



# TOP SHELF FICTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS 2017

After reading and discussing the many books submitted for consideration, the members of the 2017 selection committee have chosen titles representing a variety of genres and formats. The committee is confident that the Top Shelf holds something to please every reader. Purchasing the entire list would cost approximately \$426.

## ADVENTURES

Bouwman, H. M. **A Crack in the Sea.** Illus. by Yuko Shimizu. Putnam/Penguin Random House, January 2017. 368p. \$16.99. 978-0-399-54519-1.



Kinchen just wants to protect her brother, Pip, who cannot remember people's faces and can chat with sea creatures. When the leader of Raftworld kidnaps Pip, Kinchen races to the rescue on his floating city. In a parallel storyline, Thanh and Sang try to escape Vietnam's war, going through a crack in the sea into Kinchen's watery world. In

a rare hybrid of fantasy and historical fiction, this book includes actual events, such as the slave ship *Zong* whose crew threw fifty-four living women and children overboard, returned to port, and attempted to collect insurance for the losses. Complicated issues are handled with a delicate touch, making this a fantastic book to spark awareness and discussion.

Burgis, Stephanie. **The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart.** Bloomsbury, May 2017. 256p. \$16.99. 978-1-68119-343-4.



Aventurine, a spirited young dragon, is bored being cooped up in her family's mountain cave until her scales harden. Wanting to explore and prove to her dragon-kin that she can take care of herself, she sneaks out, only to be transformed by a food mage into a human girl. Still all-dragon on the inside, Aventurine must suddenly cope with the indignity of surviving as a puny human. The only good thing is that the transformation revealed her elusive dragon-passion—chocolate! Aventurine becomes an apprentice to a chocolatier and learns to appreciate her strengths and weaknesses and to accept herself as both dragon and human. This entertaining tale is best enjoyed with a cup of hot cocoa at hand.

Cheng, Jack. **See You in the Cosmos.** Dial/Penguin Random House, February 2017. 320p. \$16.99. 978-0-3991-8637-0. VOYA February 2017. 5Q 4P M



Alex Petroski is fascinated by space. He loves stars and rockets; his dog, Carl Sagan; his older brother, who works in Los Angeles as a sports agent; and his mother, who has some good days but mainly bad ones. Heading out to New Mexico with Carl Sagan to launch a rocket, Alex meets new friends and ends up crossing many

states on an adventure to find his father's other family. As Alex records his adventures on his golden iPod, he reveals that, while he may be as responsible as a thirteen-year-old can be, he is also incredibly naive and endearingly talkative. The discovery of a half-sister increases the size of his family, and the many contacts he makes during his trip turn into friends who help him grow and deal with his mother's schizophrenia. Alex, who often believed he was alone, discovers he has a larger family and more friends than he ever dreamed.

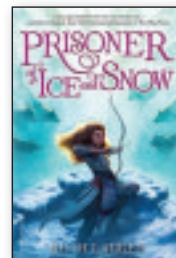
Körner, Miriam. **Yellow Dog.** Red Deer, October 2016. 296p. \$12.95. Trade pb. 978-0-88995-546-2. VOYA June 2017. 4Q 3P M J



Jeremy and his best friend, Justin, live on the reserve in northern Saskatchewan. They have always hung out together, playing hockey and video games and goofing off. Now Justin is becoming mean, especially to dogs. Upset by his own involvement in hurting a dog, Jeremy sneaks back to make amends and ultimately

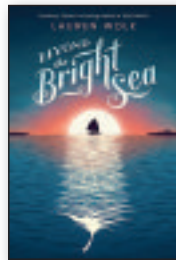
befriends the dog's elderly owner. The old man tells Jeremy stories about the old days when he ran his dog sleds. Before long, Jeremy is dreaming of running a dogsledding team. His new passion starts to heal his friendship with Justin, but will the boys and the dogs survive when a sudden storm maroons them in the wilderness? Fans of Gary Paulsen's books will find a great adventure story here.

Lauren, Ruth. **Prisoner of Ice and Snow.** Bloomsbury, April 2017. 288p. \$16.99. 978-1-68119-131-7.



Most people try to avoid incarceration, especially at the infamous Tyur'ma prison, but thirteen-year-old Valor will do anything to break in. This jail houses Valor's twin, Sasha, convicted of a crime Valor knows she did not commit. After staging an attempt to kill the Crown Prince, Valor goes to jail, part of the plan to free her sister. Once inside, she must find a way to survive in the brutal environment where the freezing cold is only slightly less dangerous than the inmates. As her family's freedom comes within reach, Valor discovers a secret that could destroy the kingdom. This story is a great choice for readers seeking excitement and adventure, as well as a strong female character.

Wolk, Lauren. **Beyond the Bright Sea.** Dutton/Penguin Random House, May 2017. 304p. \$16.99. 978-1-101-99485-6. VOYA June 2017. 5Q 5P M



Cast adrift at only a few hours old, Crow was taken in by Osh, a squatter on one of the smaller Elizabeth Islands off the coast of Massachusetts. With the help of Maggie, a healing woman, the irascible bachelor has raised and schooled Crow mostly in isolation. The other islanders, assuming she came from the leper hospital on

VOYA booklists are reproducible without permission for library, classroom, and workshop use. Reprinting in any medium for sale by a commercial or nonprofit entity or posting on the Internet requires written permission from the publisher.

Penikese Island, will have nothing to do with her. At twelve, Crow is overcome with curiosity about her birth parents and where she came from. Her questions lead her to assert her independence by using what little she knows to learn the hidden truths about her families of both birth and of choice.

## CHALLENGES

Anthony, Joelle. **A Month of Mondays**. Second Story, March 2017. 336p. \$11.95 Trade pb. 978-1-77260-026-1.



Suze Tamaki is a middle-school slacker navigating a life of changing friendships, her teacher's attempts to motivate her, and the reappearance of her mother, who abandoned the family when Suze was two. Suze has no memory of her and no one has ever bothered to tell her what really happened. While her family is thrown into an emotional tailspin,

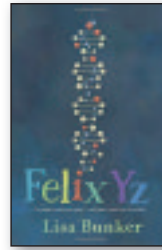
Suze stubbornly wants to get to know her mother and decide for herself what role she wants her mother to play in her life. As Suze discovers and acts upon, for the first time, her own desires, she gradually learns to be brave and heals some of the ragged edges of her family life.

Behar, Ruth. **Lucky Broken Girl**. Nancy Paulsen/Penguin Random House, April 2017. 256p. \$16.99. 978-0-399-54644-0. **VOYA** April 2017. **3Q 3P M J**



Everyone experiences pain growing up, but Behar's autobiographical novel raises the intensity as she describes her slow recovery in a full-body cast after an automobile accident. As a Cuban-Jewish immigrant who grew up in 1960s New York, she skillfully conveys a feel for the period and the immigrant experience. What makes this story truly unforgettable is how the author must adjust to being bedridden and how she embraces creativity as a means of escape.

Bunker, Lisa. **Felix Yz**. Viking/Penguin Random House, June 2017. 288p. \$16.99. 978-0-425-28850-4. **VOYA** June 2017. **5Q 4P M J S**  
Felix was fused with Zyx, a hyper-intelligent being from another dimension, in an experiment gone wrong that killed his scientist



father. Felix's condition causes him to appear bent and strange to the other kids at school, making him a target for bullying. Even worse, his fused state means he may not be able to grow to adulthood. Felix also has a crush on Hector, and, while Hector seems to want to be his friend, can Felix trust him with his secret? What will happen with the risky procedure to separate him from Zyx that may result in the death of one—or both—of them? This unique tale succeeds in being both funny and moving as it celebrates loyalty, love, and diversity.

Clasen, Tricia. **The Haunted House Project**. Sky Pony, October 2016. 228p. \$15.99. 978-1-5107-0712-2.



Andie's family has fallen apart since her mother's death, so she concocts a plot to bring them back together: She will make it appear as though her mother is haunting their home. Her plan, however, leads to some unexpected repercussions. Although the ending resolves perhaps a little too easily, this title is a good pick for readers who are dealing—or have had to deal—with grief.

Flint, Shamini. **Ten**. Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, June 2017. 176p. \$16.99. 978-0-544-85001-9.



Flint's novel, based loosely on her own youth in Malaysia, is the winning tale of Maya, a girl obsessed with soccer who will not be satisfied until she can play in an organized league. In 1986, however, soccer is a "boys' game" only. After teaching herself basic drills and capitalizing on a popular girl's crush on a boy who likes soccer, Maya encourages some of her classmates to form a team—and the first girls' soccer league in her country. While the Rocky-style tale is familiar, Flint's enthusiasm for the game of soccer makes this extremely accessible novel fresh.

Frost, Helen. **When My Sister Started Kissing**. Farrar Straus Giroux/Macmillan, March 2017. 208p. \$16.99. 978-0-374-30303-7. **VOYA** April 2017. **4Q 2P M J R**

For Claire, summer vacation meant celebrating with her family, but now her father's attention revolves around her stepmom and

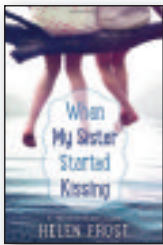
## PUBLISHERS: HOW TO NOMINATE YOUR BOOKS FOR VOYA'S NEXT TOP SHELF FICTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS

1. Select your finest fiction published between October 2017 and September 2018. You are limited to five titles from each imprint.
2. Send five copies of each nominated title to our selection committee chair at 16211 Oxford Ct., Bowie, MD 20715. CLEARLY mark the package and each book with "Top Shelf Entry."
3. Be sure the committee receives your books *as early as possible*, but no later than July 31, 2018.
4. Winning selections will be featured in the next edition of Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers, an annotated booklist, in the February 2019 issue of **VOYA**.
5. Refer procedural inquiries to **VOYA** Editor-in-Chief RoseMary Ludt by e-mail to [rmludt@voyamagazine.com](mailto:rmludt@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 2017

- 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 2016 and September 2017 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.



their new baby. Her older sister, Abigail, used to hang out with her, but now she only wants to spend time with boys. As time passes, Claire must find a way to reconnect with her sister and help everyone unite as a new family. Employing a variety of verse forms, Frost describes the events and evolving relationships of that summer in realistic situations and accessible language.

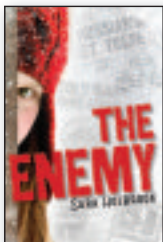
Quietly charming, this book celebrates both the natural world and the power of family ties.

Hahn, Mary Downing. **One for Sorrow: A Ghost Story.** Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, July 2017. 304p. \$16.99. 978-0-544-81809-5. **VOYA** June 2017. **4Q 3P M**



Hahn's work has been reliably creeping out young readers for nearly forty years, and the good news is that she just gets better with age. Her latest title uses the deadly influenza epidemic of 1918 to create a bone-chilling ghost story and period piece sure to induce more than a few nightmares about a girl named Elsie who returns from the grave for vengeance against all those who bullied her.

Holbrook, Sara. **The Enemy.** Calkins Creek/Boyd's Mills, March 2017. 224p. \$17.95. 978-1-62979-498-3. **VOYA** February 2017. **4Q 3P M**



Not many historical fiction novels for youth explore the Cold War era and the effects of McCarthyism, but Holbrook successfully recreates the atmosphere of the time and its effect on children. Marjorie must choose between going along with all of her peers in making fun of a new student of German background or risking her own social standing in order to befriend a girl who is strange and different to her. This is a timely tale that will entertain while helping fulfill curriculum objectives.

Jamieson, Victoria. **All's Faire in Middle School.**

Dial/Penguin Random House, September 2017. 248p. \$20.99. 978-0-525-42998-2. **G**



Imogene has grown up working in a Renaissance fair with her parents and wants to demonstrate that she can be brave and chivalrous enough to become a squire. She leaves a sheltered life of homeschooling to

venture forth to attend public middle school, where the challenges of fitting in bring her in conflict with the knightly virtues she is aspiring to achieve. Great artwork, humor, and message will make this an easy recommendation for fans of Raina Telgemeier.

Rosenberg, Madelyn, and Wendy Wan-Long Shang. **This Is Just a Test.** Scholastic, June 2017. 256p. \$17.99. 978-1-3380-3772-2. **VOYA** June 2017. **5Q 4P M J**



In 1983, Americans and Soviets are engaged in the Cold War and possess enough nuclear weapons to achieve mutually assured destruction. David Da-Wei Horowitz is constantly worried that the bombs are about to fall. He has other problems too. As the only Chinese Jew he knows, David feels different as he prepares for his bar mitzvah. The whole event is being argued about by his two grandmothers—his Chinese grandmother who lives with them and his Jewish grandmother who lives only a few blocks away. Asked by heartthrob Scott to join his school trivia team, David agrees because he hopes to learn how to talk to the girl he likes. Scott is also worried about nuclear war, and the two decide to build a nuclear shelter in his backyard. Will David manage to avoid dying of embarrassment at his bar mitzvah, or will the Soviets launch a nuclear attack and end it all? David's constant peacemaker role between his two grandmothers is amusing, while the stress on children of living in the Cold War era is palpable in this entertaining book.

Sayre, Justin. **Pretty.** Grosset & Dunlap/Penguin Random House, July 2017. 224p. \$16.99. 978-0-448-48417-4. **VOYA** June 2017. **4Q 4P M J**



It can be difficult for middle grade fiction to tackle the home lives of at-risk youth realistically and sensitively, but Sayre does just that in this excellent novel about Sophie, a girl attempting to survive with an alcoholic mother. Readers learn the little routines Sophie goes through each day to keep sane, as they see Sophie's aunt offering her help. Sayre also delivers a powerful message about the dangers of making superficial assumptions about people based on appearance. Someone may indeed be pretty on the outside while hiding all kinds of ugliness and pain on the inside.

## MEET THE COMMITTEE

Jessica Atherton works in beautiful Massachusetts at the Newburyport Public Library. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Aaron Burr, and General Lafayette all were entertained where she gets to work, which is really neat. Besides being surrounded with history, Atherton enjoys fantasy books, a good TV binge, and chasing after her one-year-old son.

Committee chair Jamie Hansen, a **VOYA** reviewer since 1982, has been a librarian for almost forty years, working as a media specialist, public library director, and rare book librarian. Now retired, she teaches young adult literature at the School of Information of the University of South Florida.

Elizabeth Matson is the head of youth services at the Hedberg Public Library in Janesville, Wisconsin. She recently returned to the north after eight years as a youth and teen librarian in Arizona. She loves snow and stockpiles hot cocoa, knitting projects, and good books (mostly YA!) to properly enjoy it.

Sean Rapacki has been a teen librarian and **VOYA** reviewer for over eleven years. He is currently the teen librarian for the main branch of Medina County District Library in Medina, Ohio, where he lives with his wife and dog. He loves reading, rock and roll, and is Level 34 in Pokémon Go. You can often find him visiting schools and the juvenile detention center to talk to teens about cool books.

Etienne Vallée is a school librarian at the Moultonborough Academy in Moultonborough, New Hampshire. When not hiding behind piles of books or chasing after dragons, he enjoys matching students to books they didn't know they wanted to read. A fan of historical fiction, dystopias, and fantasy, he also hikes and spends quality time at home with a very energetic first grader who loves all sorts of stories.

## FRIENDSHIPS

Beasley, Cassie. **Tumble and Blue**. Dial/Penguin Random House, August 2017. 390p. \$17.99. 978-0-525-42844-2. Blue Montgomery is cursed to always lose. Way back when, his ancestor messed up an encounter with a mystical alligator-deity and his descendants have received either good fates or bad ones ever since. The red moon is coming again, and the Montgomery clan is descending on Blue's grandmother's house to try for better



destinies. Blue, however, has been dumped there by his always-a-winner father. When Blue meets Tumble, a hero in training, whose ancestor also had something to do with these messed-up fates, Blue's plans change. This entertaining and quirky fantasy is filled with plenty of interesting characters and plenty of twists and turns.

English, Karen. **It All Comes Down to This**. Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, July 2017. 368p. \$16.99. 978-0-5448-3957-1.

As a member of the only African American family in her Los Angeles neighborhood in 1965, Sophie will be entering ninth grade, along with her best friend Jennifer. Sophie is often reminded that she is African American, but she does not see what race has to do with anything. Interested in writing and acting, Sophie and Jennifer seize the chance to audition for a community play, but Sophie knows she will be the only African American kid to audition. She plans to memorize not only her part, but also the whole play, just to get a fighting chance. Sophie's voice and her first experiences with racism are well handled and treated respectfully. Her desire to be like other kids is relatable, but she grows throughout the summer to recognize that her individuality is what makes her unique.



Frank, Steven B. **Armstrong & Charlie**. Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. 304p. \$16.99. 978-0-544-82608-3.



In 1974, Charlie is beginning sixth grade at Wonderland Elementary, his neighborhood school. None of his friends are attending school with him, because the school is part of Los Angeles's opportunity busing program. African-American students from central L.A. will be attending Wonderland. Armstrong is one of

these kids, who now must get up at 5:30 a.m. just to catch his bus. Assigned seats in class next to each other, Armstrong and Charlie begin an intense rivalry that evolves as they realize they have more in common than they originally recognized. This novel allows the reader to see how two unique individuals can look past their differences and resolve their conflicts in a humorous yet poignant tale.

Holt, Kimberly Willis. **Blooming at the Texas Sunrise Motel**. Henry Holt/Macmillan, March 2017. \$16.99. 978-1-62779-324-7.

After Stevie's parents die in a car accident, she loses everything: her home, her friends, and her family. She must now live with a previously unknown grandfather at his run-down motel in Texas. At first, she is treated like just another employee, but Stevie slowly discovers that her grandfather's love for her runs deeper than she thought. After another family member offers to take her in, Stevie must decide if she wants to start again or remain at the motel with her grandfather and newfound friends. This fine novel combines appealing characters, a strong sense of place, and just the right amount of romance.



Smy, Pam. **Thornhill**. Roaring Brook/Macmillan, August 2017. 544p. \$19.99. 978-1-62672-654-3. VOYA June 2017. 5Q 4P M J S R **(G)**



The format of Smy's graphic novel is bold, alternating between sections of diary entries from 1982 and virtually wordless pictorial narrative taking place in the present. With an increasing sense of wonder and dread, the reader will slowly piece together the threads linking

the diary of an orphan in the past to a lonely girl in the present. Smy's striking black-and-white artwork is both detailed and subtle, while the narrative she spins in the diary is reminiscent of the work of Mary Downing Hahn. A remarkable synthesis of art and story, **Thornhill** is destined to become a classic.

Vrabel, Beth. **Caleb and Kit**. Running Press Kids, September 2017. 256p. \$16.99. 978-0-7624-6223-0.



Caleb has cystic fibrosis. At twelve, he is starting to chafe at all of the restrictions his medical condition and his over-protective mother place on him. When he meets Kit in the woods surrounding his neighborhood, he is entranced by her wild imagination and her apparently unsupervised life. Her ardent belief in the fantasies she weaves has Caleb more than half believing them as well. Caleb starts playing hooky from summer day camp. He ignores the signs that all is not well in Kit's world while he ignores his own limitations. Imaginative readers who love books that grab their hearts will enjoy this one.

Vail, Rachel. **Well, That Was Awkward**. Viking/Penguin Random House, February 2017. \$16.99. 320p. 978-0-670-01308-1. VOYA February 2017. 5Q 5P M J



Sienna and Gracie's friendship feels like it will last forever, but everything changes when Gracie develops a crush on AJ, who, she discovers, likes Sienna. Even though it makes things complicated, Gracie offers to help Sienna get together with AJ. Because Gracie's skills lean towards clever witticisms and amusing *bon mots*, she ends up as the Cyrano de Bergerac of texting. Luckily, her story has a happy ending. The story includes rich backgrounds of people who want to do and say the right thing, even though it nearly always comes out sounding a little, well, awkward.

Wiesner, David, and Donna Jo Napoli. **Fish Girl**. Art by David Wiesner. Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, March 2017. 192p. \$25. 978-0-54481-512-4. VOYA October 2017. 5Q 4P M J **(G)**

Something smells fishy at Ocean Wonders, and it is not the mermaid. The man calling himself Neptune sells tickets for viewing the gigantic aquarium he converted from an apartment building and relies on the mermaid to make a profit. Neptune calls himself the god of the sea, so the mermaid tries to follow his commands and only lets people see hints of her true self. Curiosity and loneliness, however, bring her into contact with a girl who challenges Neptune's version of his world and encourages the mermaid to explore. The mermaid's search leads to a devastating discovery about her past. The gentle pacing gathers in excitement as she tries to escape her watery prison, finally building to a thrilling conclusion. With minimal dialogue and stunning visuals, this is a story about facing our truths and embracing the wonder of a world of possibilities. ■

