make final preparations an overzealous Chinese police captain searches them for passport and underage violations. Mix the dangers of mount climbing, family issues, international cultural struggles and Peak's difficult decision concerning all of those issues and you will find this story well-crafted.

Strength: Well crafted plot development; exotic setting; cultural diversity; adventure

Author: Sheth, Kashmira

Title: Keeping Corner

Publisher: Hyperion

Date: 2007

ISBN: 9780786838592

Price: \$15.99

#of pgs: 281

Call number: FIC SHE

Annotation: Keeping Corner is the story of a young girl named Leela who has been sheltered and spoiled her entire life. She and her family live in a small village on the border of India and Pakistan (around 1918-19) where Leela focuses most of her attention on jewelry, clothing and her pending arranged marriage to a boy she hardly knows. She has no use for or interest in school, learning or the growing unrest in her country between the British colonists and the people of India; many of whom live in poverty. Rather, Leela spends her days looking forward to the presents and adoration that she will receive when she gets married. But when Leela's new husband dies and her life changes forever. Instead of being showered with attention and expensive baubles, she finds that she must "keep corner" for an entire year. During this period of isolation, Leela must shave her head and give away her most prized possessions in preparation for the life of mourning she will now be expected to live for the remainder of her life. However, it is only during this period of seclusion that Leela's eyes are opened to the plight of her countrymen, the political unrest that is shaking her nation and the wave of excitement being started by the non-violent protests of a man named Gandhi.

Strength: Historical fiction with sympathetic and interesting characters. Topics relating to multiculturalism and social justice are explored with honesty and wit.

Weakness: Unfamiliar terminology

Author: Mass, Wendy

Title: Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life

Publisher: Little, Brown and Co Date: 2006 ISBN: 0316058297
Price: 15.99 #of pgs: 289 Call number: FIC MAS

Annotation: A week before his thirteenth birthday, Jeremy fink receives a package in the mail from his father who died five years ago. The package contains a wooden box with the cryptic message "The Meaning of Life" engraved on the top. Unfortunately, the box has an intricate locking mechanism and the keys have been lost. Jeremy and his friend Lizzy, embark on a quest to find the missing keys. This brings them into contact with many interesting characters who share *their* ideas about the meaning of life.

Strength: Refreshingly optimistic story with two strong main characters - one a boy and the other a girl.

Author: Riordan, Rick

Title: Lightning Thief

Publisher: Hyperion Date: 2005 ISBN: 9781415662984
Price: #of pgs: 375 Call number: FIC RIO

Annotation: This fast paced adventure which combines ancient Greek mythology with modern day appeal is narrated in first person by the main character, Percy (Perseus) Jackson. Percy is a twelve year old boy about to be kicked out of school for the third time when he finds out he is the half mortal son of a Greek god. He is then sent on a quest to recover Zeus's stolen lightning bolt which leads to an action packed story.

Strength: Fast-paced, action packed and funny. Book one in the Percy Jackson and the Olympians series.

Author: Hill, Kirkpatrick

Title: Do Not Pass Go

Publisher: Margaret K. McElderry Books Date: 2007 ISBN: 9781416914006
Price: \$15.99 #of pgs: 229 Call number: FIC HIL

Annotation: *Do Not Pass Go* is the story of Alaskan high-schooler Deet: a good kid who has to take a leadership role in his family because his parents, although loving, are a bit flighty and irresponsible. Deet feels burdened by having to be the "adult" at home and these emotions are compounded by his growing alienation at school. When his father is arrested for drug possession and ultimately sent to prison, Deet's first thoughts are not about his family, but about what the kids at school are going to think of him. Reality finally sets in, however, when Deet's family-life has to change radically as a result of the arrest. At first Deet is angry with his father for "ruining his life," but soon Deet slips into a pattern of visiting his dad in jail every afternoon, while his mother learns to be the family bread winner. Eventually, Deet's view of prisons and prisoners begins to change as he starts to see the people in prison through his father's eyes. Through their stories, Deet sees the hopelessness of prison life as well as the reality that rehabilitation is not

always possible. However, along the way, Deet also learns to have sympathy for people whose lives have followed an almost inevitable path while also realizing that something positive may come from his father's incarceration after all.

Strength: Realistic characters and story. Serious subject matter is treated honestly and tastefully.

Author: Jinks, Catherine

Title: Evil Genius

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Date: 2007 ISBN: 978-015-205988-0
Price: \$17.00 #of pgs: 486 Call number: FIC JIN

Annotation: This complex, engrossing tale of deception features Cadel, a 13-year old super-brain, who is being groomed for world domination. His mentor is his psychologist, the mysterious Thaddeus. Before entering this new "school" Cadel created the most spectacular traffic jam in Sydney. He also managed to cause all his classmates to fail their finals. His parents send him to this special school where he takes courses in such things as "Copying Skills" and "Accounting" which really are tutorials in embezzlement and lying. Cadel finds himself involved in multiple webs of intrigue, which, along with his own efforts to manipulate faculty and fellow students, result in numerous fatalities. He is a sympathetic anti-villain.

Strength: multiple layers of deception create a masterful plot; fanciful science fiction

Weakness: some may be turned away by the length of the novel, 486 pgs.

Author: Cooney, Caroline B.

Title: Diamonds in the Shadow

Publisher: Delacorte Press Date: Sept. 2007 ISBN: 978-0385732611
Price: \$16.99 #of pgs: 228 Call number: FIC COO

Annotation: *Diamonds in the Shadow* introduces you to two families: The Finches who live in suburban Connecticut. They are good people, but naïve about the task they about to undertake. You will also meet the battle-scarred Amabo family of African refugees who are temporarily living with the Finches. These two families come together as the Finches agree to host the church-sponsored family from Sierra Leone. At first skeptical, teenage Jared warms quickly to the Amabos, especially to Mattu who is adjusting well to American life. The two boys bond quickly. On the other hand, sixth grader Mopsy loves her new friend Alake. However, as hard as Mopsy tries, Alake does not respond to anything Mopsy says or does, and has chronic nightmares. To confirm a growing suspicion about the family, Jared and Mopsy snoop through a box that is supposed to be the remains for Matte's grandparents and discover uncut diamonds. They begin noticing how this family doesn't really seem to act like a family at all. While the Amabos are adjusting to their new life and happy to escape their terrible past, a killer lurks closely watching their every step. Suddenly, both families find themselves in terrible danger.

Strength: Incredible plot! Great characters! A story that you will not want to end!
Grabs you at the end!

Author: Parker, Robert

Title: Edenville Owls

Publisher: Philomel Books

Date: 2007

ISBN: 978-0-399-24656-2

Price: \$18.00

#of pgs: 194

Call number: FIC PAR

Annotation: It is 1945, the end of World War II, and 8th grader, Bobby Murphy takes on two major challenges: (1) help free his teacher, Miss Delaney, from the clutches of a sinister stranger and (2) keep the Owls (his coachless, junior high basketball team) which he does by taking on the unofficial role of coach in addition to his player role. After witnessing an altercation between his teacher and a strange man, Bobby decides that he must get involved. With Owls' support, he investigates the stranger and ultimately saves his teacher from her abuser. This is a mystery that plays out to the end. Readers will like 14 year-old Bobby who is a true problem-solver and a champion of doing the right thing. His stock phrase, "I'll figure it out," is testimony to his relentless belief that challenges are meant to be solved. The author's carefully crafted dialogue between Bobby and his special friend, Joanie, is meaningful and wise for their ages. Lastly, using Bobby's thoughts as a launching point, the author effectively depicts the culture of post World War II era.

Strength: heart-pounding suspense, poignant coming of age moments

Weakness: Contains a few derogatory racial terms, which although true to the characters' voices, may jar contemporary readers.