

Some Novels to Read to Them

*Recommendations by Dr. Shelley H. Allen,
elementary reading consultant and children's literature specialist*

Realistic Fiction

Babbitt, N. (1970). Kneeknock Rise. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

A boy named Egan is at the center of this thought-provoking fable about the human need for mythology. Egan is visiting relatives in the village of Instep, located at the foot of the mysterious, misty cliff known as Kneeknock Rise. Villagers and visitors alike believe the cliff's peak is home to the noisy, monstrous "Megrimum," but is it? 118 pp. Grades 1-5.

Blume, J. (1972). Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing. Yearling.

This hilarious, enduring story chronicles the trials and tribulations of Peter Hatcher, a nine-year-old who must deal with a trying little brother named Fudge. First in a series. 124 pp. Grades 2-5.

Cleary, B. (1968). Ramona the Pest. Yearling.

Cleary narrates the classic tale of feisty Ramona Quimby and her uproarious efforts to make her way in the strange new world of kindergarten. First in a series. 192 pp. Grades 1-5.

Clements, A. (1996). Frindle. Aladdin.

Fifth grader Nick Allen likes to put his own spin on school assignments to make them more interesting. He finds himself at odds with his English teacher when he renames a pen a "frindle," and use of his newly coined word snowballs beyond his school. 105 pp. Grades 3-6.

Colfer, E. (2004). The Legend of... Spud Murphy. Miramax.

Will and Marty Woodman's parents have consigned them to the library for several hours a week during the summer to keep them out of trouble. Comical surprises await them there as they match wits with the notorious librarian, Spud Murphy. First in a series. 95 pp. Preschool-grade 5.

Gardiner, J. R. (1980). Stone Fox. Harper Trophy.

Ten-year-old Little Willy shoulders the responsibility of saving his grandfather's farm by entering the National Dogsled Races in Wyoming. Willy and his loyal dog, Searchlight, must face the formidable, undefeated Shoshone Indian named Stone Fox to win the prize money in this gut-wrenching tale. 81 pp. Grades 1-5.

Hiaasen, C. (2002). Hoot. Alfred A. Knopf.

Middle-schooler Rob Eberhardt's family has moved again, this time to Florida. In his new community, Coconut Cove, Roy encounters bullies (both kid and adult) as he becomes involved with a mysterious running boy, a pancake house construction site, and a group of burrowing owls. 2003 Newbery Honor book. 292 pp. Grades 4-8.

Konigsburg, E. L. (1967). From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. Cornerstone.

The perceived injustices of being the oldest child provoke Claudia Kincaid to run away with her younger brother Jamie. Claudia carefully plans the caper and chooses the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City as their destination. She and Jamie soon become involved in a mystery surrounding a statue on display at the museum, a statue once owned by Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. Newbery Medal winner. 183 pp. Grades 3-6.

Myers, W. D. (1990). The Mouse Rap. Harper & Row.

Fourteen-year-old Mouse comically narrates this story, beginning each chapter with a rap. He and his friends live in Harlem and have an eventful summer playing basketball, experimenting with kissing, and searching for the hidden stash from a 1930s bank heist. 186 pp. Grades 6-9.

Paulsen, G. (1987). Hatchet. Puffin.

On a trip to visit his father, Brian Robeson's two-seater plane crashes in the Canadian wilderness after the pilot suffers a heart attack. His only tool a hatchet, thirteen-year-old Brian must develop survival skills or perish in this gripping Newbery Honor book. First of several books about Brian. 195 pp. Grades 4-8.

Rockwell, T. (1973). How to Eat Fried Worms. Cornerstone.

Billy and his friends are at the center of this light-hearted romp about a \$50 bet involving 15 worms – to be eaten in 15 days. Not for the squeamish! 131 pp. Grades 1-5.

Sacher, L. (1998). Holes. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hapless Stanley Yelnats is sent to Camp Green Lake, an ironically named juvenile detention center, after being wrongly found guilty of stealing a famous pair of tennis shoes. The heartless warden of Camp Green Lake requires all detainees to dig holes in the arid region each day to build character. The tale of Stanley's ancestors is cleverly woven into Stanley's story to reveal the true reason the warden is obsessed with digging holes. 1999 Newbery Medal winner. Companion book: Small Steps (2006). 233 pp. Grades 4-8.

Spinelli, J. (2002). Loser. Scholastic.

Loser is the thought-provoking, touching story of a quirky, optimistic boy named Donald Zinkoff who is perceived as a "loser" by others, but not by himself, as he traverses his elementary school years. 218 pp. Grades 4-8.

Historical Fiction

Anderson, L. H. (2000). Fever: 1793. Aladdin.

Sixteen-year-old Mattie Cook narrates the harrowing, fascinating story of her experiences during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic. Set in Philadelphia and chock full of well-researched historical detail. 251 pp. Grades 5 and up.

Avi. (2001). The Secret School. Harcourt.

When the teacher of Elk Valley's one-room schoolhouse in rural Colorado is called away on a family emergency, the school board decides to close the school early. However, fourteen-year-old Ida Binson and the other children elect to continue their education with Ida bravely -- and secretly -- taking on the teacher's job. Set in the 1920s. 153 pp. Grades 3-8.

Burch, R. (1980). Ida Early Comes Over the Mountain. Puffin.

Fun-loving and tall-tale-telling Ida Early unexpectedly arrives at the Sutton family's doorstep and is hired as the housekeeper. Ida's quirky ways and warm heart soon bring happiness back to the four motherless Sutton children and their father. Set in 1930s rural Georgia. Sequel: Christmas with Ida Early (1983). 145 pp. Grades 2-5.

Curtis, C. P. (1995). The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963. Scholastic.

This humorous story turns sobering at the end when an African-American family travels from Michigan to Alabama at the time of the 1963 church bombing in which four girls are killed. Ten-year-old Kenny narrates his family's hilarious and fateful experiences. Readers will laugh out loud at Kenny's description of his older brother Byron's encounter with a frozen car mirror – something Byron painfully learns should not be kissed. An epilogue illuminates the civil rights movement of the era. 1996 Newbery Honor book. 210 pp. Grades 4 and up.

Cushman, K. (1995). The Midwife's Apprentice. Harper Trophy.

In this 1996 Newbery Medal winner, Cushman deftly tells the story of an orphan girl with no name or home. Nicknamed "Brat," then "Beetle," the girl becomes the apprentice of a calculating midwife and gradually makes a place – and name -- for herself in the oft-harsh world of medieval England. 122 pp. Grades 6 and up.

DeFelice, C. (1996). The Apprenticeship of Lucas Whittaker. Avon.

Twelve-year-old Lucas is left to fend for himself after his whole family is wiped out by consumption (tuberculosis). He becomes the apprentice of kindly old Doc Beecher, and readers along with Lucas learn about both the unusual medical practices and the superstitious rituals people used to combat health problems in the mid-1800s. 151pp. Grades 4-8.

Haddix, M. P. (1995). Running Out of Time. Aladdin.

Thirteen-year-old Jessie believes she is living in an 1840s frontier village until a diphtheria epidemic causes her mother to disclose that the year is 1996. Jessie learns that they are imprisoned on a tourist site founded by a millionaire obsessed with portraying an authentic historical settlement. Jessie sets out to escape and bring back the modern medicine needed to save the children of the village. 184 pp. Grades 3-8.

Lord, B. B. (1984). In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson. Harper Trophy.

Shirley Temple Wong has moved from China to Brooklyn, New York in 1947. As she struggles to adjust to life in America, she is inspired by Jackie Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers in this engagingly humorous story. Readers will laugh out loud at Shirley's translation of the Pledge of Allegiance, which begins, "I pledge a lesson to the frog...." 169 pp. Grades 2-5.

Park, L. S. (2001). A Single Shard. Clarion.

Set in 12th century Korea, this 2002 Newbery winner beautifully tells the story of the orphan boy, Tree-ear, and his honorable, difficult journey toward the goal of making the celadon pottery for which his village is renowned. 152 pp. Grades 4 and up.

Patterson, K. (1991). Lyddie. Puffin.

When her family falls apart, Lyddie Worthen is determined to earn enough money to save the family farm and reunite her loved ones. She becomes a factory worker in Lowell, Massachusetts in this gritty, inspiring tale set in the 1840s. 182 pp. Grades 5 and up.

Peck, R. (1998). A Long Was From Chicago. Puffin.

Joey recounts the adventures he and his sister Mary Alice have when they visit their grandmother's rural community during the summers of 1929-1942. Each chapter of this Newbery Honor book chronicles a humorous escapade of the cantankerous, irrepressible Grandma Dowdel. Sequel: A Year Down Yonder (2000), winner of the 2001 Newbery Medal. 148 pp. Grades 4-8.

Taylor, M. (1976). Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. Dial.

This Newbery winner is the classic, spellbinding narrative of Cassie Logan and her family, African-Americans living in Mississippi during the 1930s Depression and facing racial prejudices with dignity and courage. First of several books about the Logan family. See also the related novellas such as Song of the Trees (1975) and The Well (1995). 276 pp. Grades 4 and up.

Yolen, J. (1988). The Devil's Arithmetic. Puffin.

Twelve-year-old Hannah steps through a door during her family's observance of a Passover Seder and travels back in time to a World War II German concentration camp. This gripping tale unflinchingly conveys the experiences of Hannah and the other prisoners, each of whom is tattooed with a number – the arithmetic of the devil. 170 pp. Grades 6 and up.

Fantasy

Avi. (1995). Poppy. Avon Camelot.

The self-proclaimed ruler of Dimwood Forest, Mr. Ocax the owl has forbidden young Poppy's mouse family from relocating to a new farm. Poppy sets out on a perilous journey to discover the true reason for Mr. Ocax's refusal to allow her family to move to more bountiful quarters. Part of the Dimwood Forest series. 160 pp. Grades 3-5.

Cleary, B. (1965). The Mouse and the Motorcycle. Scholastic.

Ralph the mouse and his family live in a hole in the wall of a hotel room. When a young boy brings a toy motorcycle just Ralph's size into the room, the adventures begin. First of three books. 158 pp. Grades K-4.

Collins, S. (2003). Gregor the Overlander. Scholastic.

The immensely likeable Gregor and his two-year-old sister, Boots, fall down a hole in the laundry room of their apartment building in New York City. They land in an underground world populated with giant bats, rats, spiders, roaches, and "Underlander" humans, and they soon find themselves at the center of a breathtaking quest. First in the "Underland Chronicles" series. 308 pp. Grades 3-6.

DiCamillo, K. (2006). The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane. Candlewick.

Reminiscent of The Velveteen Rabbit and the Newbery classic, Hitty, Her First Hundred Years, this fable-like tale chronicles the physical and spiritual journey of a china rabbit named Edward Tulane. After going overboard on an ocean voyage, Edward is lost and found and lost again several times over. His experiences with a fisherman and his wife, a hobo, an old gardener, a dying girl and her loving brother, and a doll maker transform him from an apathetic toy into a being who feels great loss and love. 200 pp. Grades 2-6.

DiCamillo, K. (2003). The Tale of Despereaux. Candlewick.

Sparkling language and the enchanting hero, Despereaux the mouse, make this Newbery Medal book a real-aloud to savor. 270 pp. Grades 2-5.

Haddix, M. P. (1998). Among the Hidden. Aladdin.

Enter a chilling, futuristic world where third children's parents must hide them from the Population Police because they are illegal. The story centers on twelve-year-old Luke, a third child, who encounters a fellow "shadow child" and begins to question the government's policies and his own limited way of life. First in the "Shadow Children" series. 153 pp. Grades 4 and up.

Howe, D. & J. (1979). Bunnicula. Avon Camelot.

The Monroe family adopts a black and white bunny they find at the theater while seeing a Dracula movie. The family cat, Chester, suspects that the new pet is a vampire when vegetables in the house start getting drained of color. Harold, the family dog, drolly narrates the story. First in a series. 98 pp. Grades 2-5.

Kurzweil, A. (2003). Leon and the Spitting Image. Greenwillow.

In this offbeat tale with a cast of quirky characters, poor Leon Zeisel is assigned to the 4th grade class of Mrs. Hagmeyer. She's an unsavory teacher who demands that all of her students learn to sew stuffed "animiles." With the help of his friends Lily-Matisse and P.W. – and some spit from their tobacco-chewing gym teacher -- Leon sews an extraordinary masterpiece and turns the tables on "the Hag." Sequel: Leon and the Champion Chip (2005). 302 pp. Grades 3-5.

McMullan, K. (2002). Have a Hot Time, Hades! Scholastic.

Hades, ruler of the Underworld, tells *his* side of the story in this tongue-in-cheek take on the Greek myths. First in a series. 135 pp. Grades 3-5.

Pinkwater, D. (1977, 1999). The Hoboken Chicken Emergency. Aladdin.

Arthur Bobowicz's family assigns him the duty of getting the Thanksgiving-day turkey. He comes home with a 266 pound pet chicken named Henrietta instead. Henrietta becomes misunderstood and feared by Arthur's town of Hoboken, and a comic emergency ensues. 109 pp. Preschool-Grade 3.

Rodda, E. (1993). Rowan of Rin. Greenwillow.

Young Rowan, a timid, unlikely hero living in the mythical village of Rin, is the key member of a group embarking on a dangerous, riddle-filled quest to restore Rin's water supply. First in a series. 151 pp. Grades 2-5.

Rowling, J. K. (1997). Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Scholastic.

A spellbinding plot and cleverly named people and places characterize this British phenomenon. Orphaned Harry learns on his eleventh birthday that he has the makings of a wizard and thus the means of escaping life with his horrible aunt, uncle, and cousin Dudley. Soon Harry is attending Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, making loyal friends and formidable enemies, and coming to grips with his incredible destiny. First of seven books, one for each year Harry attends Hogwarts. The intensity and complexity of the content increases with each novel as Harry himself gets older. 309 pp. Grades 2 (for book 1) and up.

Wallace, B. (1998). Upchuck and Rotten Willy. Minstrel.

Chuck the pet cat, nicknamed Upchuck, forms a humorous and unlikely friendship with a neighboring rottweiler named Rotten Willy. First of three books. 101 pp. Grades K-4.

White, E. B. (1952). Charlotte's Web. Harper Trophy.

This heartwarming barnyard story is the quintessential read-aloud featuring loveable Wilbur the pig and his wise spider-friend, Charlotte. 1953 Newbery Honor book. 184 pp. Grades K-5.