

TOP SHELF

Fiction for Middle School Readers 2014

Middle school is a time of change as students' minds develop and their exposure to the world increases. As a result, their internal lives and emotions grow more complex, and they may struggle to comprehend those new feelings. Since sympathetic writers can help, we decided to organize this year's list around the many moods of middle school. The adventurous titles in "Thrill Seekers" will attract students restless in their ordinary lives and yearning for more agency in the world. These action-packed stories show young teens at their most capable and daring. The tales in "Shifting Selves" explore the mutability of identity, and may comfort readers feeling uneasy with internal changes, as well as young teens wondering about their place in their changing world. The "Hard Times" titles reach out to students facing sadness or grief. Helping them understand and cope with their own feelings, these stories can also help young people empathize with others. Sometimes, though, they just want to stop thinking about all these changes. When they do, the hilarious and rollicking tales in "Break Time" will whisk them away into lighthearted adventure and humor. Finally, the edgy titles in "Fast Forward"—full of painful emotions, violence, complex relationships, and sophisticated world outlooks—will appeal to early maturing students yearning to know more about what lies ahead. We and our students loved reading these books, and hope you and your students will love them just as much. If so, to purchase the entire list would cost \$472.32.

THRILL SEEKERS

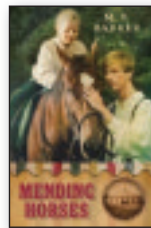
Auxier, Jonathan. **The Night Gardener**. Abrams, 2014. 368p. \$16.95. 978-1-4197-1144-2. VOYA April 2014. 5Q 5P M J



In 1840s England, orphaned Irish girl Molly and her crippled brother become servants at a crumbling mansion with an evil reputation and a black tree growing through the wall. Why does Molly find muddy footprints in the house each morning, when she locked the door the night before? What is in the locked upstairs room? What is the real price of living in the cursed house?

"This book intrigued me like no other. Every word came out like honey, dripping slowly, getting seared into my mind."—Tej, 6th grade

Barker, M. P. **Mending Horses**. Holiday House, 2014. 320p. \$17.95. 978-0-8234-2948-6.



In 1839 New England, a peddler rescues sixteen-year-old Irishman Daniel from a mistakenly murderous mob. The newly freed indentured servant joins up with the peddler, to the fury of another Irish rescuer, Billy, who has a secret to hide. When they all join a traveling circus, Daniel works with abused horses, while Billy's beautiful voice becomes the star attraction—until Billy's

drunken, abusive father comes to reclaim the child he sold.

"Really something!"—Anna, 7th grade

Johnson, Jaleigh. **The Mark of the Dragonfly**. Delacorte/Random House, 2014. 400p. \$16.99. 978-0-385-37615-0.



Orphaned Piper survives by scavenging otherworldly items falling from meteors. After rescuing an amnesiac girl from a deadly meteor shower, Piper discovers Anna's dragonfly tattoo, which gives her royal protection. Could Piper earn a reward by returning Anna to the king? Together they embark on a steampunk train journey rife with adventure and danger, for Anna's amnesia hides deadly secrets, as does the train's oddly young security guard, Gee.

"It was a completely unique plot that I haven't seen any threads of ever."—Sofia, 6th grade

Lockwood, Vicki. **The Magnificent Lizzie Brown and the Mysterious Phantom**. Capstone, 2014. 200p. \$10.95. 978-1-62370-069-0.



In Victorian London, Lizzie flees her drunken, abusive father and joins a circus. Although thrilled by the colorful life and by many unexpected kindnesses, Lizzie is soon thrown off-balance again by discovering her gift of second sight. When it warns her about future targets of the mysterious thief and murderer nicknamed "The Phantom," she and her new friends decide to do something about it.

"It was a spine-chilling mystery with a surprising twist at the end that I didn't see coming"—Sofia, 6th grade

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Preus, Margi. **West of the Moon**. Abrams, 2014. 224p. \$16.95. 978-1-4197-0896-1. VOYA April 2014. 4Q 3P M J



Nineteenth-century Norway soars to vivid life in the tale of motherless, thirteen-year-old Astri, whose aunt sells her to a goat herder as a slave. Escaping, Astri vows to get to America to find her father, rescuing her sister along the way. Together they embark on a series of fraught adventures reflective of various Norse folktales, which Astri uses as guidelines for her own tale—even when

the tales do not quite match.

"A wonderful book, full of adventure and action."—Alyssa, 6th grade

SHIFTING SELVES

Alexander, Kwame. **The Crossover**. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. 240p. \$16.99. 978-0-544-10771-7. VOYA August 2014. 5Q 5P M J S

Josh is not only an A student, but a superstar basketball player with a slam dunk no one can beat. When his twin brother BJ gets a girlfriend, Josh's jealousy gets the better of him, putting his basketball career in jeopardy. Worse, his hypertensive father keeps having attacks. This novel-in-verse explores issues of race, family, and responsibility.



"It's a good book and the style makes it fun to read. It's clever. I think that's really cool."—Charlie, 7th grade

Cotter, Charis. **The Swallow: A Ghost Story**. Tundra, 2014. 320p. \$19.99. 978-1-77049-591-3. VOYA February 2015. 3Q 3P M J S



In 1960s Toronto, only-child Rose lives next door to ignored middle-child Polly, and they become friends by whispering through an adjoining attic wall. Polly is thrilled when Rose reluctantly divulges she can see ghosts, but when they find a cemetery gravestone bearing Rose's name, both girls start to question reality. This creepy story

will thrill and surprise burgeoning horror fans.

"If I had to pick one book to read for the rest of my life over and over again, this would be it."—Sofia, 6th grade

Pakkala, Christina. **Jasmine and Maddie**. Boyds Mills, 2014. 192p. \$16.95. 978-1-62091-739-8.



Jasmine's family struggles financially after her father's death. Maddie's family has plenty. Neither understands nor likes the other, but when forced to work together, they find they have dishonesty and a lack of respect for personal property in common. How will they cope when their behavior is exposed? With poetry interjected throughout, readers can learn from these middle school girls'

poor decisions.

"This story has a great friendship lesson. It shows that two very different people who like different things can become best friends."—Skylar, 5th grade

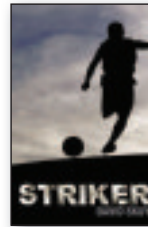
Sedgwick, Marcus. **She Is Not Invisible**. Roaring Brook, 2014. 224p. \$16.99. 978-1-59643-801-9.

VOYA April 2014. 4Q 3P M J S

Laureth's blindness doesn't stop her from much, not even from abducting her little brother and adventuring from London to New York in pursuit of her missing father. An email from a mysterious Mr. Walker reunites Laureth with her father's notebook, full of clues to his whereabouts. Will she locate him in time? This fast-paced, thoughtful story will keep readers entertained and guessing until the end.



Skuy, David. **Striker**. James Lorimer, 2014. 216p. \$12.95. 978-1-4594-0513-4.



His cancer in remission, Cody is eager to get back to soccer, but things turn ugly on his new team. Although his mother taught him to play, she fears for his health, and his father is consumed with work. Cody has no one to turn to when the bullying and favoritism grow worse, with both teammates and adults targeting Cody and his new Brazilian friend, Paulo. This engaging sports story

will keep readers entertained and thinking.

"A great feel-good book!"—Grace, 8th grade

Wiersbitzky, Shannon. **What Flowers Remember**. Namelos, 2014. 158p. \$18.95. 978-1-60898-166-3. VOYA June 2014. 3Q 3P M

Delia has two loves: flowers and her neighbor Old Red Clancy.

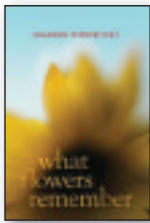
PUBLISHERS: HOW TO NOMINATE YOUR BOOKS FOR VOYA'S NEXT TOP SHELF FICTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS

1. Select your finest fiction published between October 2014 and September 2015. You are limited to five titles from each imprint.
2. Send five copies of each nominated title to our selection committee chair: Lona Trulove, 777 Windgate DR, Annapolis, MD 21409.
3. Be sure that the committee receives your books as early as possible, but **no later than July 31, 2015**.
4. Winning selections will be featured in the next edition of Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers, an annotated booklist, in the February 2016 issue of VOYA.
5. Refer procedural inquiries to VOYA Editor-in-Chief RoseMary Honnold by email at rhonnold@voyamagazine.com.

NOTE: Submitting a nomination does not mean that you are also submitting the title for review. Please send review copies to VOYA Review Editor Lisa Kurdyla, 16211 Oxford CT, Bowie, MD 20715.

SELECTION CRITERIA APPLIED FOR TOP SHELF FICTION 2014

- Themes and subject matter are of particular interest to readers aged eleven through thirteen or in grades six through eight.
- Titles have special appeal to this age group both as outstanding companions to middle school curriculum and as free reading choices.
- Fiction books published between October 2013 and September 2014 are eligible.
- The final list reflects the geographic, ethnic, racial, intellectual, and economic diversity of North American middle school readers.
- The final list reflects top quality in books for middle school readers—"best" books that stand out among the rest, that take old plots and make them new and original, and that have something different to say and say it well.
- The list is limited to thirty titles or fewer.

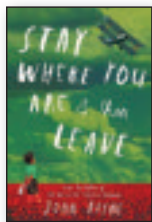


Over a year of gardening with Old Red, Delia comes to fear he is forgetting things. Since she does not want him to lose his memories of his beloved hometown, Delia decides to collect them for him—so he, and she, will never forget. Readers will not soon forget the lush imagery of this Southern prose.

"It always seemed like it had really happened even though it was fiction."—Sofia, 6th grade

HARD TIMES

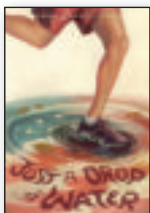
Boyne, John. **Stay Where You Are and Then Leave.** Henry Holt, 2014. 256p. \$16.99. 978-1-62779-031-4. **VOYA** February 2014. **3Q 3P M**



World War I brings changes that nine-year-old Alfie can barely understand: beloved Austrian neighbors disappear, a conscientious objector is ostracized, and his soldier father's letters suddenly stop. Although Alfie's mother blames the silence on an important secret mission, Alfie finds the truth in a shell-shock hospital. Boyne powerfully evokes war and its lasting toll on families in this many-layered tale.

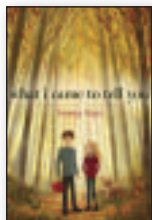
"Looking at the horrors of WWI through a child's eyes enables the reader to ignore any politics or bias and focus on the violence."—Abigail, 8th grade

Cerra, Kerry. **Just a Drop of Water.** Sky Pony, 2014. 320p. \$14.95. 978-1-62914-613-3. **VOYA** October 2014. **3Q 4P M J**



Running means the world to inseparable friends Jake and Sam—until September 11th opens a gulf between them. Raised a secular Muslim, Sam confronts prejudice and fear from lifelong friends and neighbors, and is inspired to explore his heritage. Well-meaning Jake fights hard, but cluelessly, to support Sam, wanting everything to return to normal. The polarizing responses of family and classmates plant doubts, even in his mind. Two boys have maturity thrust upon them in this deeply engaging and thoughtful book.

Hays, Tommy. **What I Came to Tell You.** Egmont, 2013. 304p. \$16.99. 978-1-60684-433-5.



His mother's death and his father's financial anxiety cast a pall over Grover's life in Asheville, North Carolina, but he finds an escape in nature, retreating to a bamboo grove to create art in solitude. Although his younger sister is a source of comfort, the new family across the street brings unwelcome changes—or do they? This dramatic yet dreamy story of loss, love, and forgiveness offers much to the thoughtful reader.

"Very heartwarming, and an amazing read!"—Sarah, 6th grade

Kelley, Jane. **The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya.** Feiwel & Friends, 2013. 208p. \$15.99. 978-1-250-02348-3.



Two souls adrift—a lonely, isolated girl battling leukemia and a brilliant African grey parrot lost outdoors—overcome desperate odds in New York City. After a chance encounter neither can forget, the hope of a reunion keeps them from succumbing to adversity in this tale of courage and trust.

"A wonderful book about a parrot [who] changes from selfish to learning about home and friendship along with a girl—and a banana nut muffin!"—Sydney, 6th grade

Platt, Chris. **Wind Dancer.** Peachtree, 2014. 176p. \$15.95. 978-1-56145-736-6.



Ali struggles with fear and frustration as she reaches out to both her beloved brother, an amputee suffering PTSD, and to the severely abused horses her family adopts. Shouldering responsibilities far greater than those of her peers, she finds a sense of purpose in helping these vulnerable, damaged beings. This book is a testament to the healing power of love, both human and equine.

"I liked how the horse bonded with the veteran and it helped them both heal."—Marielle, 8th grade

Turner, Amber McRee. **Circa Now.** Hyperion, 2014. 288p. \$16.99. 978-1-4231-7639-8.



A storm and resulting car crash leave Circa and her mother mourning her father. As Circa grasps for something to believe in, a stranger washed up by the storm appears. Miles has no memory of his past, but as he holds one of her father's digitally altered photos, Circa senses a magic connection between Miles and her family. A strong sense of place and well-drawn characters mark this quiet story of grief and hope.

"The mystery that makes you want to just keep reading."—Samantha, 6th grade

BREAK TIME

Greenwald, Tommy. **Jack Strong Takes a Stand.** Roaring Brook, 2013. 240p. \$15.99. 978-1-59643-836-1.



Between Chinese and cello, baseball and tutoring, Jack Strong is one overscheduled student. One day he has had enough, and decides to take a stand—or rather, a seat. Jack stages a sit-in protest on his couch until his parents let him drop some activities. When things spin out of control, the book takes a turn for the humorous.

"It is hard to believe a grown-up wrote this. The author knows the kids' perspective perfectly."—Nikhil, 6th grade

Holm, Jennifer L. **The Fourteenth Goldfish.** Random House, 2014. 208p. \$16.99. 978-0-375-87064-4. **VOYA** August 2014. **5Q 4P M**



The story starts when Ellie's cranky, oddball thirteen-year-old cousin moves in and begins attending middle school with her. Things get really weird when Ellie realizes that her "cousin" is actually her grandfather, who has figured out how to reverse the aging process and needs her help to break into his lab to steal a jellyfish to prove his theories.

"This book has facts about scientists combined with fiction, while adding humor."—Makenna, 5th grade

Jocelyn, Marthe, and Richard Scrimger. **Viminy Crowe's Comic Book.** Tundra, 2014. 336p. \$17.99. 978-1-77049-479-4.



Addy and Wylder, two kids who meet and don't exactly become friends at a comic convention, are pulled into "Flynn Goster Comic #3," a rollicking wild-west steampunk train escapade complete with villains and mayhem. Can Addy and Wylder fix the havoc they have wreaked on the storyline? Can they ever escape the comic and return to their ordinary lives?

"It takes you through a wormhole of time and space. I find it a great mix of genres."—Cooper, 7th grade

TOP OF THE TOP SHELF

Riordan, Rick. **Percy Jackson's Greek Gods**. Illus. by John Rocco. Hyperion, 2014. 336p. \$24.99. 978-1-4231-8364-8. VOYA October 2014. 4Q 4P M J



The classic Greek myths receive a fresh, humorous update when told from the wise-cracking and decidedly opinionated perspective of Percy Jackson, demi-god son of Poseidon from Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series. Lush, full-color illustrations complement this oversized book, which will be a godsend to teachers eager to capitalize on their students' interest in mythology.

"Rick Riordan somehow manages to keep the tales classic, yet funny and modern at the same time. This is a must-read for all Rick Riordan fans."—Sophia, 6th grade

Shusterman, Neal, and Eric Elfman. **Tesla's Attic**.

Hyperion, 2014. 256p. \$16.99. 978-1-4231-4803-6.

Nick holds a garage sale to clean out the attic of their new house and is surprised when people seem desperate to buy the junk, paying exorbitant amounts. When strange things begin to happen, Nick realizes the "junk" has been scientifically modified by Nikola Tesla himself; when linked together, it will have power beyond his dreams. Unfortunately, The Accelerati, a shadowy organization, know too and seem willing to do anything to get it.

"The book is very captivating. Electrifying, you could say!"—Bryce, 7th grade



FAST FORWARD

Acampora, Paul. **I Kill the Mockingbird**. Roaring Brook, 2014. 176p. \$16.99. 978-1-59643-742-5. VOYA April 2014. 3Q 3P M J



After a beloved English teacher's death, eighth-graders Lucy, Elena, and Michael are upset that their classmates do not appreciate Harper Lee's classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. To increase interest, they create a false scarcity at local bookstores by hiding the novels. After they publicize the scarcity on Facebook and Twitter, their plan works beyond their wildest dreams.

Will they escape prosecution while continuing their campaign? Will their classmates see the light?

"This book had memorable characters and a believable and cool plot."—Abigail, 8th grade

R Crawford, Brian. **The Weaver's Scar: For Our Rwanda**.

Royal Fireworks, 2013. 170p. \$9.99

Trade pb. 978-0-89824-477-9. VOYA December

2013. 5Q 3P J S

Before the Rwandan genocide of 1994, soccer player Faustin just wanted friends, soccer, and peace with his father—but Faustin is a Tutsi, and soon he must flee for his life with the help of a Hutu friend. They embark on a nightmare journey along the river toward Burundi, with grisly death around every corner. Readers will share in Faustin's grief, anguish, and fear in this heartbreaking and well-written introduction to an area of the world rarely covered in middle school literature.



Fantaskey, Beth. **Buzz Kill**. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. 368p. \$17.99. 978-0-547-39310-0.

VOYA February 2014. 4Q 4P M J S

Hapless and hilarious senior Millie unwillingly turns detective when her father is accused of murdering her school's football coach. During her investigation, she stumbles upon the



WEST OF THE MOON

The physical beauty of this book blends with the rich sensory detail of the prose to create a memorable reading experience. In a tribute to the power of story to transport the imagination and sustain the spirit, Astri clings to folktales that both give her hope and provide her with somewhat of a moral compass. This glimpse into a Scandinavia where Christian and pre-Christian beliefs lived side by side and the struggle for survival was often bitter is simply captivating.—Laura Simeon



THE NIGHT GARDENER

This atmospheric tale draws readers in not just for the intricate world-building and high-creep factor, but for the multilayered characters all struggling with deep moral questions. Where does story end and lies start? Is either preferable to the truth? What is the price of not facing the truth? When does yearning justify action? Auxier also structures his story perfectly, the mystery unwinding piece by piece, all the strands weaving together towards an end that feels at once unforeseen but inevitable.—Rebecca Moore



THE SWALLOW: A GHOST STORY

The fear and confusion Rose and Polly feel as they sort out life, death, and loneliness introduce middle school students to the horror genre without giving them nightmares...that are *too* bad. Everything here is right. The characters struggle with complex themes. The plot winds and spins and doubles back. The language creates simultaneous tension and languidness that challenge readers while remaining accessible. The setting immerses the reader in spooky sensory details. Cotter delivers a middle school masterpiece that will appeal to reluctant and ravenous readers alike.—Leah Griffin



I KILL THE MOCKINGBIRD

Even readers unfamiliar with Harper Lee's beloved classic will love this heartwarming story, which follows three teenagers leveraging their Internet skills to create a buzz around classic novels. I loved how these eighth graders spoke about literature and what it meant to them, and equally engaging was how they used social media to make their desires manifest. The mixture of classic novels with novel ideas drew me in and held me captive. I even considered starting a social media campaign of my own!—Corey Paulson



THE CROSSOVER

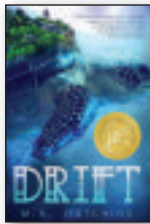
Alexander takes on big issues—jealousy, loyalty, family, success, racism, illness, and death—all while using spare, lyrical verse that communicates not just the story, but also the emotions behind the action. Some poems have the musical cadence of rap, while others sprawl free-form, reflecting the character's mood. The author shows his characters' flaws and complications both through their personal growth and through the tensions in their evolving relationships. Basketball is an in-motion vehicle for this powerfully told story about life.—Jennifer Fleck



attractive Chase, with his dark, enigmatic past, and drags him in to help. The action never lets up, and the characters are well drawn and engaging. Readers will love joining Millie's adventure to catch the murderer—and Chase.

"This book shows how a special connection between people can mean a lot more than it seems at first sight."—Aman, 8th grade

Hutchins, M. K. **Drift**. Tu, 2014. 352p. \$18.95. 978-1-62014-145-8. VOYA October 2014. 3Q 3P JS



In a world inspired by Mayan legends, everyone lives on islands carried by gigantic turtles through monster-infested waters. To avoid the humiliation of becoming a husband and having children, sixteen-year-old Tenjat joins the celibate Handlers, who use magic to protect their starving island. Although Tenjat discovers his magical gifts could save the islanders from destruction and enslavement, he also learns that his world is more wondrous and complex than he ever suspected, and that the price of salvation is high.

"It is amazing!"—Eliza, 8th grade

Lucier, Makia. **A Death-Struck Year**. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. 288p. \$17.99. 978-0-544-16450-5.

When the 1918 flu pandemic strikes Oregon, strong-minded teen Cleo leaves her boarding school to help the Red Cross. As the pandemic



worsens, Cleo's burgeoning romance with doctor Edmund is a bright light amongst the graphic details of the flu's horrors. Lovers of historical fiction, as well as those new to the genre, will love the rich details and the engaging, believable characters. They will root for Cleo as she struggles to break free from the stereotypical roles assigned to women of the times.

Swain, H. A. **Hungry**. Feiwel & Friends/Macmillan, 2014. 384p. \$16.99. 978-1-250-02829-7.



Thalia lives in a world where humans survive with the help of nutritional drugs. Food is gone. When Thalia starts to feel hungry, her scientist parents see it as a huge problem. Thalia sees it as a gift that will lead her and her new friend on a quest for food and societal change. Dystopian fans will shudder at the simultaneous absurdity and familiarity of a world where one questions the reality of everything.

"It is a really fun standalone read."—Emma, 8th grade ■

TOP SHELF

MEET THE COMMITTEE

Committee chair **Rebecca Moore**, a twenty-two-year school librarian and longtime VOYA reviewer, is the middle school librarian at The Overlake School in Redmond, Washington. She loves running activities like Bookfair and Battle of the Books to get students excited about reading. Her own reading interests include microhistories, fantasy, and mysteries.

Laura Simeon is the librarian and diversity coordinator at Open Window School in Bellevue, Washington. She enjoys maintaining a culturally relevant and responsive collection for her K-8 students. Simeon's primary reading interests are African American history, mysteries, and anything British. She also enjoys storytelling and running the Geography Bee.

Leah Griffin is proud to be a librarian at University Prep in Seattle, Washington, whose school mission statement includes the phrase, "intellectually courageous." Griffin's favorite parts of librarianship include teaching information literacy, creating fun programming, and looking over bibliographies. She prefers dystopian novels and British modernism with her coffee.

Corey Paulson, a long-time teacher and lover of all things historical, has found her calling in life in teaching eighth grade Humanities at Open Window School in Bellevue, Washington. In her spare time, she enjoys coaching the debate team, running with her husband, and spending time with her spunky nine-year-old daughter.

Jennifer Fleck has spent eight years as a teen services librarian for King County Library System, one of the nation's busiest public libraries in Washington. She enjoys providing resources for underrepresented youth and those serving them. Fleck reads anything that makes her middle school daughter roll her eyes or steal her book.