



Grade 9

English Language Arts

**Authorized Novels and Nonfiction
Annotated List**



AFTER THE WAR

Carol Matas



“There are about fifty other kids our age there, who have obviously been at the camp for awhile. We are told that it will be our job to help make the children better. (And who will make us better, I wonder?)”
p. 62

After the War looks at what happened to the young people who, against all odds, survived the Holocaust. The story follows Ruth Mendenberg as she returns to her uncle’s house in Ostrovec, Poland, the last place where her family was together before being sent to the death camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald. After an unfriendly former servant tells her that none of her family has returned, Ruth joins a group to escape from Poland through Czechoslovakia, Austria, Italy, and then by water to Palestine. The 15-year-old lies about her age saying she is seventeen and is put in charge of a group of children, some nearly her own age.

The personal story of Ruth and her family unfolds in brief flashbacks. At the same time, Ruth’s story reflects that of many of the 69 000 Jews who managed to get to Palestine illegally between the time the end of World War II in 1945 and May 1948. The journey is filled with continued persecution, suspenseful border crossings, narrow escapes, and finally the crossing by boat to Palestine. Ruth finds herself growing to care about the children in her group, as well as Zvi, a boy with whom she forms a special relationship.

Winnipeg writer Carol Matas has written a number of powerful historical novels that articulate the Jewish Holocaust experience. *After the War* shows how a group, almost beyond weariness and care, can slowly forge on, spurred by the determination to find a home for their people.

Markham, ON: Scholastic
Canada Ltd., 1994

ISBN 0-590-12384-X

Awards:

American Library Association
Best Book of the Year Award,
1996

AK

Peter Dickinson

AK depicts the horrible story of child warriors in Africa. Paul was a homeless orphan boy when guerilla soldiers found him wandering in the bush. The soldiers taught him to carry a gun, an old AK, and become a “Warrior”—someone to prepare meals for a soldier “uncle,” serve as a sentry or act as a decoy in ambushes. When the war ends, Paul’s uncle, Michael, declares that the boy is to be his adopted son. It will be Paul’s job to get an education, learn English and study the country’s dominant cultures. All arms are to be turned in to the government, but Paul buries his AK in a secret place.

Paul is learning the Fulu language in a settlement away from Dangoum, the capital city, when word comes that there has been a coup. Along with a couple of the other boy Warriors and Jilli, the young girl teaching him Fulu, Paul strikes out for Dangoum where he is certain his uncle’s life is in danger. It is a route that will take him past the spot where the AK is buried, and Paul knows the time has come to dig it up.

Written at an average reading level with graphic depictions of war, the story presents two possible results of the violence—one showing a positive direction; one locked into the bleak recurrence of strife and warfare—and challenges the citizens of today to effect a change for the better.

“At once the dream-world was forgotten and he knew exactly who he was, Paul, Warrior, of the Fifth Special Commando of the Nagala Liberation Army, now out on a mission to blow up and ambush the Grand Trunk Railway between Dangoum and Jomjom. Who he was, what he was, all he was. Paul. Warrior. A boy with his own guns.” p. 5

London, England: Macmillan
Children’s Books, 2001
[original 1990]

ISBN 0-330-48204-1

ALONE AT NINETY FOOT

Katherine Holubitsky



"I want this sadness that's been part of me since she died to go away. It's like this mean little animal deep inside me. Munching at my guts. Feeding on me day after day after day after day. Once in a while taking a great vicious chomp. It hurts so much sometimes, it's just about more than I can take." p. 51

Alone at Ninety Foot is a funny, powerful story about a 14-year-old girl trying to deal with her mother's suicide. A year ago, Pam's mother ended her life by jumping from a suspension bridge at Vancouver's Lynn Gorge. Now, Pam goes to an isolated spot at the bottom of the gorge to cope with her loss, as well as the normal confusion and self-doubt she feels in her life. She would like to get through the next while without anything creating a stir, at school or at home, but it is not that easy. She has to deal with friends, teachers, her father's awkward new girlfriend, and Matt, a new boy at school who does not seem to recognize the defenses she has built around herself.

Many teenage students will recognize and relate to Pam. Her journal entries are often self-deprecating, filled with the kind of doubts that come from the physical and emotional changes that are happening to her. However, her voice also conveys humour, irony, and a growing sense of her own strength and individuality.

Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers, 2001

ISBN 1-55143-204-8

Awards:

Canadian Library Association
Book of the Year, 1999

BLOOD RED OCHRE

Kevin Major



Blood Red Ochre combines two plot lines: the historical story of two Beothuk Indians in the 19th century and the contemporary story of two teens. Fifteen-year-old David has just discovered that the man he believed to be his dad is, in fact, a stepdad. His edginess now makes him ashamed that his mother has been so nice to him. Thankfully, there is a new girl in class: dark-haired, quiet Nancy with her resourceful and intriguing ways. When David picks the Beothuk Indians for a social studies project, he finds out that Nancy has chosen the same topic, and she even suggests an excursion to Red Ochre, a small island off the coast of Newfoundland where archaeologists discovered the skeleton of a single Beothuk Indian.

Simultaneously, the story of Dauoodaset, a young Beothuk, is revealed. It has been a troubling spring, for Dauoodaset. His band, already decimated by the violence and diseases of the white men, has faced a harsh winter with little food. Dauoodaset decides to make a trip by canoe to the seacoast to replenish their food supplies. It will be an arduous journey with many dangers, but he is sustained by the knowledge that Shanawdithit, a girl from another Beothuk encampment, will become his wife.

The two stories come together in a dramatic confrontation between past and present on Red Ochre Island. The dual narratives provide an opportunity to explore the effective use of point of view.

The history of the Beothuk is one of the darkest chapters in colonial exploitation, with an entire Indian Nation dying out because of disease and murder. Historical white men are portrayed negatively in what may be a challenging read for some students.

“A sound like thunder cracks the air! ... It is the sound of a whiteman’s gun! I paddle as fast as ever I can away from it and out to the sea. I must get to the island. I must not lose my life. Not for me, for my people. I paddle with every bit of strength I have, harder and harder.”
p. 114

Toronto, ON: Random House of Canada Limited, Seal Books, 1996
[original 1984]

ISBN 0-7704-2717-0

THE EAR, THE EYE AND THE ARM

Nancy Farmer

“Out over the vlei came a distant cry. They couldn’t hear the words yet, but Tendai knew what they said. ‘Run!’ he shouted. They stumbled on. The cry approached them, speeding under the earth, echoing out of the mine shafts ... The She Elephant’s commands burst out of the ground. Bits of the hills began to detach and creep after them. ‘Find children! Bring them to meeee!’” p. 95

The Ear, the Eye and the Arm, which takes place in futuristic Zimbabwe, is named after three sleuths who possess special abilities. Arm has an electrical sensitivity in his hands, Ear has extraordinary hearing ability, and Eye has amazing eyesight. It is 2194 and the trio has been hired to track down General Matsika’s children, who left their privileged, automated compound for an adventure and were kidnapped in the market. The sleuths learn that the children have been carried through a vast wasteland, Dead Man’s Vlei, and are to be slaves in a terrifying underworld.

Nancy Farmer’s book is a fast-paced and challenging science fiction adventure. The world it depicts combines some fascinating aspects of a possible future with many of the societal and political problems we associate with the world today. The story contains references to witchcraft and sacrifice; teachers should be prepared to discuss these topics in class.

New York, NY: Penguin
Putnam Books Inc., Firebird,
2002
[original 1994]

ISBN 0–14–131109–6

Awards:

Newbery Honor Book, 1995

ENDER'S GAME

Orson Scott Card

Ender's Game is a science fiction novel where students in a special Battle School engage in war "games" and video games in training to fight an alien race known as the "buggers." The world has won a series of battles with the buggers, but there is always the likelihood of their resurgence. Andrew Wiggin, called Ender, is a "third"— an additional child allowed to a family through a government waiver. The government has been monitoring Ender with an implant. With its removal, the six-year-old erupts into violence when confronted with a class bully. This behaviour is noted and he is seen to be a candidate for leadership training and he is invited to Battle School.

At Battle School, children are trained to take the place of the leader who brought them through the last war. Ender is the brightest, outwitting those who are older and have been at the school longer. Ender's video game is a fairy tale where he gets "killed" over and over again until he steps outside the rules and tries tactics no one else might think of. The military government has its eye on Ender's sister, Valentine, and considers how she might be manipulated to achieve the other desired characteristics of a perfect commander.

This is a challenging read with questionable language, violence and a negative portrayal of adults. Orson Scott Card developed this speculative fiction around the question of how military training in the future might be carried out, focusing on the question of whether the ends justify the means. While ultimately optimistic about the human condition, Card's dark, edgy novel suggests that military training has always included some brainwashing and that great leadership requires creativity, spontaneity and adaptation to new circumstances.

"As Ender left the room, he heard somebody say, 'It's Wiggin. You know, that smartass Launchie from the game room. 'He walked down the corridor smiling. He may be short, but they knew his name. From the game room, of course, so it meant nothing. But they'd see. He'd be a good soldier, too. They'd all know his name soon enough.'" p. 81

New York, NY: Thomas Doherty Associates, LLC, Starscape Books, 2002 [original 1977]

ISBN 0-765-34229-4

THE GOLDEN COMPASS

Philip Pullman

“The consul turned to Farder Coram and said: ‘Do you realize who this child is? ... The witches have talked about this child for centuries past,’ said the consul. ‘Because they live so close to the place where the veil between the worlds is thin, they hear immortal whispers from time to time, in the voices of those beings who pass between the worlds. And they have spoken of a child such as this, who has a great destiny that can only be fulfilled elsewhere—not in this world, but far beyond. Without this child, we shall all die.’” p. 154

New York, NY: Ballantine Books, Del Rey, 1997
[original 1995]

ISBN 0-345-41335-0

The Golden Compass is an elaborate, high-level fantasy that follows Lyra Belacqua, a precocious 11-year-old orphan who has been left by her uncle, Lord Asriel, to be raised by the instructors of Jordan College in Oxford. Her studies focus on the interconnections of science, theology and magic, but Lyra refuses to be confined by courses and becomes more interested in the discoveries on the streets and alleys of Oxford. Lyra is puzzled by sinister and mysterious happenings at the College: she observes an attempt to poison Lord Asriel and listens to discussions of “dust” and a barely-visible city suspended in the aurora borealis.

After Lyra’s friend, Roger, is one of many children kidnapped by “Gobblers,” Lyra realizes that Mrs. Coulter, her London benefactress, has been using her to lure children to a fate that is difficult to imagine. Lyra takes it upon herself to find out what has happened to Roger and the other children, and rescue her now imprisoned uncle. It is a mission that takes her to the far north where she finds allies ranging from “gyptians” to witches and even an armour-clad polar bear.

Pullman’s story deals with demons and witches, but the focus is more on fantasy than on the occult. The novel is filled with unique touches and exacting detail that brings fantasy to life. For example, each person (and each witch) has a personal daemon—a manifestation of the soul in animal form, which can shift forms according to the mental state of its master.

HOMELESS BIRD

Gloria Whelan

Homeless Bird is an easy read about the plight of young widows in India. The story follows Koly, a 13-year-old girl who must take a husband. Money set aside for her education is now for her dowry, and Koly learns the skills of a master embroiderer rather than reading and writing. A betrothal is finalized when the family sells their valued possessions, and Koly moves in with her in-laws.

It is immediately apparent that her teenage husband, Hari, is terribly ill, and Koly realizes that the family has acquired her dowry money in order to take him to Varanasi where he can bathe in the holy waters of the Ganges. But the trip only serves to hasten Hari's death, and Koly finds she is an unwanted widow with a sass (a mother-in-law) who despises her. However, Hari's sister Chandra is friendly, and Hari's father (her sassur) agrees to teach her how to read. In the next few years, Chandra marries and then Hari's father dies. Her sass persuades Koly, now seventeen, to go with her to Delhi, and intentionally abandons her in Vrindavan, a city of four thousand temples and a multitude of widows. Destitute, Koly is helped by Raji, a young rickshaw driver who puts her in touch with Maa Kamala, who runs a charity organization that helps abandoned widows.

The story takes on a difficult social issue while portraying the individual growth of a teenage girl. Koly's spirit grows as she rebuilds her life using her skillful, creative fingers and quick mind. Eventually, she even finds love with a young man who cherishes her.

"Whatever my sassur had said, I knew Sass would never think of me as a daughter. I was nothing now. I could not go back to my parents and be a daughter again. I was no longer a wife or a bahu, a daughter-in-law. Yes, I thought, I am something. I am a widow. And I began to sob." pp. 45-46

New York, NY: HarperCollins
Children's Books,
HarperTrophy, 2001
[original 2000]

ISBN 0-06-440819-1

Awards:

National Book Award, 1993

ALA Best Book for Young
Adults, 1993

THE MAESTRO

Tim Wynne-Jones



“Please, don’t call me sir. Call me Baron, if you like. No, I don’t feel like a baron any more. Nathaniel. Better still, call me Maestro. Yes, I like that. What do you think?”
‘Maestro,’ said Burl.
‘That’s like a conductor?’ ‘Oh, more than just a conductor. Master. Teacher. Here, I’ll teach you something. Then you’ll have to call me Maestro.’”
p. 54

The Maestro focuses on the unlikely friendship that forms between a teen runaway from the Ontario backwoods and a reclusive middle-aged musical genius. For years, 14-year-old Burl Crow has tried to make himself invisible around his physically abusive dad. All of his hopes and dreams are secrets. When Burl is caught spying on his father and a waitress, he must run into the forest to escape his father’s violent temper. In the Northern Ontario wilderness, he finds an old cabin to hole up in. The next day brings rain, hordes of mosquitoes and gnawing hunger. Then in the middle of the wilderness, Burl discovers piano music coming from an unusual-looking cabin. The pianist, a stooped, balding, strangely-dressed man, emerges and addresses Burl. The man is willing to share his Arrowroot biscuits with him, so Burl listens to his banter. He learns that the man is Nathaniel Orlando Gow, a composer taking advantage of the rural quiet and solitude to concentrate on his work. Gow reluctantly allows Burl to stay the night, but Burl figures out this eccentric figure can use someone to do the chores, make coffee, and fetch medicine from an arsenal of pills in the medicine cabinet. When the composer decides to return to civilization, Burl convinces Gow to leave him at the retreat as a caretaker. When Burl gets news that Gow has died, his long experience with living a secret life and telling lies presents Burl with a daring plan to keep the cabin as his own.

The story’s unique spin on the “odd couple” theme, combined with Wynne-Jones’s graceful prose, helped it capture the Governor General’s Award and makes it a rewarding novel for better readers.

Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books, 1996
[original 1995]

ISBN 0-88899-263-7

Awards:

Governor General’s Literary Award, 1995

MEN OF STONE

Gayle Friesen



Men of Stone is a coming-of-age story that draws parallels between people caught up in the currents of political strife in post-revolution Russia and current-day teens caught up in their own territorial wars. Fifteen-year-old Ben is feeling overwhelmed: he's started senior high, his best friend Stan is having problems at home, and he is being bullied by a group of other boys who call him "ballerina boy." The leader of the group, Claude, has even warned him to stay away from Kat, the girl Ben would most like to befriend. The prospect of a visit from Great-Aunt Frieda doesn't appeal to Ben any more than contact with the rest of his family. At school, however, his class has begun a social studies unit on Russian history, and Frieda, born just before the Russian Revolution, has lived a good part of that history. Frieda tells Ben about her life in a Mennonite community, separated from her baby son, with her husband imprisoned by soldiers with their rifles—men of stone. Amazingly, the old woman has kept a graceful balance to her life. As he spends time with Frieda and struggles to help Stan, Ben gradually realizes how fortunate he is to have a family—including Aunt Frieda. A very accessible read, the story portrays bullying and some violence.

"A thousand thoughts crowded into my mind as she left the room: horses walking into living rooms, chewing freshly baked buns; twelve laughing and crying children in one small house; tree-lined streets; men in army boots, storming through doors, taking people from their warm beds. Men of stone, she had said. Men with no eyes. Strangers with no reason to hate, who hated all the same. Claude." pp. 90-91

Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press Ltd., 2000

ISBN 1-55074-782-7

NO PRETTY PICTURES

Anita Lobel

“During the years of flight I had heard the fearful world Konzentrationslager so many times. But I had never had a picture in my head of what a concentration camp might really be like. All I knew now was that what we had dreaded the most had finally happened. I was ten years old. My brother was eight. We were Jews. The Nazis had found us out and caught us at last.” p. 87

No Pretty Pictures is the autobiographical story of Anita Lobel's childhood, as she struggled to survive the programs against the Jewish populace of Poland during the Nazi occupation. Anita was barely five when her father went into hiding to escape the roundup of Jews in Krakow. Her mother had falsified papers allowing her to move freely for a while, but when the program against them intensified, the family's Polish-Catholic nanny, Niania, fled with the children to her own small village. Anita's younger brother was disguised as a girl and Niania declared that the two were her daughters. When the village was combed by the Nazis looking for Jewish hideaways, the trio escaped back to Krakow and found sanctuary in a Benedictine convent. Before long they were discovered there, and the children were wrested away from Niania, imprisoned and sent to a nearby concentration camp. Auschwitz and Ravensbruck were the next stops along the line. There, the children faced starvation and disease but miraculously made it through to their liberation in 1945, and against all odds, were reunited with their parents in Sweden following the war.

Lobel writes about the horrors of the Holocaust with heart wrenching detail. Reviewing both her incarceration and the slow recovery afterwards, Lobel writes candidly of the loathing she had for herself as part of a reviled group, and the slow healing that allowed her to rebuild and grow.

New York, NY: Avon Books, Inc., Avon Camelot, 2000 [original 1998]

ISBN 0-380-73285-8

Awards:

ALA Best Book for Young Adults, 1998

OUT OF THE DUST

Karen Hesse

Out of the Dust is an unusual example of historical fiction that tells the story of a family in Texas during the Great Depression in a unique free verse form. Billy Jo is 14 years old in 1934, when Arley Wanderdale asks her if she would like to play the piano at the Palace Theatre on Wednesday nights. Mama is expecting and Daddy is trying to figure out how to keep the farm going. By summer, Billy Jo is playing gigs with the Black Mesa Boys in spots all around Lubbock, Texas, where crowds are grateful to hear a rag or two played by a long-legged red-haired girl.

In July, everything changes when Ma, mistaking a pail of kerosene for water, is badly burned. Billy Jo, trying to toss the flaming pail out of the kitchen, ends up splashing it over her mother and burning her own hands horribly. When the baby is born, Ma dies first and then the newborn boy. Billy Jo's father tries to drown his sorrows in alcohol. By winter, Billy Jo begins, painfully, to try to play piano again, but her wounded hands can no longer create the kind of music that could make people forget their misery. In the presence of her father, Billy Jo feels ever more invisible and alone, until she finally decides to run away.

Hesse captures the emotion and the landscape of the story through lyrical language and precise use of detail. The book's unusual format—brief chapters that unfold in free verse—is accessible to all levels of readers.

*“Tonight, for a little while
in the bright hall
folks were almost free,
almost free of dust,
almost free of debt,
almost free of fields
of withered wheat.
Most of the night I
think I smiled.”*
p. 116

This novel has a support video available through ACCESS: *Good Conversation: A Talk with Karen Hesse*, 1998 [21 min. BPN 2075907].

New York: Scholastic Inc., Scholastic Signature, 1999 [original 1997]

ISBN 0-590-37125-8

Awards:

Newbery Medal, 1998

THE PLAYMAKER

J. B. Cheaney

"I dared not show my face on the docks; they would no doubt be watching, as they had before. Starling had been right about that. Perhaps she was right about other things as well. What I needed was a place in London where I might be free from detection and still earn a living. A place where I could fit immediately into a set or trade and go about in company—unnoticed, even disguised. A place where no one watching for me would ever think to look." pp. 60–61

The Playmaker is a mystery-adventure set in Elizabethan England. With the sudden death of his mother, 14-year-old Richard Malory finds himself in London trying to track down a lawyer who may know the whereabouts of Richard's father who abandoned his family and disappeared years ago. Richard gets a job with a wine merchant but is soon robbed and realizes his life is in danger. He meets a girl named Star who, after hearing him recite psalms, suggests he approach her employer. Richard seizes the opportunity only to discover that it is a company of actors and he will be expected to play the female roles. At first he is not very good at it, but he gets better, even winning the role of Perdita in William Shakespeare's new play *A Winter's Tale*. During the months that the theatres are closed in London, Richard works as a copier and is sent by The Globe to the rival theatre, The Rose, where he discovers they have stolen the plot of Shakespeare's new play. There he also hears familiar lines penned by his father to his mother many years ago, and begins to wonder if his father is alive—perhaps even watching him.

Cheaney's robust and rousing story has some dramatic twists and turns of plot. Elizabethan London is effectively displayed, as is the rich, behind-the-scenes detail of Shakespearean theatre. The story is set against the Catholic–Protestant conflict in England at the time. In 1597, with an aging Queen Elizabeth on the throne and no heir, it seems that a Catholic may again rule the country that has been fiercely Protestant over the decades of Elizabeth's reign. Providing information on this historical context will prepare students for the violence in this lengthy but rewarding read.

New York, NY: Random House
Children's Books, Dell Yearling,
2002
[original 2000]

ISBN 0-440-41710-4

RED SCARF GIRL: A MEMOIR OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Ji-li Jiang

Red Scarf Girl recounts author Ji-li Jiang's personal nightmare during the Cultural Revolution. In 1966, Chairman Mao, disillusioned with perceived failures in rebuilding the nation, begins the Cultural Revolution to erase any vestiges of the old order or foreign influence. At the time, Ji-li lives in Shanghai with her father, an actor at a children's theatre, her mother, once an actress and now with a secure job at a sports-equipment store, her younger sister and brother, and her dotting grandmother. Life for the family includes an apartment with running water, a maid, and the laughter and talk of visiting theatre friends.

The novel tells how Ji-li's comfortable world begins to unravel from the day the 12-year-old was invited to audition for the elite Central Liberation Army Arts Academy. The move from elementary school to junior high spirals into horror as classmates learn that the Jiangs were landowners in Shanghai before the revolution—a taint that marks them in the eyes of the new order. Her closest friend is An Yi, also from a blacklisted family, and Ji-li is shocked when An Yi's grandmother commits suicide because of the harassment of the Red Guards. In the coming months, the Jiang apartment is raided, Ji-li's father is imprisoned, and her grandmother is given the humiliating job of sweeping the alley outside the apartment twice a day. Ji-li herself is urged by the Revolutionary Committee to denounce her parents, but it is something she cannot do.

"I wondered what I would be doing if I had been born into a red family instead of a black one. Searching people's houses? Hating landlords and rightists? Of course I would hate them; I hated them even now ... But I had felt sorry for Old Qian even though he was wrong ... The harder I tried to figure things out, the more confused I felt. I wished I had been born into a red family so I could do my revolutionary duties without worrying."
p. 126

New York, NY:
HarperTrophy, 1998
[original 1997]

ISBN 0-06-446208-0

THE RETURN

Sonia Levitin

“We had been hearing rumors. Jews leaving Ethiopia, a few at a time, walking far, far, then getting to the land promised in the Bible. Zion. Israel. Every day of our lives we have prayed that we might someday return to Jerusalem. But a prayer is one thing, reality is another.” p. 10

The Return recounts a terrible chapter in modern history: the persecution of Jewish communities in Ethiopia. The story begins in a small village high in the Ethiopian mountains, where the main character, Desta, and her siblings were raised. Desta's older brother, Joas, is convinced that it is time for them to join a group headed first for Sudan and then Israel. When a rendezvous with a larger group fails, Desta, Joas and their younger sister Almaz decide to continue the tortuous journey that even brought abuse to their attempts to buy food. Finally Joas believes they have caught up to the others, spotting a camp in the distance. He has his sisters stay hidden while he scouts ahead. To the girls' horror, he is shot by brigands. After burying Joas, Desta is determined to continue the journey that meant so much to him.

Before reaching Sudan, they catch up with the advance group, which has hired a guide to do their marketing for them and to help them avoid attacks. In Sudan, they confront massive refugee camps where there is little shelter and inmates fight a constant battle with disease, famine and a scarcity of water. There are rumours, though, of Jewish refugees being spirited away by bus to a new life in Israel, which Desta, thinks is an impossible dream.

Sonia Levitin presents Desta as a character with realistic hopes and fears, thrust from a tradition-locked community into a world of great change. The novel brings to life the children's Jewish community, with its customs, language and religious rituals developed over centuries. It also creates a vivid picture of the persecution, abuse and genocide that Jewish Ethiopians suffered because of their religion and ethnic background. Within this context, the book presents violence, religious/ethnic intolerance and sexual content, which will require sensitive discussion with students.

New York, NY: Ballantine Books, Fawcett Juniper, 1987

ISBN 0-449-70280-4

Awards:

ALA Best Book for Young Adults, 1987

SHIPWRECK AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD

Jennifer Armstrong

Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World recounts the 1914 true story of the *Endurance*, which Shackleton planned to sail from South America to Antarctica. The journey failed when the ship became locked into pack ice a hundred miles from the Antarctic coast. What emerged from the venture was a true-life survival story unrivaled in the history of polar exploration. Against incredible odds, Shackleton managed to bring his entire crew back to England in 1916. This nonfiction account tells how the crew watched their vessel being crushed to pieces by ice, dragged supplies and lifeboats over disintegrating ice floes, survived blizzards and managed to navigate, in their small boats, the earth's most treacherous waters. Finally reaching solid ground on Elephant Island, Shackleton decided that he, along with five of the crew, would sail on to South Georgia Island and make their way to one of the whaling stations there to get help. Forced to land on an inhospitable side of the island, he left half of his contingent and crossed a glacial mountain range to reach the nearest whaling station. Numerous photographic plates taken by the crew during the adventure enhance Armstrong's well-researched account of the events.

"On the next day, January 19, the fist of the Antarctic closed around the ship: Endurance was surrounded by ice pack, with no open water in sight. They had sailed 12,000 miles from London. They had picked their way through 1,000 miles of ice pack. Now they were less than 100 miles from the continent itself, but Endurance would never reach it." p. 22

New York, NY: Crown
Publishers Inc., 2000
[original 1998]

ISBN 0-375-81049-8

TOUCHING SPIRIT BEAR

Ben Mikaelson

“As he tossed and turned, Cole found himself growing angry again. He tried to fight back the familiar rage with his memory of touching Spirit Bear, but nothing seemed to ward off the bitterness and frustration that flooded his mind. Edwin had been right when he said that anger was never forgotten.” p. 141

New York, NY: HarperCollins
Children’s Books,
HarperTrophy, 2002
[original 2001]

ISBN 0-380-80560-X

Touching Spirit Bear is an easy to read, high-action adventure story about a troubled teenager learning to survive in the wilderness while dealing with his anger. After a brutal assault on a Grade 9 classmate, Cole Matthews must spend a year by himself on an isolated island off the BC coast. The idea is developed by a Native program—Circle Justice—in which those concerned devise a healing path for the offender. But Cole is not interested in healing; his plan is to play along and stay out of jail.

Garvey, an Aboriginal parole officer, and Edwin, a Tlingit elder, accompany Cole to the island and arrange to periodically bring food and supplies. Edwin tells Cole that there is a Spirit Bear off the coast of British Columbia, which is pure white and revered by the Tlingit for its pride, dignity and honour. Cole boasts that he would kill the bear if he saw it. Once the men leave, Cole lets loose his contained rage and burns everything, including the shelter. His attempt to swim to another island fails and Cole finds himself back on the shore, cold, exhausted and hungry. After his failed escape attempt, Cole encounters the Spirit Bear and almost loses his life when the bear mauls him. Fortunately, Garvey and Edwin return and find Cole.

After six months of physical rehabilitation, they are not sure whether Cole should be allowed to return to the island and complete his sentence. They are concerned, too, that Peter, Cole’s victim, has slipped into a deep depression and has attempted suicide. The book portrays graphic violence and deals with difficult issues, but it also presents an intriguing look at justice, reformation and personal responsibility. Ultimately, Cole has a moment of revelation from touching the Spirit Bear, and begins to change his attitude and his life.

AN UNBROKEN CHAIN: MY JOURNEY THROUGH THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

Henry A. Oertelt, Stephanie Oertelt Samuels

The Unbroken Chain retraces a chain of 18 harrowing events that Henry Oertelt experienced as a Jewish teenager in Berlin during World War II. Each event in the chain was essential for Oertelt to survive the Holocaust. The story begins in 1933, when Oertelt was 12 years old. At 14 his education was halted, so he became a furniture apprentice. By describing the restrictions imposed on him—restrictions on shopping hours, attendance at public events, ownership of bicycles and radios—Oertelt clearly establishes the dramatic changes that quickly evolved in his life. At 22, Oertelt and his family were arrested and shipped to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. This was the first of five concentration camps and twenty-two months of captivity.

This is a gripping memoir of adventure and survival. Some students might find the vivid presentation of atrocities disturbing but these scenes are made more bearable by the knowledge that Oertelt survived due to his own optimism and the kindness of others.

“No more than two feet in front of me stood an SS officer, with his back turned halfway toward me. His gun slung over his shoulder, he was guarding the truck and apparently the door. This was obviously not the first time he had experienced people trying to escape. We were trapped!” p. 52

Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications Company, 2000

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WESTMARK

Lloyd Alexander

“Even if the cause is good,” said Theo, “what does it do to the people who stand against it? and the people who follow it?” “Next time you see Jellinek,” said Florian, “ask him if he’s ever found a way to make an omelet without breaking eggs.” “Yes,” Theo said. “Yes, but men aren’t eggs.”” p. 138

Westmark is an historical fantasy novel featuring Theo, an orphan and printer’s apprentice, who flees from town after his master is killed by the militia, and ends up travelling around the kingdom of Westmark with a troupe of roadside performers. Count Bombas (a charlatan with many aliases) is the leader of the group, and puts Theo to work in their act as a wild Trebizonian. In the next town, Mickle, a street urchin with a talent for ventriloquism, joins the troupe. It is Mickle’s skill, in fact, that brings them their greatest success as she uses her projected voice to simulate contact with the dead in séances. The troupe’s reputation reaches King Augustine who is grieving the loss of his only child. Through a séance, he believes he may be able to contact her. Never did anyone anticipate the truth: that Mickle might actually be the lost princess.

The *Westmark* trilogy is filled with adventure and skullduggery. It explores a number of human foibles and examines the uses and abuses of political power. Alexander’s witty and elegant prose, splashes of word play, and traces of romance make this an ideal fantasy series for maturing readers.

New York, NY: Penguin Putnam
Inc., Firebird, 2002
[original 1981]

ISBN 0-14-131068-5

THE WILD CHILDREN

Felice Holman

The Wild Children is a story of homeless orphan children, struggling for survival during the Russian revolution around 1925. Twelve-year-old Alex wakes up one morning to discover that the rest of his family has been arrested by soldiers. On the advice of his teacher, Katriana Sokolova, Alex goes to Moscow to find his uncle. Cold and starving, travelling on foot, Alex arrives to find that his uncle is gone and his house has been taken over by the state. Close to collapse, Alex is taken in by a gang of boys living in the cellar of an abandoned bakery. They survive by begging and stealing. Peter, who seems to be the leader, has set down rules that the boys live by: everyone works and shares what they get; no one brings vodka or cocaine into the cellar. Alex decides to remain with them.

When the Moscow winter makes survival increasingly a struggle, Peter leads the group to a warmer area in southern Russia. Hitching rides on trains, they jump off at a rural spot and hide in some caves in the nearby hills. When a couple of the older boys get caught drug running and betray Peter to the authorities, the children are placed in an orphanage that is as bad as anywhere they have been. Alex remembers Katriana telling him of her brother in Leningrad who has helped people to escape from Russia. After Miska, one of the smallest boys, dies following a beating, the ragtag gang of twelve decides that they must escape.

The Russian vocabulary does not detract from the novel's wide appeal to male readers. A glossary is provided.

"If they could have looked down upon themselves from the height of a cloud, they would have seen that they were just a wave, a small one, in a large ocean of people along the roads to Moscow: people in wagons, people in sleds, people carrying people, but mostly people on their own two feet, dragging themselves by force toward something better—something less bad, at least—than they were leaving. From the known to the unknown." p. 25

New York, NY: Puffin Books,
1985
[original 1983]

ISBN 0-14-031930-1

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA

Ursula Le Guin

“You summoned a spirit from the dead, but with it came one of the Powers of unlife. Uncalled it came from a place where there are no names. Evil, it wills to work evil through you. The power you had to call it gives it power over you: you are connected. It is the shadow of your arrogance, the shadow of your ignorance, the shadow you cast.”
p. 79

Le Guin's fantasy trilogy, beginning with *A Wizard of Earthsea*, offers an elaborately detailed locale with its own peoples, beasts, culture and beliefs. *A Wizard of Earthsea* follows the coming-of-age of a young mage. As a boy, Duny learned spells and charms from his aunt, a witch. When their village is besieged by fierce fair-haired kargs, Duny summons fog and spins a concealment spell that sends the enemy scattering back to their ships. Duny's skill as an enchanter attracts the attention of Olgion, a mage who urges Duny's father to release the boy into his care. The thirteen-year-old is ready to receive his true name, Ged, and to begin his training as a mage.

On Roke Island, Ged attends the famous School for Wizards and advances into a thoughtful young scholar whose skills as a mage grow daily. However, he still has a reckless side. Although cautioned not to use his abilities before he is truly ready, Ged is goaded into a display of magic that releases an evil shadow-beast into the land. Facing the consequences alone, he decides to pursue it, even if it means sailing to the farthest reaches of Earthsea.

The lyrical prose in the book challenges readers to think about the power of language and how the act of naming is in many ways an act of creation. Themes of responsibility and friendship are established through vocabulary. Teachers should be aware that some students or communities might be offended by the presentation of magic in the book.

London, England: Penguin Group, Puffin Books, 1971
[original 1968]

ISBN 0-140-30477-0