

NOVELS OF 2002-2003

Compiled by Peggy M. Johnsen

Banks, Kate. *Dillon Dillon*. Frances Foster Books * Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 2002.

Dillon wonders why his parents named him Dillon Dillon; why would they do that to him. On his tenth birthday he discovers that his parents are really his aunt and uncle and his siblings, his cousins. His parents were killed in an airplane crash when he was an infant and “his parents” never felt it the right time to tell him. The author tells a believable story that weaves two strong threads of “story” into a wonderful tapestry of self discovery and acceptance. Dillon’s self discovery of who he really is, the struggle to accept this and then the realization of where he belongs within his “family” is a beautiful journey that is made stronger by the second thread in the tapestry of the story. This thread is the mysticism of a pair of nesting loons who accept Dillon as one their family. They allow him to swim, fish, assist in the building of the nest (with his tennis shoe) and then be allowed to witness the birth of their nestling. The tragic killing of the parent loons and the apparent death of the baby loon is tragic. But, this memorable encounter with the loons allows Dillon to understand and accept the world and his place in it. Powerfully developed story with no hint of didacticism. 10 and up.

Bell, Hilari. *The Goblin Wood*. HarperCollins. 2003.

Makenna has witnessed her mother’s execution by drowning as she has been accused of being a soccerer. In truth Makenna and her mother are Hedgewitches, dedicated to heal and bring life to the village folk. The unrest of the country from the attacking of Barbarians from the borders has given priests the power to blame goblins and Hedgewitches of treachery. This story combines wonderful magical creatures, loyalty, and courage within fantasy elements. This is the story of Makenna, a young Hedgewitch, an idealistic knight, Tobin, and an army of clever goblins that fight against the ruling hierarchy that is trying to rid the land of all magical creatures. 10 and up. Hilari is also the author of *A Matter of Profit*, a SF thriller that is set in a universe of fantastic creatures with the protagonist, a weary young soldier.

Blacker, Terence. *The Angel Factory*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. 2002.

Thomas Wisdom seems to live the perfect life. In fact, it is too perfect. He hacks into his father’s computer and discovers secrets! First, that he’s adopted. Then, that his parents are not human. They are angels, sent to Earth to save humanity from itself. Is their goal worthwhile if it means humankind will no longer have free choice? This is a well crafted story that builds a strong plot through believable characters. Great discussion of free will and the concepts of good and evil will be a natural with this book. Using this book as a companion to *The Giver* is suggested.

Butler, Amy. *Virginia Bound*. Clarion Books. 2003.

Rob and young Nell are kidnapped off the streets of London and sent across the ocean to Virginia as indentured servants. This is a suspenseful adventure story set in 1627 Jamestown, Virginia. The author provides a very probable account of probable life and conditions for the people of Jamestown and the indentured servants. This would be an excellent book to add to a fifth or eighth grade classroom in order for students to grasp the conditions of children their age during this historical time. The author has a graduate degree in history.

Clement-Davis, David. *The Sight*. Dutton Books. 2000.

This is the second book by Clement-Davis. The first is *Fire Bringer*, an animal fantasy. In this second novel he used the wolf pack to investigate fairy tale analogies and the pull of family to protect the young and each other at all costs. The conflict of evil and good between wolf packs also is a strong analogy for human behavior. Mysterious and powerful messages.

Creech, Sharon. *Ruby Holler*. HarperCollins: Joanna Cotler Books. 2002

“Trouble Twins” Dallas and Florida are orphans who have given up believing there is such a thing as a loving home. Tiller and Sairy are an eccentric, older couple who live in the beautiful, mysterious Ruby Holler, but they’re restless for one more big adventure. When they invite the twins to join them on their journeys, they first all must stay together in the Holler and the magic of the place takes over. Two pairs of lives grow closer and are changed forever. Lots of humor, poignancy, cookies, and treasure maps; this is a delightful book about finding love. A lovely, fun read. Ages: 8-12.

Cushman, Karen. *Rodzina*. Clarion Books. 2003.

Rodzina Clara Jadwiga Anastazyja Brodski, a twelve-year-old Polish American girl is boarded onto an orphan train in Chicago with fears about traveling to the West and a life of unpaid slavery. This novel presents an accurate account of the orphan trains that transported nearly 250,000 poor urban children from the slums of the east and also from the midwest to the west. These children had been abandoned, neglected or sent away by desperate parents; also they came from overcrowded orphanages. It was thought that hard work in the clean air of the west would offer children a better chance to lead happy and productive lives. Grades: 5-9.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Behind the Mountains*. Orchard Books. 2002.

Danticat writes as beautifully and realistically for young readers as she has for adult readers. I was extremely touched with her novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and learned greatly about the culture of Haiti. Now in her contribution to the “first person fiction” series that Scholastic is sponsoring, young readers will read about the political unrest and poverty of Haiti. The journey within and from Haiti and finally to Brooklyn, New York, is boldly told. We will look forward to more of the First Person Fiction books from award-winning authors of differing backgrounds. These are voices that our multi-ethnicity students need to hear.

Deuker, Carl. *High Heat*. Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

When sophomore Shane Hunter’s father is arrested for money laundering at his Lexus dealership, the star pitcher’s life of affluence and private school begins to fall apart. Once again, Deuker writes honestly of the realistic emotional problems of adolescents and authentically of sports. This time it is baseball. Carl Deuker has been a school teacher for twenty years in Seattle. His other four novels are: *On the Devil’s Court*, *Heart of a Champion*, *Painting the Black*, and *Night Hoops*. Each novel combines top-flight sports writing matched to uncommonly perceptive coming-of-age stories. Young adult.

Doherty, Berlie. *Holly Starcross*. Greenwillow Books. 2002.

This is a touching, thoughtful, and introspective coming-of-age novel that pulls the reader into the troubled life of fourteen-year-old Holly Starcross. She vaguely remembers her first six years of her life with her mother and father in the country and finds the last eight years with her mother and new husband one that is full of constant strain on everyone. The combination of establishing an anonymous e-mail relationship with a new friend (and wise) and then the sudden reappearance of her long-absent father, provides realistic choices for her and her parents.

Flieger, Verlyn. *Pig Tale*. Hyperion Books for Children. 2002.

In her debut novel, Verlyn Flieger weaves elements from Celtic mythology into an unforgettable tale that explores universal truths about the human condition of society’s need for scapegoats, the yearning to belong, and love’s transcendent power to make the world anew. Because of the subject matter, this is strongly recommended as a young adult novel (ages 16 and up). The protagonist is an abandoned baby girl who grows up unwanted and unloved. She exists on the grudging charity of the village folk and has the permanent place in the village as the pig herder. Mokie (“Little Pig-Girl”) runs

from the village after a brutal attack by the village boys at the age of fifteen and flees into the mysterious Wickwood and accurately ends steeped in Celtic legend. This novel would make a great companion within a unit of study of Celtic mythology.

Funke, Cornelia. *The Thief Lord*. Scholastic Inc. 2001

Prosper and Bo are orphans on the run from their cruel aunt and uncle. The brothers decide to hide out in Venice, where they meet a mysterious character who calls himself the "Thief Lord." Brilliant and charismatic, the Thief Lord leads a ring of street children who dabble in petty crimes. Prosper and Bo relish being part of the colorful new family. But the Thief Lord has secrets of his own. Soon the boys are thrust into circumstances that will lead them, and readers, to a fantastic, spellbinding conclusion. The author is the third most popular children's writer in Germany after J.K. Rowling and R.L. Stine.

Galloway, Priscilla. *The Courtesan's Daughter*. Delacorte Press. 2002.

Galloway has written an excellent researched historical novel of 350 BC Athens. Phano is the fourteen-year-old female protagonist who struggles to escape the antagonist Phrynion's hold over her and her step-mother, the courtesan, and to prove that she is not a slave, but a free citizen. This novel successfully presents the social and political structure of ancient Athens through the eyes and life of Phano. This is definitely an adult novel. (16 and up.)

Grunwell, Jeanne Marie. *Mind Games*. Houghton Mifflin. 2003.

This wonderful novel is cleverly written in a science project format, told in the six voices of the members of the Mad Science club. Each team member is out to try to prove that ESP exists, while at the same time learning about the personal discoveries of friendship, sisterhood, and ties that bind human beings. The tone and voice of this piece of fiction crackles with seventh grade personality. This fast read is also full of deep discoveries and emotions that middle school readers will love to discuss. Fun and tender!

Hahn, Mary Downing. *Hear the Wind Blow, A Novel of the Civil War*. Clarion Books. 2003.

On a cold, snowy night, Haswell Magruder makes a decision that will have a profound effect on his own life as well as the lives of all those he loves. A wounded Confederate soldier appears at the Magruder's Virginia farm and Haswell convinces his mother and younger sister to take the man in, despite the possible repercussions if enemy Yankees were to catch them in such a traitorous act. Of course the Yankees do discover the wounded soldier and a horrific chain of events leaves the farm burned and his mother dead. This novel is a truly realistic account of events of the Civil War. This is a skillful storytelling, with well-developed characters, gritty details about the final days of the Civil war, and tells the journey and passage into manhood by the protagonist. Ages: 10-14.

Hiaasen, Carl. *Hoot*. Alfred A. Knopf. 2002.

This is definitely a book for middle school readers. It is funny and poignant; the characters' voices speak such middle school truth! Within this story is a powerful ecology story about the Florida burrowing owls. Hiaasen cleverly weaves characters such as a bully with a lisp, a renegade eco-avenger, a sinister pancake PR man, and a mysterious runaway boy. This all surrounds the new kid "on the block", Roy Eberhardt. What a great, funny, heartwarming read!

Hoeye, Michael. *The Sands of Time*. G.P. Putnam's Sons. 2002.

This is the second Hermus Tantamo adventure, a watchmaker mouse that ends up solving wonderful mysteries. The first book was *Time Stops for No Mouse*. The animal characters are entirely believable and the adventure is a keeper. There is even a touch of romance for Hermus Tantamo. Friendship and trust are strong themes, also. Age 10 and up.

Hoffman, Alice. *Green Angel*. Scholastic Inc. 2003.

Prolific writer of adult novels has successfully written this thought-provoking young adult novel. This was the first story Alice Hoffman was able to tell (write) after the devastating events of September 11th. It reads well as a metaphor of rebirth coming from ashes. *Green Angel* is born from the ashes, “but her strength is found in memory and compassion, in finding the truth of her own story, and in the ever-present heartbeat of the natural world.” As Hoffman explains, “In the fairy-tale world of a future gone terribly wrong, I hoped to find solace and understanding about modern world for myself and my readers. Fairy tales tell us there have always been dark woods, but there have also always been those who have found their way through the darkest of woods, the most brutal of times, guided by hope, by a neighbor, by a black bird or a white dog, by courage, by love. And so is the young girl, *Green Angel*, one of these extraordinary persons.

Kay, Elizabeth. *The DIVIDE*. Scholastic Inc. The Chicken House. July 2003.

Felix is a special sort of hero. Though brave and resourceful, he has a heart condition that threatens his life. This summer, Felix is spending his vacation in Costa Rica. At a spot called the Divide ... where the waters that run down to the Pacific and Atlantic oceans separate, Felix tumbles into a magical backwards world where mythical creatures are real and human beings are only a legend. A great adventure unfolds. The book includes a clever glossary for the names of the mythical creatures. Friendship, love, courage, and risks tell the story. Ages: 9-11.

Lee, Tanith. *Wolf Queen*. Dutton Children's Books. 2002.

This is the last in the trilogy by Tanith Lee: *Wolf Tower*; *Wolf Star*; *Wolf Queen*. Claidi continues as the strong female protagonist who continues to discover love and trust through her adventures. The reader will quickly become a believer within Claidi's world in this well written fantasy trilogy. Young female readers should enjoy Claidi's discovery of her own abilities and, also, the tough learning situations. The entire trilogy is presented in a diary/journal format that is written “after-the-fact.” Tanith Lee is a strong fantasy writer. 12 and up.

Lester, Alison. *The Snow Pony*. Houghton Mifflin. 2003.

The author grew up on a cattle farm by the sea in Gippsland, southeastern Victoria. This is her second novel about the Australian country life. *The Quicksand Pony* is full of adventure, a tale of survival, an engaging mystery, a touching animal story and a family saga. Once again, Lester weaves together a colorful and compassionate story of family, courage, adventure, and a young girl's passion for her horse in this second novel. Good for young readers 10 and up.

Love, D. Anne. *The Puppeteer's Apprentice*. Simon & Schuster * Margaret K. McElderry Books. 2003.

This is a great story for middle grade readers. It is set in medieval England, involving a young girl, Mouse, who is hungry, afraid and finds herself running away from a fractious cook. She sees a puppet play and knows at once that she must learn to make “the puppets dance.” She becomes a puppeteer's apprentice and through her travels with the puppeteer, secrets are revealed, courage and skill is found, trust is discovered, and adventure abounds. The story reads with a strong ring of truth and the characters are well developed.

Lowry, Lois. *The Silent Boy*. Houghton Mifflin. 2003.

Two-time recipient of the prestigious Newbery Medal, Lois Lowry presents a sensitive and moving story of Katy Thatcher, daughter of the town doctor, growing up at the beginning of the twentieth century and the influence of the farm community around her. She knows she already wants to become a doctor and her insatiable curiosity to understanding people fuels friendships with a variety of town and country folk. She accompanies her father often on his medical calls and becomes friends with a young fifteen-year-old boy who does not speak. Because of her sensitivity and her understanding of his

movements and “singing”, she alone comprehends the silent boy’s role in the human tragedy that unfolds within the story. Middle school and up.

McKinley, Robin and Peter Dickinson. *Water, Tales of Elemental Spirits*. G.P. Putnam’s Sons. 2002.

Robin Mc Kinley and Peter Dickinson give six stories of the fabulous creatures associated with the element of water. Each story is as different from the others as are the creatures themselves. A great, great read. Grades: Middle to Young Adult.

Morris, Gerald. *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan*. Houghton Mifflin. 2003.

Morris has written at least five hilarious tales on the Arthurian legend. The characters are full bodies, the dialogue is snappy, the detailed descriptions of medieval life is woven throughout the story and the dry wit screams for reluctant and avid readers. Grades 5-Young Adult.

Murphy, Claire Rudolf. *Free radical*. Clarion Books. 2002.

Luke McHenry is determined to make his dream of being selected for the All-Star team a reality in his hometown of Fairbanks, Alaska. Then his mother makes a shocking revelation: She has been hiding a devastating secret for more than thirty years. And she is as determined to give herself up to authorities in order to make restitution for her part in this secret. His mother’s radical past has involved the murder of young college student when she and fellow protesters set a pipe bomb on the Berkeley campus. The theme and message of restitution and revealing a secret with one’s family after rebuilding a new life is valid. However, the book comes across as quite didactic. Ages 12 and up.

Oppel, Kenneth. *Firewing*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. 2003.

This is the third book in Oppel’s wonderful series of the *Silverwing* bat adventures. Once again, the bats exhibit all the human characteristics of fear, love, courage, and individual sacrifice. This epic tale continues with another harrowing adventure. Griffin is the newborn Silverwing bat, son of Shade from the second book, *Sunwing*. After committing a fool hardy feat which killed his friend Luna, Griffin finds himself sucked into a fissure deep below the earth during a terrible earthquake. Shade knows he must find Griffin quickly, for if they don’t get out of the Underworld soon, they will never be able to return to the land of the living. Yeah, another book in the series! Hopefully there will be more, also. Ages 8-12... or whatever!

Paulsen, Gary. *The Glass Café: or The stripper and The State; How my Mother Started a War with the System that made us kind of Rich and a Little Bit Famous*. Random House: Wendy Lamb Books. June 2003.

Paulsen uses first person and a free write style to develop this quirky, tender, funny, and powerful story of Tony and his mother, Al. The relationship and love between this son and mother is wonderful while at the same time we are privy to the unique life they both share. A great, fast read for middle school students. Great for viewing writing style. Once again Paulsen presents us with a fine vignette.

Paulsen, Gary. *How Angel Peterson Got His Name*. Random House: Wendy Lamb Books. June 2003.

This is a collection of stories about how thirteen-year-old boys survive their own wacky stunts and schemes. Funny, slapstick tales that kept me laughing and smiling from page one to the end. This is a must addition to any middle school; girls will enjoy it too. My son, Erik, will read these short stories to his middle schoolers in Amman, Jordan.

Prue, Sally. *Call on the Stars*. Scholastic Press. 2003.

This is a debut novel for the author and has blended the British Isle legends of the tenuous relationships of elves and humans with some powerful themes: the conflict of responsibility within freedom; the bonds of love and emotions between humans; and does love enslave people or allow them to

dance together? Tom is an outcast from his ruthless elfin Tribe, he flees to the city of the hated demons, humans. Tom is part demon and part elfin. As much as he despises the demons and the twining emotional bonds they use to enslave each other, Tom realizes he cannot escape the Tribe's deadly silver spears without their help. An outstanding blend of fantasy and human basic needs. Ages 9-14.

Roberts, Katherine. *The Echorium Sequence- Dark Quetzal*. Scholastic Inc.: The Chicken House. 2003.

Far from the purple plains and the mountains of midnight, nestled in the crystal blue waters of the Western Sea, lies the Isle of Echoes, where the forces of good and evil are held in harmony by a strange and mysterious people: the Singers. The singers can hear the silent voices of magical half-creatures and speak over great distances using only their minds. Safely hidden away on the enchanting Isle of Echoes, they use their unearthly songs to keep peace in their world. *Dark Quetzal* is the latest adventure in the *Echorium Sequence*, the epic saga that began with the award-winning *Song Quest* and was followed by the second installment, *Crystal Mask*. Ages: 9-13.

Torrey, Michele. *To The Edge of the World*. Alfred Knopf. 2003.

Mateo Macias de Avila is orphaned by the plague in the year that Magellan sets sail to reach the Spice Islands. Mateo joins the Captain General's flag ship as the cabin boy. This is an accurate historic fiction novel that graphically depicts the hardships of that 2 year voyage around the world. Also, revealed are the learning, friendships and loyalties one discovers on such a voyage. A glossary is included, plus an excellent *Afterword* that connect the story of the novel with the historical facts. 12 and up

Veciana-Suarez, Ana. *Flight to Freedom*. Orchard Books. 2002.

The first person account poignantly narrates the escape from Cuba and migration to Miami, beginning the summer of 1967 of Yara Carcia and family. The novel is diary form and covers a full year beginning June of 1969 and ending March 1971. This a compelling and realistic writing about the experience of coming to America. This would be a wonderful companion to the other First Person Fiction novels.

Zehaniah, Benjamin. *Refugee Boy*. Bloomsburg. 2002.

Alem Kelo's parents are unable to find peace within either of their homelands: Ethiopia and Eritrea. Both countries have expelled them because they are of "mixed" marriage and both countries are at war with each other. Alem's father brings him to London and with help with the Refugee Council finds a foster home with the Fitzgeralds. Alem is caught in a circumstance beyond his control, but begins to accept his life in London. His parents have infused him with the desire for education and the belief that war is not the answer to the differences of their respective countries. This is a powerful and realistic view of the challenges that refugees face. This would be a great companion novel with the First Person Fiction series.