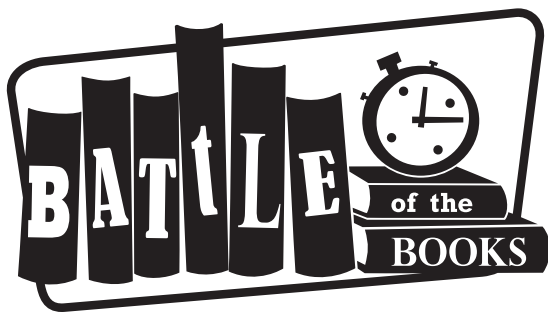


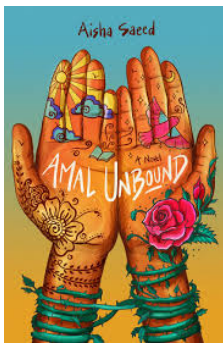
Battle of the Books 2019-2020



The list is in! This list contains review &/or summaries from Amazon.com. If there was a review on Common Sense Media I copied the link. (<https://www.commonsensemedia.org>)

There are a few mature titles on the list. As a parent, you have the right to choose what your child reads. Go through the list and decide what is appropriate for your child.

Amal Unbound, by Aisha Saeed



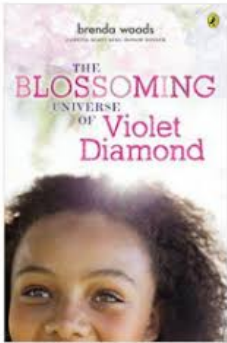
School Library Journal Review: "This beautifully crafted and moving story will encourage middle grade readers to ponder such issues as indentured servitude, class, and resistance. Saeed's well-developed narrative will evoke empathy for all those around the world like Amal, who are not guaranteed freedom or education. An inspired read for all, particularly for those who have followed Malala Yousafzai's story or enjoyed Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* or Tara Sullivan's *The Bitter Side of Sweet*."

Summary: The compelling story of a girl's fight to regain her life and dreams after being forced into indentured servitude. Life is quiet and ordinary in Amal's Pakistani village, but she had no complaints, and besides, she's busy pursuing her dream of becoming a teacher one day. Her dreams are temporarily dashed when--as the eldest daughter--she must stay home from school to take care of her siblings. Amal is upset, but she doesn't lose hope and finds ways to continue learning. Then the unimaginable happens--after an accidental run-in with the son of her village's corrupt landlord, Amal must work as his family's servant to pay off her own family's debt.

Life at the opulent Khan estate is full of heartbreak and struggle for Amal--especially when she inadvertently makes an enemy of a girl named Nabila. Most troubling, though, is Amal's growing awareness of the Khans' nefarious dealings. When it becomes clear just how far they will go to protect their interests, Amal realizes she will have to find a way to work with others if they are ever to exact change in a cruel status quo, and if Amal is ever to achieve her dreams.

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-reviews/amal-unbound>

The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond, by Brenda Woods

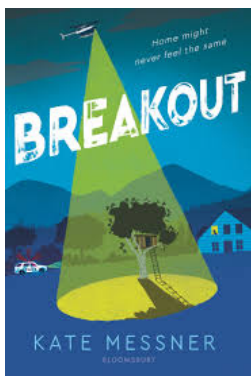


School Library Journal Review: Violet Diamond's father died in a car accident two months before her birth, and the 11-year-old has always felt that a piece of her was missing. As the daughter of an African American father and Caucasian mother, she is frustrated with narrow racial assumptions directed at her by those living in her predominantly white neighborhood in Seattle. After eavesdropping on an eye-opening family conversation, Violet digs around and finds out that Roxanne Diamond, the estranged paternal grandmother she's never met, is having an art exhibition in Seattle, and the resourceful tween vows to meet her. Complex family history renders their first meeting awkward and tense, but Roxanne

genuinely wants to be involved in her granddaughter's life. Violet travels with her grandmother to Los Angeles to meet her father's relatives and better understand her African American heritage. Violet's charming quirks, which include nighttime wishing rituals and keeping a mental catalogue of sophisticated vocabulary words, prove endearing. In this quiet story, Woods's admirably touches upon profound issues related to identity and race and tenderly conveys intergenerational bonds. Grades 4–6.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/the-blossoming-universe-of-violet-diamond>

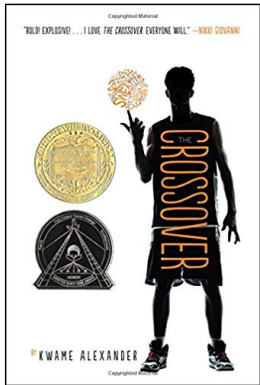
Breakout, by Kate Messner



Summary: Told in letters, poems, text messages, news stories, and comics--a series of documents Nora collects for the Wolf Creek Community Time Capsule Project--*Breakout* is a thrilling story that will leave readers thinking about who's really welcome in the places we call home.

Nora Tucker is looking forward to summer vacation in Wolf Creek--two months of swimming, popsicles, and brushing up on her journalism skills for the school paper. But when two inmates break out of the town's maximum-security prison, everything changes. Doors are locked, helicopters fly over the woods, and police patrol the school grounds. Worst of all, everyone is on edge, and fear brings out the worst in some people Nora has known her whole life. Even if the inmates are caught, she worries that home might never feel the same.

Crossover, by Kwame Alexander

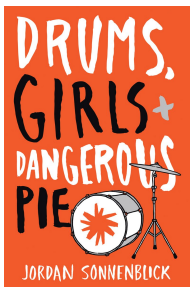


School Library Journal Review: Twins Josh and Jordan are junior high basketball stars, thanks in large part to the coaching of their dad, a former professional baller who was forced to quit playing for health reasons, and the firm, but loving support of their assistant-principal mom. Josh, better known as Filthy McNasty, earned his nickname for his enviable skills on the court: "...when Filthy gets hot/He has a SLAMMERIFIC SHOT." In this novel in verse, the brothers begin moving apart from each other for the first time. Jordan starts dating the "pulchritudinous" Miss Sweet Tea, and Josh has a tough time keeping his jealousy and feelings of abandonment in control. Alexander's poems vary from the

pulsing, aggressive beats of a basketball game ("My shot is F L O W I N G, Flying, fluttering.... ringaling and SWINGALING/Swish. Game/over") to the more introspective musings of a child struggling into adolescence ("Sit beside JB at dinner. He moves./Tell him a joke. He doesn't even smile....Say I'm sorry/but he won't listen"). Despite his immaturity, Josh is a likable, funny, and authentic character. Underscoring the sports and the fraternal tension is a portrait of a family that truly loves and supports one another. Alexander has crafted a story that vibrates with energy and heart and begs to be read aloud. A slam dunk. Gr 6–10

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/the-crossover>

Drums, Girls & Dangerous Pie, by Jordan Sonnenblick

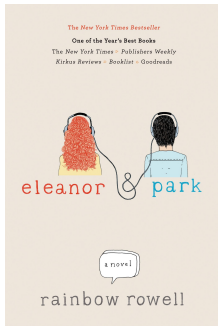


Booklist *Starred Review*: Steven Alper is a typical eighth-grader--smarter than some, a better drummer than most, but with the usual girl problems and family trials. Then, on October 7, his five-year-old brother, Jeffrey, falls, has a nosebleed that doesn't stop, and is diagnosed with leukemia. All hell breaks loose. Mrs. Alper's days and nights revolve around getting Jeffrey to his chemotherapy treatments, and Mr. Alper retreats into a shell, coming out only occasionally to weep over the mounting medical bills. Steven becomes the forgotten son, who throws

himself into drumming, even as he quits doing his homework and tries to keep his friends from finding out about Jeffrey's illness. A story that could have morphed into melodrama is saved by reality, rawness, and the wit Sonnenblick infuses into Steven's first-person voice. The recriminations, cares, and nightmares that come with a cancer diagnosis are all here, underscored by vomiting, white blood cell counts, and chemotherapy ports. Yet, this is also about regrouping, solidarity, love, and hope. Most important for a middle-grade audience, Sonnenblick shows that even in the midst of tragedy, life goes on, love can flower, and the one thing you can always change is yourself. Gr. 5-8.

Eleanor & Park, by Rainbow Rowell

** Note, this book contains mature content more suitable for 8th graders.



A *New York Times* Best Seller!

A 2014 Michael L. Printz Honor Book for Excellence in Young Adult Literature
Eleanor & Park is the winner of the 2013 *Boston Globe* Horn Book Award for Best Fiction Book.

A *Publishers Weekly* Best Children's Book of 2013

A *New York Times* Book Review Notable Children's Book of 2013

A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Teen Book of 2013

An NPR Best Book of 2013

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, March 2013: While *Eleanor & Park* is technically classified as YA lit and has a cutesy cover, don't let the stigma of "books for teens" fool or deter you. It is written *about* teens, sure, but the themes are so universal that anyone who survived high school will relate to the lives of the two protagonists. Eleanor is the new girl in town and her wild red hair and patchwork outfits are not helping her blend in. She ends up sitting next to Park on the bus, whose tendencies towards comic books don't jibe with the rest of his family's love of sports. They sit in awkward silence every day until Park notices that Eleanor is reading his comics over his shoulder; he begins to slide them closer to her side of the seat and thus begins their love story. Their relationship grows gradually--making each other mixed tapes (it is 1986 after all) and discussing X-Men characters--until they both find themselves looking forward to the bus ride more than any other part of the day. Things aren't easy: Eleanor is bullied at school and then goes home to a threatening family situation; Park's parents do not approve of Eleanor's awkward ways. Ultimately, though, this is a book about two people who just really, really like each other and who believe that they can overcome any obstacle standing in the way of their happiness. It's a gem of a book.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/eleanor-park>

Esperanza Rising, by Pam Muñoz Ryan



Pura Belpré Award Winner

IRA Notable Book for a Global Society

New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing

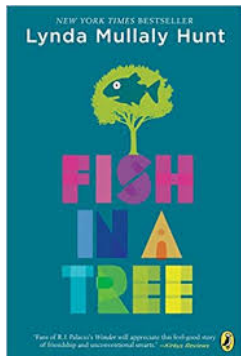
Summary: Esperanza thought she'd always live with her family on their ranch in Mexico--she'd always have fancy dresses, a beautiful home, and servants. But a sudden tragedy forces Esperanza and Mama to flee to California during the Great Depression, and to settle

in a camp for Mexican farm workers. Esperanza isn't ready for the hard labor, financial struggles, or lack of acceptance she now faces. When their new life is threatened, Esperanza must find a way to rise above her difficult circumstances--Mama's life, and her own, depend on it.

School Library Journal Review: Ryan uses the experiences of her own Mexican grandmother as the basis for this compelling story of immigration and assimilation, not only to a new country but also into a different social class. Esperanza's expectation that her 13th birthday will be celebrated with all the material pleasures and folk elements of her previous years is shattered when her father is murdered by bandits. His powerful stepbrothers then hold her mother as a social and economic hostage, wanting to force her remarriage to one of them, and go so far as to burn down the family home. Esperanza's mother then decides to join the cook and gardener and their son as they move to the United States and work in California's agricultural industry. They embark on a new way of life, away from the uncles, and Esperanza unwillingly enters a world where she is no longer a princess but a worker. Set against the multiethnic, labor-organizing era of the Depression, the story of Esperanza remaking herself is satisfyingly complete, including dire illness and a difficult romance. Grade 6-9.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/esperanza-rising>

Fish in a Tree, by Lynda Mullaly Hunt



School Library Journal Review: In her second middle grade novel (*One for the Murphys*, 2012), Mullaly Hunt again paints a nuanced portrayal of a sensitive, smart girl struggling with circumstances beyond her control. Ally is great at math, and her ability to visualize moving pictures makes her an amazing artist, but she has a terrible secret: reading is almost impossible for her. By using her wits and adopting a troublemaking persona, she's been able to avoid anyone finding out a truth she is deeply ashamed of, but a new teacher at school seems to see right through the defenses she's

built. While Ally struggles to accept the help that Mr. Daniels offers, she also deals with a father deployed in the Middle East, crushing loneliness, and an authentically awful set of mean girls at school. Ally's raw pain and depression are vividly rendered, while the diverse supporting cast feels fully developed. As the perceptive teacher who finally offers the diagnosis of dyslexia, Mr. Daniels is an inspirational educator whose warmth radiates off the page. Best of all, Mullaly Hunt eschews the unrealistic feel-good ending for one with hard work and small changes. Ally's journey is heartwarming but refreshingly devoid of schmaltz. Gr 4-6

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/fish-in-a-tree>

Front Desk, by Kelly Yang



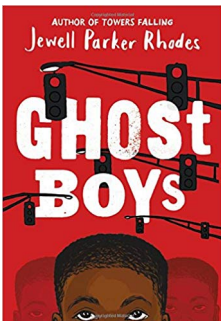
Awards and Praise for *Front Desk*:

Asian / Pacific American Award for Children's Literature
Parents' Choice Gold Medal Fiction Award Winner
NPR Best Books of the Year
Kirkus Reviews Best Books of the Year
Publishers Weekly Best Books of the Year
Washington Post Best Books of the Year
Amazon Best Books of the Year
School Library Journal Best Books of the Year
Bookpage Best Books of the Year
New York Public Library Best Books of the Year
Chicago Public Library Best Books of the Year
Top Ten Debut Novels 2018 - ALA Booklist

School Library Journal Review: Mia Tang and her parents expected to work hard when they came to the United States, but they had no idea how difficult things would be. After a year or two struggling to make ends meet, they find themselves managing a motel for a cruel and exploitive owner. The work is exhausting and the problems are many, but the Tangs approach their new responsibility with determination, creativity, and compassion, making friends everywhere and sheltering a trickle of immigrants in worse straits than themselves. Ten-year-old Mia takes over the front desk, and makes it her own, while dreaming of a future as a writer. Based on Yang's own experiences as a new immigrant in the 1980s and 1990s, her novel speaks openly of hardship, poverty, assault, racism, and bullying, but keeps a light, positive tone throughout. Mia herself is an irresistible protagonist, and it is a pleasure to see both her writing and her power grow through a series of letters that she sends to remedy injustices. The hefty and satisfying dose of wish fulfillment that closes the story feels fully earned by the specificity and detailed warmth of Yang's setup. Many young readers will see themselves in Mia and her friends. VERDICT A swiftly moving plot and a winsome protagonist make this a first purchase for any collection, especially where realistic fiction is in demand. Gr 4-6

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/front-desk>

Ghost Boys, by Jewell Parker Rhodes

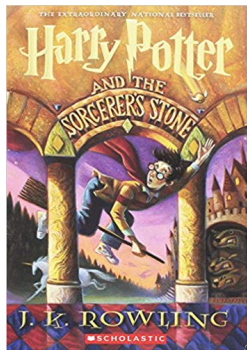


School Library Journal Review: The Towers Falling author once again tackles a timely yet difficult subject. In Chicago, 12-year-old black youth Jerome is shot and killed by a white police officer who mistakes a toy gun for a real one. As a ghost, Jerome witnesses the aftermath gripping both his family and that of the police officers. Jerome also meets another ghost—that of Emmett Till, a black boy murdered in 1955. Through Till's story, he learns of the hundreds of other "ghost boys" left to roam and stop history from continually repeating itself. The only person who can see Jerome is the daughter of the white

police officer, Sarah, and through her eyes, he realizes that his family isn't the only one affected by the tragedy. Two families are destroyed with one split decision, and Sarah and Jerome together try to heal both of their families, along with Jerome's friend Carlos. It was Carlos' toy gun that Jerome was playing with, leaving Carlos with great guilt and the intense desire to protect Jerome's little sister, Kim, from bullies and other sorrows. Deftly woven and poignantly told, this a story about society, biases both conscious and unconscious, and trying to right the wrongs of the world. VERDICT Rhodes captures the all-too-real pain of racial injustice and provides an important window for readers who are just beginning to explore the ideas of privilege and implicit bias. Gr 4-8

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/ghost-boys>

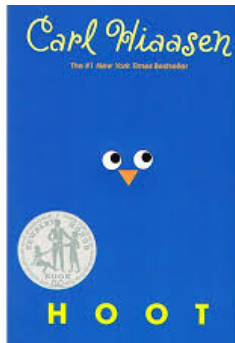
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, by J. K. Rowling



Publishers Weekly Review: Readers are in for a delightful romp with this award-winning debut from a British author who dances in the footsteps of P.L. Travers and Roald Dahl. As the story opens, mysterious goings-on ruffle the self-satisfied suburban world of the Dursleys, culminating in a trio of strangers depositing the Dursleys' infant nephew Harry in a basket on their doorstep. After 11 years of disregard and neglect at the hands of his aunt, uncle and their swinish son Dudley, Harry suddenly receives a visit from a giant named Hagrid, who informs Harry that his mother and father were a witch and a wizard, and that he is to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry himself. Most surprising of all, Harry is a legend in the witch world for having survived an attack by the evil sorcerer Voldemort, who killed his parents and left Harry with a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. And so the fun begins, with Harry going off to boarding school like a typical English kid?only his supplies include a message-carrying owl and a magic wand. There is enchantment, suspense and danger galore (as well as enough creepy creatures to satisfy the most bogeymen-loving readers, and even a magical game of soccerlike Quidditch to entertain sports fans) as Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione plumb the secrets of the forbidden third floor at Hogwarts to battle evil and unravel the mystery behind Harry's scar. Rowling leaves the door wide open for a sequel; bedazzled readers will surely clamor for one. Ages 8-12.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerers-stone>

Hoot, by Carl Hiaasen

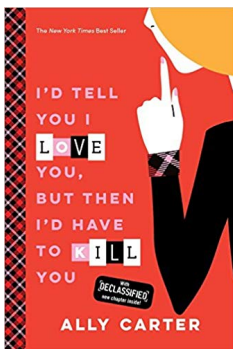


Publishers Weekly Review: With a Florida setting and proenvironment, antidevelopment message, Hiaasen (Sick Puppy) returns to familiar turf for his first novel for young readers. Characteristically quirky characters and comic twists will surely gain the author new fans, though their attention may wander during his narrative's intermittently protracted focus on several adults, among them a policeman and the manager of a construction site for a new franchise of a pancake restaurant chain. Both men are on a quest to discover who is sabotaging the site at night, including such

pranks as uprooting survey stakes, spray-painting the police cruiser's windows while the officer sleeps within and filling the portable potties with alligators. The story's most intriguing character is the boy behind the mischief, a runaway on a mission to protect the miniature owls that live in burrows underneath the site. Roy, who has recently moved to Florida from Montana, befriends the homeless boy (nicknamed Mullet Fingers) and takes up his cause, as does the runaway's stepsister. Though readers will have few doubts about the success of the kids' campaign, several suspenseful scenes build to the denouement involving the sitcom-like unraveling of a muckity-muck at the pancake house. These, along with dollops of humor, help make the novel quite a hoot indeed. Ages 10-up.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/hoot>

I'd Tell you I Love you, But Then I'd Have to Kill You, by Ally Carter

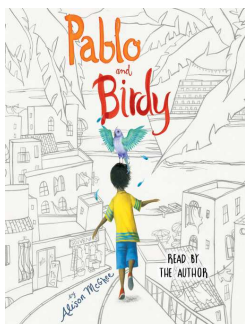


Summary: Cammie Morgan is a student at the Gallagher Academy for Exceptional Young Women, a fairly typical all-girls school-that is, if every school taught advanced martial arts in PE and the latest in chemical warfare in science, and students received extra credit for breaking CIA codes in computer class. The Gallagher Academy might claim to be a school for geniuses but it's really a school for spies. Even though Cammie is fluent in fourteen languages and capable of killing a man in seven different ways, she has no idea what to do when she meets an ordinary boy who thinks she's an ordinary girl. Sure, she can tap his phone, hack into his computer, or

track him through town with the skill of a real "pavement artist" – but can she maneuver a relationship with someone who can never know the truth about her? Cammie Morgan may be an elite spy-in-training, but in her sophomore year, she's on her most dangerous mission-falling in love.

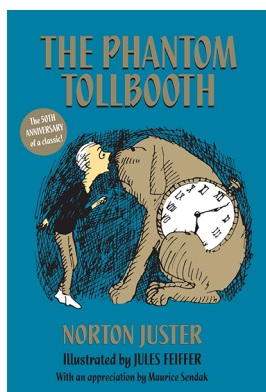
<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/id-tell-you-i-love-you-but-then-id-have-to-kill-you>

Pablo And Birdy, by Alison McGhee



From School Library Journal Review: An exploration of family and how sometimes special bonds demand great sacrifices. Pablo washed up on the beach of Isla strapped to a baby pool 10 years ago, along with Birdy, a flightless parrot. Where he came from and how he ended up in the ocean with only Birdy to watch over him are mysteries—ones Pablo allows himself to think about only on the anniversary of that fateful day. Isla is a picturesque beachside town famous for its birds, including one whose existence has never been verified: the Seafaring Parrot, who, according to local legend, has seen all and remembers all. As the anniversary of Pablo's arrival nears, a storm is predicted that will bring with it the "winds of change," which spell fortune lost or fortune gained. The only one who may know about Pablo's origins is Birdy. But unlike many of the birds on the island, Birdy doesn't talk. That is, until the winds of change arrive. By the time the storm is over, Pablo will have felt a whirlwind of emotions and learned that feeling sad about what he has lost doesn't take away from what he has achieved. VERDICT This understated book will appeal to readers who savor interpersonal relationships more than action-packed plots. Gr 4–6.

Phantom Tollbooth, by Norton Juster



Summary: "It seems to me that almost everything is a waste of time," Milo laments. "There's nothing for me to do, nowhere I'd care to go, and hardly anything worth seeing." This bored, bored young protagonist who can't see the point to anything is knocked out of his glum humdrum by the sudden and curious appearance of a tollbooth in his bedroom. Since Milo has absolutely nothing better to do, he dusts off his toy car, pays the toll, and drives through. What ensues is a journey of mythic proportions, during which Milo encounters countless odd characters who are anything but dull.

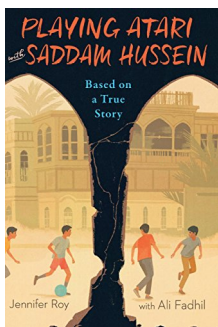
Norton Juster received (and continues to receive) enormous praise for this original, witty, and oftentimes hilarious novel, first published in 1961. In an introductory "Appreciation" written by [Maurice Sendak](#) for the 35th anniversary edition, he states, "*The Phantom Tollbooth* leaps, soars, and abounds in right notes all over the place, as any proper masterpiece must." Indeed.

As Milo heads toward Dictionopolis he meets with the Whether Man ("for after all it's more important to know whether there will be weather than what the weather will be"), passes through The Doldrums (populated by Lethargarians), and picks up a

watchdog named Tock (who has a giant alarm clock for a body). The brilliant satire and double entendre intensifies in the Word Market, where after a brief scuffle with Officer Short Shift, Milo and Tock set off toward the Mountains of Ignorance to rescue the twin Princesses, Rhyme and Reason. Anyone with an appreciation for language, irony, or *Alice in Wonderland*-style adventure will adore this book for years on end. (Ages 8 and up)

<https://www.commonensemedia.org/book-reviews/the-phantom-tollbooth>

Playing Atari with Saddam Hussein, by Jennifer Roy



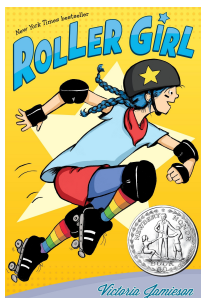
Booklist Review: "What strikes are the mundane aspects of the brief war: going out to play and explore a familiar but ruined neighborhood, the boredom and fear of awaiting scheduled airstrikes, living with uncertainty about loved ones returning home. Still, there's room for optimism and humor despite Fadhil's harrowing experience."

School Library Journal Review: "This blending of biography, historical fiction, and realistic fiction paints a vivid portrait of daily family life in Iraq and the trials many faced."

Summary: At the start of 1991, eleven-year-old Ali Fadhil was consumed by his love for soccer, video games, and American television shows. Then, on January 17, Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein went to war with thirty-four nations led by the United States.

Over the next forty-three days, Ali and his family survived bombings, food shortages, and constant fear. Ali and his brothers played soccer on the abandoned streets of their Basra neighborhood, wondering when or if their medic father would return from the war front. Cinematic, accessible, and timely, this is the story of one ordinary kid's view of life during war.

Roller Girl, by Victoria Jamieson



School Library Journal Review: When Astrid, about to begin junior high, heads to summer roller derby camp while best friend Nicole opts for ballet camp, their relationship is jeopardized by opposing interests. This fast-paced, engrossing graphic novel featuring a lesser-known sport captures the first pangs of adolescent angst, friendship, and loyalty. Gr 5-8

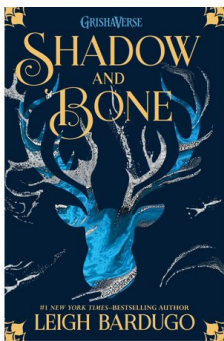
The Newbery Honor Award Winner and *New York Times* bestseller *Roller Girl* is a heartwarming graphic novel about friendship and surviving junior high through the power of roller derby—perfect for fans of Raina Telgemeier's *Smile*!

Summary: For most of her twelve years, Astrid has done everything with her best friend Nicole. But after Astrid falls in love with roller derby and signs up for derby camp, Nicole decides to go to dance camp instead. And so begins the most difficult summer of Astrid's life as she struggles to keep up with the older girls at camp, hang on to the friend she feels slipping away, and cautiously embark on a new friendship. As the end of summer nears and her first roller derby bout (and junior high!) draws closer, Astrid realizes that maybe she *is* strong enough to handle the bout, a lost friendship, and middle school... in short, strong enough to be a roller girl.

In this graphic novel debut that earned a Newbery Honor and five starred reviews, real-life derby girl Victoria Jamieson has created an inspiring coming-of-age story about friendship, perseverance, and girl power!

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/roller-girl>

Shadow and Bone, by Leigh Bardugo



Amazon Best Books of the Month, June 2012: Alina Starkov has never been anything more than yet another orphan of her country's on-going wars...until she channels magic not seen in centuries to protect her best friend, Mal. Her new-found powers attract the attention of the Darkling, the most powerful of the country's magic-wielders. He tells Alina that her magic could heal the Shadow Fold, if she can only learn to control it--and if she agrees to trust the Darkling despite the mystery that surrounds his very existence. Leigh Bardugo brings a cast of well-defined characters and a unique magic system to her lavishly imagined world, where light doesn't always conquer dark and deception runs so deep that it becomes truth. And yet, against all expectations, the bonds of sacrifice and friendship remain too strong to be severed in this thrilling debut.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/shadow-and-bone-the-grisha-trilogy-book-1>

Spy School, by Stuart Gibbs

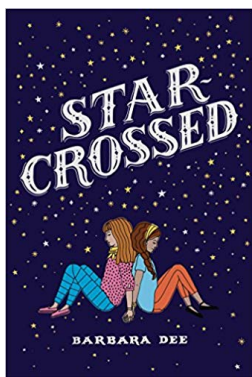


Summary: Like many kids, Ben Ripley imagines life as a secret agent would be pretty awesome -- so when he learns he's been recruited to the C.I.A.'s top secret Academy of Espionage, it sounds too good to be true. And it is. From the moment he arrives -- and ends up in the middle of an enemy attack -- Ben finds Spy School is going to be far more difficult, dastardly and dangerous than he expected. Even worse, he soon discovers that he hasn't been recruited to become a top agent; instead, he's been brought in as bait to catch a devious double agent. Now, Ben needs a crash course in espionage so that he can catch the mole, prove his worth -- and get the girl. It won't be easy, but it'll be a very fun -- and very funny -- ride.

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/book-reviews/spy-school-book-1>

Star-Crossed, by Barbara Dee

There are MANY books titled “Star-Crossed” make sure you read the one written by Barbara Dee. This book does deal with a mature subject, but in an appropriate way for middle school.



School Library Journal Review: When it is announced that the eighth grade play will be Romeo and Juliet, Mattie and her friends shift from obsessing over boys to auditioning for the show. The class's best-looking lad, Liam, is chosen as Romeo, even though he's a clod with the lines. British-born Gemma is Juliet, naturally. Mattie's interest in Gemma intensifies, and eventually Mattie admits the crush to herself. Mattie is recast as Romeo when Liam drops out. Once the kissing scenes begin, Mattie passes out from nerves, but by opening night, she and Gemma are a brilliant, star-crossed couple. This is a mostly breezy young teen romance: the besties are supportive, the boys are pawns, the mean girls are nasty, the school cafeteria is a stage, etc. It is also a sweet coming-out story for junior high readers. The clever Shakespeare content is a bonus, and Dee deserves praise for a strong example of gender-blind casting. The charming cover art accurately portrays the spirit of the novel. VERDICT A fine choice for middle school libraries in need of accessible LGBTQ stories, and a great option for students reading or performing Romeo and Juliet. Gr 4-6