

Novels of 2003-2004  
Compiled by Peggy M. Johnsen

Allende, Isabel. *Kingdom of the Golden Dragon*. Harpercollins. 2004. ISBN 0-06-058945-4.

This is Isabel Allende's sequel to her first novel for young readers, *City of the Beasts* (2002), and continues the adventures of Alexander Cold (America) and Nadia Santos (South America) with Kate Cold, Alex's grandmother. Where as the first novel takes place in the Amazon, this second novel's setting takes place in the Himalayas. Both novels combine suspense and magic realism with the history and contemporary politics of each geographical region. The characters and story are inviting and wonderful. However, the translation seems at times stiff and didactic, not the flow that we expect from Allende's adult novels.

Avi. *The Mayor of Central Park*. Harpercollins. 2003. ISBN 0060515562.

Avi's delightful, believable yarn of the animals that live in and around New York City's Central Park is a great romp. This is a classic good "guys" - bad "guy" story that every reader who loves baseball should read. Oscar Westerwit (squirrel) the protagonist and mayor of Central Park will solve the horrendous problem of life and death that Big Daddy Duds brings to the Park; Big Daddy Duds (rotten rat) who is the head honcho of a downtown rat gang who has three loves: money, diamonds, and baseball; Maud (rat), Dud's little girl is a smart rat and a sweet nurse; Arty (cat) is known as BIG CAT because he has the best pitching arm in town and a taste for trouble; Uriah Pilwick (possum) who is Dud's second-hand man, a gray-whiskered possum. You "get" the picture or is that pitcher?! And of course this entire plot revolves around the winning of a baseball game!! Very reading friendly for grades 3-7 and a fun read aloud selection.

Avi and Rachel Vail. *Never Mind: A Twin Novel*. Harpercollins Pub. 2004. ISBN 0-06-054314-0.

Meg and Edward are twins, like night and day. This story takes place within a week's time. Finally, the twins have their wish: to be enrolled in different schools for their seventh grade year. Meg, great in sports and school with a "gaxillion" friends enrolls in a "gifted" school, while Edward, is enrolled in a non-graded, alternative school, with one close friend. You "get the picture" and the week is full of great surprises and the realization that the twin really do have a lot in common: caring for each other. Fast and fun read for middle schoolers.

Bunting, Eve. *The Presence*. Clarion Books. 2003. ISBN 0-618-26919-3.

Eve Bunting always tackles difficult subjects and so once again presents us with yet another piece of such literature: a novel dealing with guilt, depression, and a great mystery. This young adult novel addresses the issues of extreme guilt feelings of seventeen-year-old Catherine who has lived through a tragic car accident that claimed the life of her best friend. Thrown into this serious psychological condition, is the mystery of the young stranger in her grandmother's church and the elderly woman who warns her to stay away from the church! Suspense mounts as Catherine leaves for the church and a meeting with the ghostly presence.

Byng, Georgia. *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism*. Harpercollins Pub. 2002. 0060514078.

This was published in England before coming to the US and has already received glowing reviews. I even saw it in Costa Rica, translated into Spanish. Molly Moon is a smart spunky heroine; a book that is strong for middle grade. She'll remind you a little of Roald Dahl's Matilda. Mooy lives in a horrible orphanage run by the mean and snagged-tooth Miss Adderstone. After finding a book on hypnotism one day in the town's library, she realizes she has the power to do anything she wants. So her quest begins to escape to New York City. A sinister Professor stalks Molly to convince her to join his evil schemes. Story is filled with humor and pathos. Byng's sequel, *Molly Moon Stops the World*, will be available in spring 2004. Grades 3-7.

Byng, Georgia. *Molly Moon Stops the World*. Harpercollins Pub. 2004. 0-06-051413-2.

This time Molly Moon returns to American with all the orphans, Mrs. Trinklebury, Nockman, and of course, Rocky, to save the world from the evil Primo Logan who is hypnotizing not only the entire actors of Hollywood, but soon all the leaders of the world. As in the first novel, there is lots of adventure, over-the-wall villains, and wonderful twists and turns throughout the story. This novel ends with definite portends of another sequel in the works.

Constable, Kate. *The Singer of All Songs*. Scholastic. 2003. 439-55478-0.

This is the first in the *Chanters of Cremaris Trilogy*. Calwyn knows nothing about the world beyond the Wall. She is a gifted novice of the ice priestess society in Antaris. Enter Darrow, who speaks to Calwyn of discord in Tremaris, where chanters are hated for their gifts. Calwyn leaves the safety of the Wall to see the world and perhaps save it. Powerful

story that pulls together the different characters in the world of Tremaris. As this first part of the trilogy ends, the reader feels the pull of the premonitions and forebodings of the safety of Tremaris and Calwyn's major role in saving her world. Ages: 12 and up.

Creedon, Catherine. *Blue Wolf*. HarperCollins. 2003.

This is from the Julie Andrews Collection which encompasses books for young readers of all ages that "nurture the imagination and celebrate a sense of wonder." I believe that our readers (grades 4-8) will be entranced by the premise and themes of this novel AND/BECAUSE the wonderfully presented setting takes place in an isolated mountain retreat in the Pacific Northwest. This believable fantasy touches on the tenuous and perhaps lost connections we have had with the spirit and intellect of wolves. The protagonist, Jamie, is pulled into the realization of his connection he feels with a neighboring pack of wolves and is soon confronted with a life-transforming decision. The beginnings of this novel are full of foreshadowing that make the heart of the novel believable. This is definitely within the "coming-of-age" genre, but also full of the wonder and inexplicable mystery of the natural world. Great read aloud novel. Grades 4-8.

Ellis, Deborah. *Mud City*. Groundwood Book, Douglas & McIntyre. 2003. ISBN 0-88899-518-0.

This is the third book of the Breadwinner Trilogy: *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana's Journey* are the first two novels. These are excellent novels that present the difficult times and courage of Afghan children, most specifically the plight of Afghan girls. Our libraries need novels such as these to acquaint our American young readers with the realities of children raised and moving into adulthood in political upheaval and war. This novel tells the story of Shauzia, Parvana's best friend, who has fled Afghanistan to a refugee camp in Pakistan. As Shauzia flees the camp to find her independence in the "city", realistic accounts of scrounging for food, begging for money and looking for a safe place to sleep every night on the streets of Peshawar, Pakistan allow us to begin to understand the plight of homeless children of war. Ages 12 and up.

Hunter, Erin. *Warriors, A Dangerous Path*. HarperCollins Children's Books. June 2004. ISBN 0-06-000006-6

This is book five in the *Warriors* series. These novels are in the genre of Brian Jacques's *Redwall* series. The characters are cats and the classic plot is one of good vs. evil with all the elements of fantasy and the law of the clan, honor, and sacrifice. Grades 5 and up.

Hurst, Carol Otis. & Rebecca Otis. *A Killing in Plymouth Colony*. Houghton Mifflin Children's Book Department. 2003. ISBN 0-618-27597-5.

This historical novel brings together the drama of a murder mystery and the complexities of the evolving relationship between a father, Governor William Bradford, and son, John Bradford, to provide a glimpse of what life might have been like growing up in the young Plymouth (Plimouth) Colony. The preface provides a short historical summary of the Plymouth Colony and the driving political and religious events that drove the founding of the colony. The story is based on real people who lived in Plymouth in 1630 (in fact my personal lineage is traced to Samuel Eaton) and as much factual information as possible. However, it is a story and written with the intent of sharing the possible feelings and daily life of that time. Should work in a fifth grade classroom nicely.

Jones, Diana Wynne. *Unexpected Magic: Collected Stories*. Greenwillow Books, HarperCollins Pub. ISBN 0-06-0555335-5.

This is a collection of 15 fantasy stories and one novella. The stories are somewhat of an uneven collection in relationship to appropriateness for a specific age. These are entertaining stories, each one; but I would recommend this collection for grades 7 and up. The author is a prolific author with more than forty published books, all fantasy or high fantasy. She lives in Bristol, England. Online address: [www.dianawynnejones.com](http://www.dianawynnejones.com).

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Freaky Green Eyes*. HarperCollins Pub. 2003. ISBN 0-06-623757-2.

This is a powerful young adult novel that addresses the unconscionable situation of a child not only caught between the fighting between parents headed toward a divorce, an abusive father, but then struggling with the ethical situation of knowing that your father has killed your mother and how do you make the decision to tell what you know if it means you will then also lose your father. Spokane readers will enjoy the setting as it takes place in Seattle and Skagit Harbor. Very realistic and powerful novel told through the voice of high school freshman, Franky. Reading her mother's diary after her death provides Franky with the courage to step forward and tell the truth.

Oppel, Kenneth. *Airborn*. HarperCollins. 2004. ISBN 0-06-053181-9.

Once again Oppel has created a believable world with rich characters and an adventurous plot for middle grade readers. This world has fleets of airships, airplanes and ocean liners seem not to exist. It is the grand luxury ships of the

air that travel world wide. Our protagonist is a young man, Matt Cruise, who is a member of the airship crew and seems more at ease in the air than on land. Detailed descriptions of the *Aurora* airship transport us inside its world of flight. We know the crew well; they are people of substance and interest. Even the antagonist is many faceted and interesting. Opper know how to write great stories that make us want more! It seems this will happen as the novel ends with too many "suggested" future events. Grades 5-8 will enjoy the trip aboard the *Aurora*!

Pinkwater, Daniel. *Looking for Bobowica*. HarperCollins Children's Books. May 2004. ISBN 0-06-053554-7.

This reads as a sequel to *Henrietta*, the Hoboken chicken. Lots of great adventure for three friends, who are attempting to discover the mysterious "chicken" that they have seen in the park and who they suspect is responsible for missing items in the town. A quote from Jules Feiffer sums up Pinkwater's writing: "Daniel Pinkwater's thoughts don't connect like your or mine." Thank goodness for that! What a fun read. Definitely for grades 3-5.

Potter, Ellen. *Olivia Kidney*. Philomel Books. 2003. ISBN 0-399-23850-6.

Twelve-year-old Olivia explores her new apartment building and finds a psychic, talking lizards, a shrunken ex-irate, an exiled princess, ghosts, and other unusual characters. As the author, Janet Taylor Lisle, shared, "Olivia's fabulous, hilarious adventures are not to be missed. While some readers may find them to be pure fantasy, others will find a touching portrait of a lonely child wielding the power of imagination against a disruptive world." This is a beautiful blend of fantasy and poignant feelings of a child dealing with the death of a brother. This is Olivia Kidney's first published novel. Great addition for libraries of grade 4-8.

Pratchett, Terry. *A Hat Full of Sky*. Harpercollins. May 2004. ISBN 0-06-058660-5.

Pratchett is a prolific writer for young people. This particular novel is the sequel to *The Wee Free Men* and is equally delightful. Our heroine is strong, vulnerable, brave, wise, ignorant, etc. Tiffany Aching lives in a world of magic and the mundane. Her journey to discovering and controlling her gifts as a witch is witty, believable and exciting. The full bodied characters are truly wacky. The Nac Mac Feegle little people, are members of the fairy race and are quite the opposite of the traditional sweet fairy. Pratchett provides the history, habits and habitats, and vocabulary glossary in an introduction ... wonderful! Comedic, scary, charming, and tender. Pratchett promises a third book. I hope so. I am also in need of reading some of her books.

Langrish, Katherine. *Troll Fell*. Harpercollins. 2004. ISBN 0-06-058305-3.

This is a debut novel from Langrish and she uses Norway as her setting and the myths and magic of this Scandinavian country. After Peer's father's death, he is claimed by his half-brothers who plot to use him not only as a slave labor, but to bribe the troll king in order to find riches. Of course there is a young girl who becomes part of the treacherous plot. Together, Peer and Hilde outwit both the evil twin brothers and the clever trolls. The story is rich with Norwegian folk lore beliefs and legends. Grades 4-8.

Martin, Ann M. & Laura Godwin. *The Meanest Doll in the World*. Hyperion Books for Children. 2003. ISBN 0-7868-0878-0.

This is the sequel to *The Doll People* in which we met Annabelle, a hundred old doll living in the equally old doll house with her doll family, and Tiffany, a member of a plastic Funcraft doll family. These two best friends must stop Mean Mimi, the meanest doll in the world before she destroys all of dollkind. The clever illustrations by Brian Selznick add LOTS to this story. Ages 8-12 will enjoy.

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Breath*. Simon & Schuster Children's Pub. 2003. ISBN 0-689-86174-5.

Yet another wonderful young adult novel from Napoli. Once again she uses a fairy tale motif and transforms the theme into something new all together. This is the tale of the Pied Piper seen through the eyes of the one boy who survived. Salz lives in a time of superstition and fear, in the medieval town of Hamelin, 1284. Napoli weaves into her tale not only the pestilence of rats, but Salz's afflicting disease of cystic fibrosis. Also, it is not the black plague that these rats carried that caused the onset of great illness in the village, but ergot poisoning caused by the killer spores thriving in the grasses and grains during several wet, rainy years and then cold winters in Hamelin. Napoli develops strong characters that in whom we care greatly and her setting is vivid and quite believable. Other of her must-read novels are: *Beast*, *Zel*, *Sirena*, and *Stones in the Water*. Young Adult.

Seidler, Tor. *Toes*. HarperCollins: Laura Geringer Books. 2004. ISBN 0-06-054100-8.

Seidler is the author of the National Book Award finalists, *Mean Margaret*. Toes is born with seven toes on each foot and is teased by his litter mates and soon feared as they believe his condition might be contagious. Toes flees his house and takes refuge in a strange basement in which he becomes a prisoner when he can't climb out the high window he

entered. Because of his intelligence and ability to talk to other creatures (learned human speech from watch T.V.), he survives the ordeal and is adopted by the struggling musician, Sebastian who lives upstairs. This is a charming and touching story of friendship, trust, and learning to believe in one's unique gifts. Grades 3-6.

Sepulveda, Luis. *The Story of a Seagull and the Cat who Taught Her to Fly*. Arthur A. Levine, Scholastic Press. 2003. ISBN 0-439-40186-0.

Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden, this story has been popular in Europe since 1996. A seagull, dying from the effects of an oil spill, entrusts her egg to Zorba, the cat, who promises to care for it until her chick hatches, then teach the chick to fly. Ecological concerns are definitely woven throughout the story, particularly the un-authorized oil dumping in the Mediterranean Sea. Readers are thrown into the port city of Hamburg and its world of cats and their friendship and creative thinking. This is a fun book with strong themes of friendship, devotion and perseverance.

Stahler Jr., David. *Turesight*. HarperCollins. 2004. ISBN 0-06-052286-0.

Another debut novel; the genre is science fiction and takes us to a world inhabited by transported earth humans who have chosen to be genetically engineered to be blind. The decision of these inhabitants in this colony is logically presented by the author. As I read this novel, I felt the same themes of lack of choice and blind acceptance by the colonists as is found in Lois Lowery's, *The Giver*, and Terence's Blacker's, *The Angel Factory*. This would be yet another novel to add to a thematic literature circle where middle school readers could examine "coming of age" issues and the struggle between seeking what is best for oneself and what people who love you believe is correct for you.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *No Laughter Here*. HarperCollins. 2003. ISBN 0-688-16248-7.

Williams-Garcia received a Coretta Scott King honor award for this powerful and sensitive young adult novel which deals with the subject of female genital mutilation (FGM). Although FGM is performed on young girls, materials written for young readers about this topic are scarce. At least twenty-three African countries still practice this custom and many immigrants have brought this custom to the United States, Canada, and Europe. This story poignantly presents the story of one 12-year-old Nigerian friend of an American girl. Victoria learns of Akilah's, her best friend, reason for visiting Nigeria after the summer of fourth grade. As fifth grade begins for these fast friends, Victoria is stunned by the personality change in her best friend; gone are the smiles and crazy exuberant behavior that they share. As the discovery unfolds, the reader learns of the strong ties Nigerian immigrants have to their home land and their customs. This is sensitive material, but young girls should be educated in this topic.

Yep, Laurence. *Sweetwater*. HarperCollins. 2003. ISBN 0-06-056028-2.

This was Yep's first published novel (1973) and its science fiction genre is wonderful. It is interesting to note that Laurence Yep began his writing career in this genre and then grew into the realization that writing about his Chinese American heritage. This is wonderfully explained in the introduction of the novel. The story takes place in the world, Harmony, where the ancestors came from Earth. However, over several generations, the politics and unrest of this planet no longer bear its name: Harmony. The cycle of high tides has flooded the great city by the sea and most people moved inland, therefore now known as Inlanders. The people who stayed in the half submerged city are called Silkies. Divisions have occurred between the inhabitants, who include the aliens whose world it really is and the divided colonists. We share the last years of the flooded city, Old Sion, through young Tyree's experiences and the events that he set in motion that ultimately resulted in the final withdrawal from the city. As Andre Norton said, "It is difficult to believe that this is a first novel. The extremely competent handling of alien background, plus excellent characterization, suggests rather a long apprenticeship in the craft." Ages 8-12.