Student Reviews

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Student Reviews

Authors
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Student Reviews

A  Cooper, Ilene. *Choosing Sides.*
   FI  $12.95. 218 pp.

Jonathan Rossi thinks playing basketball for the Kennedy Middle School will be fun. But when Coach Brown breaks his leg and is replaced by the hard-driving, arrogant Coach Davidson, he begins to wonder. By quitting the team he will disappoint his father and friends, but by continuing playing he will make himself miserable. His girlfriend Robin and his cousin Mark help him make his decision.

I highly recommend this novel to sixth and seventh grade students for the Shakespearian theme it brings home: "to thine own self be true." Cooper asks of Jonathan, "How was he going to keep everyone happy and keep himself happy, too?" The answer is simple. He cannot. No one can. Each adolescent must choose sides and take his own path. Cooper grasps this theme firmly and conveys it well. Sensitive students will laugh and learn.

—Tracy L. Wright

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B  Hamilton, Morse. *Effie's House.*
   FI

*Effie's House*, by Morse Hamilton, is a disturbing story about an emotionally confused girl whose father was killed in the Viet Nam war. She fantasizes about him, eventually believing he is alive and that she is traveling with him back to his hometown.

Throughout the course of the novel, the story comes out that Effie is pregnant with her stepfather's child, which is why she is running away from her mother. Effie travels with her imaginary father, staying in peoples' empty houses, and trying to make it to a non-threatening place. The novel unfolds through what is written in Effie's green notebook to Father Jude, the only person she trusts. (However, Effie knows he will never read the notebook.)

This book is well-written and very imaginative. There are, however, parts which are sexually explicit, and some parts with strong language. A mature young adult reader would be able to handle this. I would not recommend it to anyone but a mature reader. The book is definitely not uplifting, but it does paint a powerful picture of some
serious problems that young adults may have to face. For this reason, it is worthwhile reading.

—Kristin Monson

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A


6+


Benno and Moon, two Mexican American boys living in a big city barrio, stumble across the North Sector, an abandoned section of the city. The two boys fix up a house and decide to invite several homeless children to live with them, despite a pack of wild dogs, some hoodlums, and an unknown old man who wanders nearby.

I appreciate the book’s theme—finding shelter for the homeless—and Secret City, U.S.A. illustrates the plight poignantly. Some readers might find Holman’s narrator too obtrusive, even preachy. Still, the problem of homelessness needs to be addressed. Overall, the setting, characterization, and plot work together to form a worthwhile and believable story. However, the written ghetto dialogue might confuse young readers. This book might be best read aloud, or read by older readers.

—Devan Jensen

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B

Johnston, Norma. The Time of the Cranes.

7-9


FI


Stacy’s acting gave her life purpose and promise under the direction of her teacher and mentor, Madame Karpova. Then, her life is shattered with the accidental death of her mother and the loss of her father’s job which forces them to move to New Jersey. Stacy’s acting and her correspondence with Madame Karpova dwindled with their move to New Jersey. Then, one day a call came of madame’s death and the shocking news that she would inherit Madame’s estate. With this information also came the news of possible foul play on the part of Sunnyside Nursing Home, where Madame had lived for the past two years. This news led Stacy, her father, and friends to investigate the mysterious workers and surroundings of the nursing home. Was it malpractice, neglect, or some unimagined reason that caused Madame’s death at Sunnyside and now haunted Stacy? These circumstances force Stacy to come to terms with the deaths of loved ones in her life and also reach inside herself to find the actress Madame Karpova believed in.
Norma Johnston's *The Time of the Cranes* shows the loss and confusion that arrives on the death of a loved one. Stacy Winbrand demonstrates that it is human to work through the guilt and sadness that death leaves behind. The mysterious elements surrounding this lesson propel the story along until death is faced and laid to rest. Memories of loved ones live on for Stacy, but death no longer holds her back. Life continues. A lesson all should learn.

—Lesley Woodfield

In *Meet Your Match, Cupid Delaney*, a wonderful love story unfolds at the end of a plot full of tension and anxiety. Cupid Delaney is a half-human half-angel character who matches couples at a high school. Her final and hardest mission is to match the pairs for the last school dance. Cupid Delaney's own love story becomes a part of her endeavors.

This book is valuable because Ellen Leroe records, on paper, the feelings that so many teenagers experience in the high school setting. She deals with the issues of insecurity, acceptance, personal appearance, and popularity. She touches each "clique," and the true, inward feelings the individuals experience. The cheerleaders have just as many reservations and concerns and the same worries as the quiet, introverted, unpopular group has.

The language is fun and flowing, making the reader want to complete the book in one sitting. The beginning of the first chapter was slow because it seemed a little difficult to place the characters in their roles. After it was clear who Cupid Delaney was, the plot flowed freely, and romance followed.

—Katrina Colson

Anne, a 16-year-old, takes the summer job as "keeper" of a 10-year-old-boy, Matt, at an exclusive resort on Lake Michigan called the Beaches. Matt, whose mother had died, is in the custody of his grandparents, the Larimers. They have given instructions to Anne not to let Matt see his father, if he shows up, because of some "unpleasantness" surrounding the death of their daughter. Anne feels uncomfortable with the secretive atmosphere and the refusal to let Matt
see the father he adores, especially as she relates it to her feelings for her own father who has left home. When Bryce, Matt’s father, suddenly appears and charms her into letting him see Matt, Anne is caught in a web of kidnap and murder. The shocking conclusion to the story reverberates long after the pages of the book are closed.

There is a mixture of disbelief, almost fear as one is given hints throughout the story of the awful truth behind the death of Matt’s mother and the disappearance of his father. It is disconcerting and uncomfortable to think of a young girl being faced with the horrors of the mystery and the frustration of being unable to do anything about it.

—Marilyn Rose


_The Revolving Door Stops Here_, by Phyllis Anderson Wood, is the story of 17-year-old, Eric Chandler, a foster child since his mother died when he was eight years old. His globe-hopping father, an oil engineer, has had no contact with Eric since he divorced Eric’s mother when Eric was a baby. Despite efforts on Eric’s part to make contact, when his mother died, and, again, a few times during his adolescence, the only evidence of his father’s awareness of Eric’s exists are the support payments he makes monthly to the state for Eric’s foster care. At the beginning of the book, Eric, through no fault of his own, is being shuffled from his third to his fourth and even fifth foster home, all within three months’ time. He writes one more letter to his father, who is on the north slope of Alaska, hoping he’ll respond at last and maybe even invite him to Alaska to live with him. Complications arise, just as Eric is getting attached to a wonderful couple in his fifth foster home, when a letter arrives from Alaska.

I cannot recommend this book because of the superficial way it treats truly sad, high-impact situations and the way Eric must deal with them. The characters in the story are very flat, and all but one, are "nice people" with no description to round them out. Eric’s behavior and attitude reflect little of the turmoil one would go through changing foster families three times in as many months. He simply faces the changes and makes the best of them. Very little imagery is used in the book; the author tells, but rarely "shows" what is going on. When Eric realizes that his father is just a fantasy, not the man he actually meets, he recognizes the difference in their values and holds on to his own and
finally lets go of his fantasy father. This is not a bad theme, but it is just presented in too shallow of a style.

—Glenda K. Wright

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