BOOK REVIEW EXAMPLES

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
Fiction by Betty Smith
Reviewed by Brenna Hagen Period 6
Rated 5 out of 5 stars

This is an outstanding book about a family struggling to survive life in the slums of Brooklyn in the early 1900's. The novel is told mainly from Francie's point of view, starting at age eleven, and focuses on her courage in seeking a better life. Although Francie is the main narrator, many of the other characters tell their parts of the story, something which Smith does remarkably well, without drawing the reader away from the main plot or Francie.

Smith creates many memorable characters and relationships. One of my favorites was Francie's Aunt Sissy, who is eccentric and kind but is considered a bad influence because of her history with men.

Francie's relationship with her father is also complex. She loves him very much, and he does his best to be good to her, but he is an alcoholic and becomes depressed and quiet when he drinks, so he doesn't spend enough real time with his daughter.

Francie is one of the best, most memorable, main characters I have come across. I would recommend this book to anyone and everyone. It deserves to be a classic.

Lizard
Fiction by Dennis Covington
Reviewed by Chris Kunitz Period 5
Rated 4 out of 5 stars

Lucius' life is anything but normal. With eyes more on the sides of his head than on his face, and a nose turned to its side, how couldn't it be? But when this orphan's caretaker, Miss Cooley, runs off with a man and sends Lucius to the Leesville State School for Retarded Boys, probably the worst place on earth, things only get worse.

Leesville is supposed to be a school for mentally challenged children, and there's one problem:

Lucius isn't retarded. So when a shoe salesman shows up one day, claims to be his father, and spirits him away, Lucius takes his chances. He discovers that the man is actually the director of a traveling Shakespeare theatrical company. He has kidnapped Lucius in order to cast him as Caliban in a production of The Tempest. Lucius hits the road with them, makes friends he'll never forget, and discovers the secret of his birth.

While Lucius, nicknamed "Lizard" by his peers, is caught in a circle of rejection and acceptance, he meets and is torn apart from some of the oddest, most lovable, most detestable, characters you will ever meet, all of whom will go straight to your heart. Lizard is a fast-paced read full of imagery, texture, feeling, and affection. This novel is the ultimate metaphor for everyone's adolescence.
Danger Zone
Fiction by David Klass
Reviewed by Nick Miller Period 5
Rated 4 out of 5 stars

Jimmy Doyle is the star player on the high school basketball team in small town Granham, Minnesota. In fact, basically he is the team. Jimmy knows he's good, but he's still surprised when he's invited to go to Italy as one of the ten best high school players in the nation, to represent the U.S. in an international basketball tournament. He doesn't know if he can compete at that level, since he has only played against other small town teams, but he soon finds that this is the least of his problems.

Jimmy discovers that one of his black teammates has taken an instant disliking to him, because he feels Jimmy was chosen only because he's white. Then, when the team arrives in Italy, they aren't accepted or respected by some of the Italian fans. Jimmy has to deal with racism and hate in many different forms, grow up fast, and learn to play with the big boys.

David Klass has created an exciting plot and explored many themes. In this novel there's lots of basketball action, character interactions, and descriptions of Jimmy's thoughts and feelings about his experiences.

Danger Zone is for anyone who likes basketball, is interested in the topic of racism and racial stereotyping, or just wants a good, fast, exciting read.

Silent to the Bone
Fiction by E.L. Konigsburg
Reviewed by Jonathan Robinson Period 5
Rated 4 our of 5 stars

"I cannot explain why Branwell and I became friends. I don't think there is a why to friendship, and if I try to come up with any reasons why we should be friends, I can come up with as many reasons why we should not be. But I can be definite about the where and the when. Where: nursery school. When: forever."

As well as telling the story of the friendship between Conor and Branwell, this novel follows Conor's frantic attempts to figure out what happened on the day Branwell stopped speaking and describes both boys' struggle to deal with a shocking and horrific situation.

It all starts the day Branwell's baby sister lapses into a coma, after supposedly being shaken by someone. The baby's young nanny identifies that someone as Branwell. Conor knows his best friend could never do anything like this, and he is obligated, by friendship, to uncover the truth.

But first Conor needs to figure out a way to communicate with the mute Branwell, or there will be no way to discover what happened. Along with Conor, the reader slowly puts together the puzzle that began on the day of the 9-1-1 call.

This book is an amazing read. I was totally absorbed in it, and I would recommend it to anybody. Boys and girls alike will love the mystery of Silent to the Bone and its competing themes of the power of guilt and the power of love.
In the Forests of the Night  
Fiction by Amelia Atwater-Rhodes  
Reviewed by Ceysa McKechnie Period 5  
Rated 5 out of 5 stars

Risika, a 300-year-old vampire, is alive today in Concord, a small town in Massachusetts. Risika harbors a deep hatred for one thing and one thing only: Aubrey, one of just five vampires stronger than Risika, who has taken it upon himself to haunt her life forever.

As the reader lives with Risika and gets to know Aubrey, as well as one of Risika's previous families from the 1900's, we learn about her past with Aubrey and the many other vampires in her line. The novel moves back and forth in time between Risika's memories of adjusting to her new life as a vampire, to the present, in which she encounters Aubrey again, as well as exploring an unexpected character from her past.

Only thirteen when she wrote In the Forests of the Night, Amelia Atwater-Rhodes has created in Risika a character that teenage readers can easily relate to on many levels, as well as a non-stereotypical view of who a vampire or a witch might be. Her writing is remarkable and the novel one I could not put down.

I strongly recommend In the Forests of the Night to both male and female readers, as Atwater-Rhodes takes the reader on a wonderful adventure into the world of her gothic imagination.

Someone Like You  
Fiction by Sarah Dessen  
Reviewed by Audrey Stoltz Period 5  
Rated 4 out of 5 stars

Have you ever had a best friend that you couldn't be without? That you'd do anything for? That's how it is for Scarlet and Halley. They are perfect for each other: Scarlet the popular girl, and Halley her trusty sidekick, always there to help, just like in every fairy tale.

But, as in fairy tales, all it takes is one event to change everything. In Halley's life it's a phone call from Scarlet, informing her that Michael, Scarlet's boyfriend, is dead. This phone call changes everyone's lives forever. Soon after that horrible night, Scarlet discovers she is pregnant with Michael's baby. Halley does everything she can to help Scarlet through the pregnancy. But then Halley meets Macon, and she falls in love. Will this have an impact on Halley and Scarlet's friendship?

I love Sarah Dessen's characters. As I read this novel I felt as though I were there with Halley and Scarlet, catching glimpses of their frustrations and triumphs. They let me in on their thoughts and feelings as they led me through their world. The novel is filled with exciting dialogue and a complicated web of plots.

I was surprised when I first started Someone Like You and discovered the story was told from Halley's point of view, as she watched and helped her best friend become a mother. Now I would recommend it to anyone who has had a best friend and understands what it means to be there for someone you care about, no matter what.
One Fat Summer
Fiction By Robert Lipsyte
Reviewed by Marcia Conley Carter Period 5
Rated 4 out of 5 stars

Who doesn't like summer? I thought. Everyone enjoys it when it's warm. Not true, especially for Bobby Marks, who's so overweight he can't button his pants or touch his toes. Fourteen-year-old Bobby spends his summers with his family on Rumson Lake, which for him is torture, and this summer promises to be the worst yet. Knowing that his father wants him to work at Happy Valley Camp, where he would be in agony for the next three months, Bobby and his best friend Joanie set out to find him another job. And the adventure begins.

I loved this book and didn't want to put it down. When I did finish it, I was sad; I felt like I had lost a friend. But then my spirits lifted when I found Summer Rules and Summer Boy, the two other books in the trilogy about Bobby Marks. Lipsyte does a great job of creating a wonderful guy main character who, as a girl, I had no trouble relating to, as well as a believable situation. Lipsyte is also a very funny writer.

I highly recommend One Fat Summer to anyone. Everyone will enjoy its strong theme of the importance of learning who you are and standing up for yourself.

Stuck in Neutral
Fiction by Terry Trueman
Reviewed by Tyler Reny Period 5
Rated 5 out of 5 stars

"My name is Shawn McDaniels. I'm fourteen years old. I think my father is trying to kill me." Shawn McDaniels is not paranoid; he has cerebral palsy, a genetic condition that leaves him without control of his muscles, including the ability to communicate. Everyone assumes he's in terrible pain and anguish, especially his dad, who can't stand to see him "suffer." But Shawn has learned to live within his useless body and, defiantly, he doesn't want to die.

Imagine being trapped, not able to move, talk, or even look where you want to. This is Shawn's life. But the focus of this novel is his inner life, which is richly imagined by Terry Trueman, who is the father of a child with cerebral palsy.

I loved this book. Once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. Stuck in Neutral is Trueman's powerful first novel. It leaves readers with a story and a character that are impossible to forget and an ending that is haunting.
Bag of Bones  
Fiction by Stephen King  
Reviewed by Cody Borawa Period 5  
Rated 5 out of 5 stars

Mike Noonan, a middle aged writer, lives his life in dairy, Maine. Four years after Mike's wife Jo unexpectedly passes away, Mike moves to his summer cabin, "Sarah Laughs," which is in Manderly falls, Maine, and he finds that he has developed writer's block. Mike Noonan, the protagonist of the story, has high emotions of all types throughout the book Anger, pain, sorrow, and uncertainty are some of his many mixed emotions.

Mike Noonan continues on through his somewhat troubled life, living in Sarah Laughs. Sarah Laughs was named after a black woman who previously lived on the property, in the 1900's while signing with a group of blue's musicians. Mike is challenged with trying to figure out the mystery of Sarah, which also holds the key to his writer's block and finally letting go of his wife Jo's death.

He also gets caught up in a struggle between Max Devore and Mattie Devore, Max's daughter in law, for the sole custody of Mattie's daughter Kyra. Through this struggle Mike encounters a supernatural connection to Kyra, Max Devore, the town itself, and even his dead wife Jo.

Bag of Bones is an excellent book about the struggles of the rich versus poor, coping with tragic loss, and touches on racism.

Stephen King effectively captured my imagination and made me feel as though I knew the characters personally and felt their same feelings.

Bag of Bones is intriguing, mysterious, and captivating. I would recommend this book to anyone who believes that the supernatural eludes the real world.