

# TOP SHELF



## Fiction for Middle School Readers 2015

**C**APTURING THE INTEREST of middle school readers requires compelling stories with inspiring protagonists and plots that spark emotion. Fortunately, this year we reviewed books that meet all of those criteria. Regardless of the genre, the 2015 Top Shelf

nominations are books filled with strong characters, courageous moments, and thrilling adventures. As readers and educators, we are delighted that our choices include a variety of genres and reading levels.

The Annapolis, Maryland, selection committee read and had lively discussions over many good books. Making the final decision was not easy. We (and our teen reviewers) are very excited to share our choices. We are confident that these books will be devoured by the avid readers and will ignite a spark in reluctant readers.

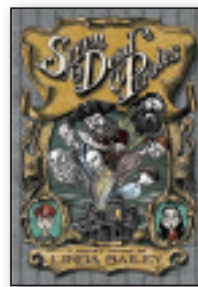


Anderson, T. Neill. **Horrors of History: Massacre of the Miners.** Charlesbridge, 2015. 144p. \$16.95. 978-1-580-89520-0.

Through fiction, this historical event in Ludlow, Colorado, in 1914 is depicted in a story of Greek immigrant miners who previously went on strike, and thus were

evicted from their company homes. The story is told in varying points of view, but all illustrate the massacre that took place on a peaceful Easter Sunday. Within the pages of fiction, there are historical photographs which add to the chilling fact that this event actually took place.

Bailey, Linda. **Seven Dead Pirates.** Tundra, 2015. 304p. \$16.99. 978-1-77049-815-0.



Ahoy, mates! Brace yerselves for a swash-buckling, sea-faring, fish-eating, good-old-fashioned . . . haunting? Things are hard for Lewis. His brilliant but clueless parents don't understand that they're living in a historic house haunted by seven dead pirates. In the meantime, he's trying to fit in at school, while at home his ghost buddies are escaping to the thrift store to try on ridiculous, brightly colored clothes. Only Lewis can help

them navigate the speeding cars on the highway (which are *terrifying*) and get them back to their long-lost ship, which is being housed at the local museum. Good, silly read for young middle schoolers.

"There were some suspenseful parts, but it is mostly a funny adventure book. I would give it four stars out of five." Joey—grade 6

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Bond, Gwenda. **Lois Lane: Fall Out**. Switch, 2015. 304p. \$16.95. 978-1-63079-005-9.



In a new twist on the Superman storyline, a teenaged Lois Lane takes the lead. She's a little idealistic, getting into trouble a lot, but her heart is in the right place, as she can't help standing up for the meek. Mind-controlling gamers are virtually bullying mild-mannered nerds, and Lois Lane, as a junior reporter, takes the scoop. Though she must battle her military dad and slimy principal, she uncovers that they're actually

pawns in a villainous, big-corporation experiment. Her best friend is "SmallvilleGuy," an online friend who she has never met, but they talk every day. Internet safety aside, the chat room and virtual relationship gives a modern-day feel to the Lois and Clark relationship. This is realistic fiction at its best with superhero tendencies.

Burgess, Brooke. **The Cat's Maw: The Shadowland Saga, Book 1**. CreateSpace, 2014. 278p. \$11.99 Trade pb. 978-1-5009-7165-6.

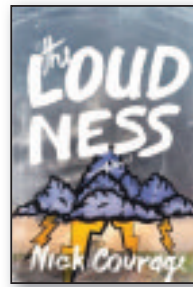


Narnia character types and a Stephen King plot make this an absolutely intriguing novel. Billy Braham, a lonely young boy, is plagued with bad luck and almost feels cursed. After a car accident, he is befriended by a black and white cat with a golden eye and swept away into a surreal world with Watchers, Shadows, and the Enemy that Awakens. Combining the cat and the dream world with reality creates sophisticated, scary, supernatural thrills. The

ending will leave you ready for Book 2 in this thrilling new series. A cat lover's must-read.

Courage, Nick. **The Loudness**. Sky Pony, 2015. 336p. \$15.99. 978-1-63220-414-1.

Henry has no heart. Well, not a real one anyway. The electronic equipment in his chest goes on the fritz whenever there's a power surge, which is often in this dystopian, segregated city. Since the Tragedies, Henry's family has been working to expand the Green Zone, which is regulated and safe. When he and



his father cross over to the Other Side, he discovers a world of colorful chaos and punk-rock beauty. Suddenly, Henry's parents are kidnapped, and he must rely on his friends and grandmother to take on the seemingly corrupt government. What he doesn't expect is that there is a traitor in the midst. Part dystopian, part coming-of-age (friends bond, romance blossoms over the sharing of a single bottle of ancient soda), **The Loudness** is perfect for *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* fans.

Curtis, Vanessa. **The Baking Life of Amelie Day**. Illus. by Jane Eccles. Capstone, 2015. 176p. \$10.95. 978-1-623-70506-0.



Amelie Day is an extraordinary baker—she bakes before and after school; she bakes for her mother, friends, and boyfriend; she bakes when she is bored or preoccupied or excited to try a new recipe. She has even made it to the final round of Best Teen Baker of the Year, but her debilitating diagnosis of Cystic Fibrosis leaves her weak and unable to travel to the competition. Amelie sets her heart upon this

endeavor and will do anything she can to achieve her goal, regardless of her inability to properly breathe. Amelie's heart-wrenching story is interspersed with some of her very own recipes and will have all readers cheering for her "flour power!"

Doyle, Roddy. **Brilliant**. Illus. by Emily Hughes. Amulet, 2015. 192p. \$16.95. 978-1-4197-1479-5.



The Black Dog of Depression is affecting nearly everyone in Dublin. Gloria and Raymond find the Dog at their doorstep as their beloved uncle's business goes into ruin. He soon moves into their home along with the depressive cloud surrounding him. These siblings are determined to hunt down the Dog and set out on the night before St. Patrick's Day to chase the Black Dog away for good. This is a lovely, warm-hearted, funny, and moving story that is rightly named. Perfect for read-aloud and ideal for families to

## 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 2015 and September 2016. 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, 2016**.
4. Winning selections will be featured in the next edition of Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers, an annotated booklist, in the February 2017 issue of **VOYA**.
5. Refer procedural inquiries to **VOYA** Editor-in-Chief RoseMary Honnold by email to 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 2015

- 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 2014 and September 2015 were 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.

read together. Readers will enjoy the bits of fantasy and beautiful illustrations scattered throughout the book.

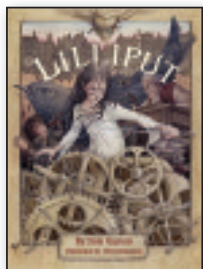
Flynn, Alex. **The Misshapes: The Coming Storm**. Polis, 2015. 304p. \$8.99 Trade pb. 978-1-940-61041-2.



Teenager Sarah Robertson lives in a superhero world in which she wants to be accepted, but there is one catch: her mother, who seems to have disappeared from the face of the earth, is now considered the top enemy. Not only are her friends' parents trying to find her mother and destroy her, but Sarah was just rejected from the Academy, where all teens learn how to polish their powers. She is soon dubbed a "misshape," but learns that, even though she

did not want to be a part of this crew of misfits, here she finds her place and purpose.

Gayton, Sam. **Lilliput**. Illus. by Alice Ratterree. Peachtree, 2015. 264p. \$16.95. 978-1-56145-806-6.



From the delightful illustrations to the plot and the characters, this is a wonderful story which introduces the reader to Gulliver of **Gulliver's Travels** and his obsession with tiny people in a tiny land. Lilly of Lilliputian is captured by Gulliver and faces being caged by an evil clock maker. Fortunately, she makes some unlikely friends and ultimately takes the reader on a fast-paced adventure.

The idea that size doesn't matter and trust is important are two theme topics that don't go unnoticed. Lilliput is a delightful story and a page-turner for readers of all ages. This should be listed on all read-aloud lists and is a must-read for lovers of fantasy or adventure.

Hardinge, Francis. **Cuckoo Song**. Amulet, 2015. 416p. \$17.95. 978-1-4197-1480-1.



Set in early 20th-century England, Triss wakes up from a feverish sleep to discover that she almost drowned in a river. Though she learns she's always in and out of sickness, something is very wrong. Suddenly, she is having terrifying dreams and insatiable hunger, plus scissors hate her and dolls come to life, screaming in her hands. In this delightful horror-fantasy, she slowly realizes she's been replaced by a magical, evil straw doll. With the help of her neglected

sister and dead brother's ex-fiancé, Triss must enter the creepy underworld to save her family and the city before she literally and figuratively falls apart. This is fantastical and dark, like Tim Burton's nightmares. High-level language makes this a little more challenging, but definitely worth it.

Kam, Jennifer Wolf. **Devin Rhodes Is Dead**. Mackinac Island, 2014. 240p. \$16.95. 978-1-934133-59-0.



This is a haunting tale about a pretty teenager's untimely demise and her frumpy best friend's part in it. Told from Cass's (the best friend) point of view, the story alternates between past and present, while Cass is coping with the loss of Devin who had been beautiful, popular, and a little mean. Cass starts to feel as though Devin isn't entirely gone. Readers who enjoy ghost mysteries will have a hard time putting this book down. Anyone who's ever experienced

the drama and agony of teenage friendships will absolutely

adore it. Not surprisingly, the adult in the novel turns out to be the villain, but the surprise ending will thrill young readers. The mix of a ghost, a dead girl, and a mystery definitely make this a page-turner.

Loe, Steve. **The Glimpsing Book**. Royal Fireworks, 2015. 236p. \$9.99 Trade pb. 978-0-88092-594-5.

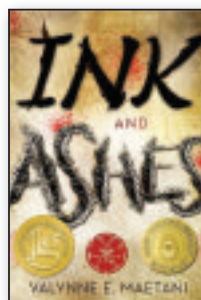


This is a wonderful blend of *The Neverending Story* meets *National Treasure*. A fast-paced adventure mixed with interesting characters help make this a unique novel. Henrietta, a shy, young girl dealing with the death of her mother, is friends with TP, an intelligent artist who has family issues of his own. Together they deal with their situations by escaping to the library. While in the library, their

world collides with the world of Sebastian, a home-schooled boy who has discovered a strange coincidence among photos of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Each photo depicts a boy holding the same book. The book turns out to be magical and it takes the children on an interesting adventure which involves friendship, saving the library, graffiti, and realizing that books are so much more than paper and ink. The plot is unique, the characters are likable, and the mystery is intriguing. This is a must-read for both girls and boys.

"This book is recommended to any reader, because it can lead anyone in the right direction, letting their imagination run free." Hellen—grade 7

Maetani, Valynne E. **Ink and Ashes**. Tu, 2015. 368p. \$19.95. 978-1-62014-211-0.



Claire Takata is an intelligent, strong-willed, sixteen-year-old amateur sleuth trying to find out the truth about her deceased father in this Japanese thriller. Her insatiable curiosity leads to snooping and uncovering a secret that her mother and stepfather were keeping from her. Her father had ties to the Yakuza, a Japanese organized crime syndicate, and Claire inadvertently puts everyone in harm's way. She and her friends must keep ahead of the henchmen before

it's too late. Japanese culture in the United States is deftly intertwined with mystery and intrigue throughout the novel. This thriller incorporates family secrets, romance, and fast-paced, heart-stopping action to keep readers of all ages on the edge of their seats.

"This book is an action and mystery sandwich, making you want more." Yasmeen—grade 7

Marney, Ellie. **Every Breath**. Tundra, 2015. 352p. \$17.99. 978-1-77049-772-6.

Rachel Watts is a young girl who has moved from a small, rural town in Australia to the city of Melbourne. She is incredibly homesick and hates the city. Her neighbor, James Mycroft, becomes her best friend. While Rachel is unhappy with her life in the city, James has his own issues. His parents died and he lives with an aunt whom he doesn't like. Rachel and Mycroft become inseparable and eventually find themselves investigating the murder of a homeless man named Dave. As the investigation grows, so does their relationship. This is a fast-paced, intriguing mystery with a budding romance. The main characters are well developed and the action is well paced. This is a great read for boys and girls alike.

McCowan, Patricia. **Honeycomb**. Orca, 2014. 152p. \$9.95 Trade pb. 978-1-459-80579-8.



The Tall Grass Music Festival, the place where Nat and her two friends dream of starring, is slowly breaking down Nat's expectations of an easy road to a potential musical career. Nat tries to maintain harmony between her friends and bandmates, Jess and

Harper, while balancing life with a boyfriend and school—and it is proving to be a difficult endeavor. As this quick plot develops and she navigates her way through the drama, Nat learns lessons in determination, collaboration, and believing in oneself.

McNicoll, Sylvia. **Best Friends through Eternity**. Tundra, 2015. 192p. \$17.99. 978-1-77049-710-8.



When fourteen-year-old Paige, adopted from China, takes a shortcut home to avoid the school bullies, she is hit by a train and met on the other side by her childhood friend, Kim, who offers an opportunity to re-live what might be

her final days. As Paige tries to change her future, she learns more about herself and the lives of those she was quick to judge. Readers will easily relate to Paige and will find themselves reflecting on their own values, cultural identity, and self-discovery.

McQuerry, Maureen Doyle. **The Telling Stone: Time Out of Time, Book 2**. Amulet, 2015. 365p. \$16.95. 978-1-4197-1494-8.



This engaging tale of intrigue, mythology, and magic will capture readers' imaginations from start to finish. Four children must travel once again through time out of time to take part in the war between Light and Dark forces in

the second volume of the *Time Out of Time* series. With the help of his friends, the young hero Timothy must find the Telling Stone, one of four treasures, to prove he is the chosen one and fulfill the ancient prophecy. The formidable Balor the One-Eyed is also rallying his dark forces to stop Timothy and his allies at every step. An ancient map leads the intrepid adventurers to Scotland where they come across other figures of Celtic folklore, some willing to help while some

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**The Telling Stone** by Maureen McQuerry

This engaging tale of intrigue, mythology, and magic will capture readers' imaginations from start to finish. Four children must travel once again through time out of time to take part in the war between Light and Dark forces in the second volume of the *Time Out of Time* series. With the help of his friends, the young hero Timothy must find the Telling Stone, one of four treasures, to prove he is the chosen one and fulfill the ancient prophecy. But the formidable Balor the One-Eyed is also rallying his Dark forces to stop Timothy and his allies at every step. An ancient map leads the intrepid adventurers to Scotland where they come across other figures of Celtic folklore, some willing to help while some have their own mysterious agendas. The sinister atmosphere established through the dark setting and nefarious adversaries make this fantasy an adventure for any reader to enjoy.—Jackie Jarrell



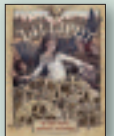
**Cuckoo's Song** by Frances Hardinge

In early 20th-century England, Triss wakes up from a feverish sleep to discover that she almost drowned in a river. Though she learns she's always in and out of sickness, something is very wrong. Suddenly she is having terrifying dreams and insatiable hunger, plus scissors hate her and dolls come to life, screaming in her hands. In this delightful horror-fantasy, she slowly realizes she's been replaced by a magical, evil straw doll. With the help of her neglected sister and dead brother's ex-fiancé, Triss must enter the creepy underworld to save her family and the city before she literally and figuratively falls apart. This is fantastical and dark, like Tim Burton's nightmares. High-level language makes this a little more challenging, but definitely worth it.—Deirdre Lunn



**Lilliput** by Sam Gayton

From the delightful illustrations to the plot and the characters, this is a wonderful story which introduces the reader to Gulliver of *Gulliver's Travels*, and his obsession with tiny people in a tiny land. Lilly of Lilliputian is captured by Gulliver and faces being caged, an evil clock maker, and the London streets. Fortunately, she makes some unlikely friends and ultimately takes the reader on a fast-paced adventure. The ideas that size doesn't matter and trust is important are two theme topics that don't go unnoticed. Lilliput is a delightful story and a page-turner for readers of all ages. This should be on all read-aloud lists and is a must-read for lovers of fantasy or adventure.—Lona Trulove



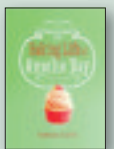
**Andreo's Race** by Pam Withers

Andreo and Raul, two talented, adventurous teenagers, have an opportunity to travel to Bolivia for an international multi-sport race. As they prepare for the competition and a visit to their home country (both boys were adopted from Bolivia), they learn about a possible baby trafficking operation that may have involved them. In an attempt to discover the truth about their past, the boys are put on the path of a death-defying race and into the grips of dangerous gangs and the terror of baby trafficking. Reluctant readers will enjoy the non-stop action and adventure as these two boys investigate their past to discover their present.—Andrea Sporre.



**The Baking Life of Amelie Day** by Vanessa Curtis

Amelie Day is an extraordinary baker—she bakes before and after school; she bakes for her mother, friends, and boyfriend; she bakes when she is bored or preoccupied or excited to try a new recipe. She has even made it to the final round of Best Teen Baker of the Year, but her debilitating diagnosis of Cystic Fibrosis leaves her weak and unable to travel to the competition. Amelie sets her heart upon this endeavor and will do anything she can to achieve her goal, regardless of her inability to properly breathe. Amelie's heart-wrenching story is interspersed with some of her very own recipes and will have all readers cheering for her "flour power!"—Lauren Straub



have their own mysterious agendas. The sinister atmosphere established through the dark setting and nefarious adversaries make this fantasy an adventure for any reader to enjoy.

Tiller, Jerome, adapter. **Edgar Allan Poe's Thou Art the Man.** Illus. by Marc Johnson-Pencook. ArtWrite, 2014. 48p. \$8.99 Trade pb. 978-1-939846-04-4.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Nathaniel Hawthorne's Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe.** Illus. by Marc Johnson-Pencook. ArtWrite, 2015. 48p. \$8.99 Trade pb. 978-1-939846-06-8.



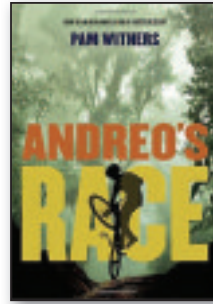
This growing collection of adapted classics is a welcome addition to school and classroom libraries. Both books reviewed do a great job of adapting text and format to appeal to a modern, young reader and include biographical information about the original authors.

Johnson-Pencook's black-and-white illustrations are bold and rich. The illustrations break up text and evoke the mood within each story,



and in doing so, will appeal to many readers. Tiller is able to preserve the humor in Nathaniel Hawthorne's work and keep up with Edgar Allan Poe's early satiric and dark detective writing. Middle school readers will have a new opportunity to read classics and be inspired to read more.

Withers, Pam. **Andreio's Race.** Tundra, 2015. 224p. \$12.99 Trade pb. 978-1-77049-766-5.



Andreio and Raul, two talented, adventurous teenagers, have an opportunity to travel to Bolivia for an international multi-sport race. As they prepare for the competition and a visit to their home country (both boys were adopted from Bolivia), they learn about a possible baby trafficking operation that may have involved them. In an attempt to discover the truth about their past, the boys are put on the path of a death-defying race

and into the grips of dangerous gangs and the terror of baby trafficking. Reluctant readers will enjoy the non-stop action and adventure as these two boys investigate their past to discover their present. ■



## MEET THE COMMITTEE

**Jackie Jarrell** is a National Board Certified language arts teacher at Corkran Middle School in Anne Arundel County. As a new mama to an infant, she is embracing the joys and challenges motherhood brings. Her other loves are young adult science fiction and fantasy books and movies, video games, '90s hip hop, and traveling to California.

**Deirdre Lunn** is the media specialist at Corkran Middle School in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. She loves reading, technology, and working with children of all ages. As a bibliophile, she enjoys fantasy and science fiction novels in particular. In addition to her passion for literature, she likes watching oodles of shows on **Netflix**, cooking, hiking, and traveling.

**Andrea Sporre** is the school librarian at Glen Burnie High School. She has taught middle and high school for more than ten years and lives in Baltimore City (Go O's!). She enjoys reading young adult science fiction and preparing to lead a rebellion in a dystopian future.

**Lauren Straub**, formerly a middle school teacher, is currently a tenth-grade English teacher and volleyball coach at Northeast High School. She has an obsession over all books, but holds a special place in her heart for science fiction and chick lit. What's left of her spare time outside of teaching and reading includes finishing her master's degree in school leadership and administration, doting on her extremely adorable godson, and trying to lift heavy weights at the gym.

**Lona Trulove**, committee chair, is a literacy coach at Corkran Middle School and was both an elementary and middle school teacher for over twenty years. She is an avid reader of all genres; however, mysteries and historical fiction are favorites. In her spare time she is working toward a doctorate in instructional design, knitting for enjoyment, and spending time with six wonderful grandchildren.