The summer before her first year of high school, Tilara Hayes arrives at her Aunt Cloelle's West Virginia home. This shy, young girl finds herself coerced into volunteering at McKendree, the local retirement home, or as the locals call it, the home for "colored people." There, Tilara makes new friends with some of the teenagers who are spending the summer helping out at McKendree. They call themselves the "MC's," short for the McKendree Crowd.

While working at McKendree, Tilara learns to face the vestiges of racial prejudice and age discrimination. She also recognizes, both directly and indirectly, that loving oneself is the first step towards becoming a real person.

Greenwillow, 2000, 260 pp., $15.95

"Tilara is too black..." are the words overheard during childhood by one African-American young girl, Tilara Hayes. As Tilara moves towards adolescence, she tries to accept herself and her skin, a tone she describes as "the color of a Hershey chocolate bar."

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Jeff Kaplan, Editor

Populated with offbeat characters, this book moves rapidly with Cordelia eventually reuniting with her family, but not after enduring much pain and hardship. The book's real power, though, is the vivid description of early frontier life in Seattle.

Delacorte, 2000, 244 pp., $15.95

A girl with an odd appearance can turn a profit. There, the action becomes both hilarious and complex because Cordelia soon discovers - through the carnival grapevine - that there is a reward for her stepmother's capture. Rumor has it that her stepmother Babe has allegedly murdered her first husband. Feeling defensive, Cordelia will not betray who she believes is her innocent stepmother.

Girls will enjoy this exciting well-written story of Cordelia's escape to Seattle to find Squirl, where, quite unexpectedly, Cordelia becomes part of a carnival act - because she learns that her odd appearance can turn a profit. There, the action becomes both hilarious and complex because Cordelia soon discovers - through the carnival grapevine - that there is a reward for her stepmother's capture. Rumor has it that her stepmother Babe has allegedly murdered her first husband. Feeling defensive, Cordelia will not betray who she believes is her innocent stepmother.

The arrival of a new friend - a Victoria Barrington - proves the spark that prompts Joan to see her proud Papa in a new light. Defending her heritage to Victoria, Joan sees the power of her parents to Joan's dismay, her parents are constantly reminding her and her siblings, Bobby, 10 and Emily, 8, of their cultural heritage.

Joan and her family are Chinese-Americans, and to Joan's dismay, her parents are too dependent on her for all their needs regarding overcoming cultural barriers. Moving from Ohio to West Virginia in search of a better fortune, Joan's parents work hard in their laundry business, and they don't expect less from her - even if at fifteen, Joan feels her distance from her distant father and her stepmother, Babe. In the summer of 1918, when she is fourteen, she receives her first kiss from Squirl, a seventeen-year-old logger. Immediately, Cordelia's father, though, is the vivid description of early frontier life in Seattle.

HarperCollins, 2000, 245 pp., $15.95

Joan and her siblings strike a deal - to behave splendidly - so they, in turn, can celebrate Christmas in style.

Joan and her brother and sister, though, want to celebrate American holidays - like Christmas. Papa, however, is not ready "to give in" so easily - after all, he plans to return to China one day. Joan and her siblings strike a deal - to behave splendidly - so they, in turn, can celebrate Christmas in style.

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At first the school is stunned and doesn't know what to make of her. Then she sparks a school-spirit revolution at a football game, and instantly everyone wants to be her friend. But just as suddenly, the school turns on her and shuns her because she doesn't want to play by the rules of normal school life - namely, uniform conformity and spiteful competition.

Spontaneity; the fact that she plays her ukulele and sings loudly in the school cafeteria; and her genuine lack of concern for what others think of her.

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Another well-written work by Spinelli that will particularly appeal to young people and their eagerness to discuss today's high school culture.
**When I Get Older, I'll Understand**

Through a series of life altering events, this story is a touching testament to the power of the human spirit and the importance of family.

**Eggs in One Basket by Kathy Mackel**

ISBN: 0-06-028307-6

Eggs in One Basket, a sequel to Can of Worms, is about the weird things that keep happening to star quarterback Scott Schreiber.

**Girl of Kosovo by Alice Mead**

ISBN: 0-525-46381-8

Set in Kosovo during the Albanian-Serb battles of 1999, this realistic novel brings war up close and personal, with its devastating effects on those really unable to comprehend what it's all about - and why.

**Say You Are My Sister**

ISBN: 0-786-80475-8

Eleven-year-old Zana, an Albanian whose best friend is a Serb, experiences graphically portrayed horrors she cannot understand: her father and two brothers are killed in a Serb-inspired explosion, one that shatters her leg; the neighborhood wise man is executed; bodies are burned; bombs explode. It's not an easy read, but it is an accurate one and a good one.

**Can of Worms**

ISBN: 1-56315-211-8

Scott's life has not been the same since his best friend, Mike Pillsbury, made contact with aliens. In fact, during a football game, Scott has hallucinations and develops superhuman powers. Soon, Scott discovers a new talent for flying, which he can't control. Moreover, his flying leads him and his friends to the Lyre, a peaceful but powerful birdlike alien and her eggs.

**Girl of Kosovo**

ISBN: 0-374-32620-7

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**Island in the Sky**

ISBN: 0-8234-1149-1

Eleven-year-old Zana, an Albanian whose best friend is a Serb, experiences graphically portrayed horrors she cannot understand: her father and two brothers are killed in a Serb-inspired explosion, one that shatters her leg; the neighborhood wise man is executed; bodies are burned; bombs explode. It's not an easy read, but it is an accurate one and a good one.

**The Albion Press Ltd**

ISBN: 0-525-46381-8

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Run If You Dare

By Randy Powell

Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2003, 186 pp., $16.99

Father-Son Relationships

Gardner's father has spent his whole adult life not knowing what he wants to do, except play golf. Now, at 49, he's unemployed, unhappy that his life hasn't turned out the he envisioned it, and thinking of running away to start a new life. This revelation, expressed during an infrquent father-son talk, shocks 14-year-old Gardner, who has idolized his father, especially now that Gardner is trying to establish his own identity.

While Powell's humor and Gardner's relationships with friends Sheep and Annie lighten this depressing scenario, reading the novel is like watching a TV documentary of a nice family's internal struggles. As readers, we know the story won't end happily, because this isn't a Disney movie, even though we feel Gardner is going to be okay. Although Run If You Dare is one of the best novels about father-son relationships that you will ever read, I found it more disturbing than entertaining.

The Truth Out There by Celia Rees

DK Publishing, 2000, 240 pp., $16.95

Autism/Mystery

This sequel to Newbery Honor book, A Long Way from Chicago, focuses on Mary Alice's junior year of high school and her deepening bond with her feisty Grandma Dowdel in rural Illinois. Mary Alice and her family are living in Chicago, where they are trying to get back on their feet after feeling the effects of the Great Depression. The most intriguing character is clearly the wise and very unconventional grandma, a Depression-era Robin Hood who continues to embarrass and outsmart locals most deserving of her tricks and to help those most needy without making them feel that she has done them a favor.

Several other adult characters and a handful of classmates round out this story, including Royce McNeall, another newcomer to the community who announces at the end of the school year that he'll write to Mary Alice from the University of Illinois. In an afterward, Mary Alice returns to Grandma Dowdel's house for her wedding to Royce, which occurs during World War II. She ends the story by telling the reader, "We lived happily ever after." An odd ending to an otherwise entertaining, light read about everyday life as managed by people who survived the Great Depression.

Teachers should be cautioned about explicit sexual content.

The Year of Revolution: Love and Rebellion in the 1960s

by Judith Ortiz Cofer

Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001, 195 pp., $16.00

Coming-of-Age

Mary Ellen, a Puerto Rican living in New Jersey, is the narrator who recounts the upheavals and joys of adolescence in this insightful book. She speaks of her growing awareness of her own sexuality, early sexual encounters, involvement in political uprisings, awareness of the effects of drugs, and memories of the pain of war and death. Mary Ellen reflects upon her passage into adulthood and her changing views of parents, their conflicting value systems, and the world around her.

Through Mary Ellen's narration, Confer captures the depth and complexities of adolescent emotions, drawing upon common themes such as the struggle for peer acceptance, rebellion from adults, and the search for identity. This book lends itself to an interdisciplinary study of the 1960s, masterfully weaving different literary genres into a historical account of important events such as the assassination of President Kennedy and the perspectives of Cuban exiles in America. Educators can use this work to increase awareness of Latin cultures. Teachers should be cautioned about explicit sexual content.

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Teachers should be cautioned about explicit sexual content.
Staying at his sick grandmother’s house was the last thing Joshua wanted to do for his summer vacation. Joshua knew that his mother needed to be there for his grandmother, but it meant a whole summer away from his friends in a boring town where he did not know anyone.

Soon after he arrives, however, Joshua discovers that there is a secret in his family, a secret that no one wants to talk about. In a dusty old room, he finds UFO magazines and paintings of alien ships that belonged to his Uncle Patrick. Uncle Patrick died at a very young age, and no one in the family ever talks about how he died and strangely enough, there is no known grave. As Joshua discovers the secrets of a summer long ago, he realizes that his computer game, Alien State 3, is actually the story of Uncle Patrick’s life. The resulting story answers the question - what is the family secret behind Uncle Patrick's mysterious disappearance?

This novel - full of mystery and intrigue - is an easy read, aimed at young people who enjoy tales of fantasy and mystery. This engaging summer yarn is perfect for young reluctant readers.

Terri Reily
Orlando, Florida

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**Adaline Falling Star by Mary Pope Osborne**

Scholeastic, 2000, 170 pp., $16.95


This historical novel tells the story of Kit Carson's daughter Adaline. Carson did have a daughter with an Arapaho woman, but little is known of her after she was sent to live with relatives in St. Louis. In Osborne’s vision, she is an intelligent, strong, and determined young woman who refuses to accept her life as a little better than a slave. When she believes her father is not coming back, she runs away.

Adaline’s struggle to survive along the river is realistic, but more appealing to readers is her struggle to resist the dog she finds in the woods. She accepts its company, even as she declares, “I ain’t going to love him.” Readers will feel her pain when she must leave the dog behind in order to get her work on a steamboat going upriver. Kit Carson’s reappearance after the steamboat explodes is a trifle convenient, but overall this is a solid and artistic historical fiction.

Eileen A. Greaver
Binghamton, New York

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**A Riddle of Roses by Carol Cude Mullineux**

Second Story Press, 2000, 222 pp., $6.95


When recently orphaned thirteen-year-old Meryl is caught reading - without permission - the Great Bard’s Collection of Songs and Adventures, she is suspended from training to be a bard, and sentenced to be the servant of the Mistress of Woodcraft for a year. Angry, bored, and disappointed, Meryl gains the Hall’s permission to pursue an alternate route to hardship: fulfilling a quest, as did the bards of old.

In spite of being unsure of what she is supposed to do on this quest, Meryl sets out into the forest. When she meets wisecracking Halstaff, the forest oracle, who accuses her of Taliesin of being a real mensch, a Yiddish slang for “true gentleman.”

Believing the rose is in Avalon, where the magic cauldron of Ceridwen (anyone who sips from it becomes old) is located, Meryl and Halstaff begin a spellbinding, humorous adventure filled with amazing and unforgettable characters, continuous action, and a wonderful message: it is through hard work, not magic, that you attain your goal.

Bill Moliniaux
Granby, Connecticut

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**A Short Guide to a Happy Life by Anna Quindlan**

Random House, 2000, 50 pp., $12.95

ISBN: 0-375-50481-3

Excellent insight and advice is what columnist and novelist Anna Quindlan offers in this short and inspiring collection of essays. Saddened by her own mortality since the death of her mother, Anna Quindlan writes of love, marriage, parenthood, disappointment, and death. Her purpose is to explore these topics in their complexity and to underscore that life is a gift of God and not a mere existence.

For Anna Quindlan, life is a school where everywhere, there is a classroom. Lessons can be found in falling snowdrops; glistening daffodils; small children nestling on a couch; and quiet conversations with the homeless. Written in plainspoken language, Quindlan’s work will resonate with adolescents, no matter what their religious or ethnic affiliation.

Gilberto Davis
Ponce, Puerto Rico

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Gilberto Davis
Ponce, Puerto Rico
At the Vancouver School of the Arts, seventeen-year-old Cassie studies dance. Back in Holden, Victoria's hometown, sixteen-year-old Helen paints alone, all day, in a quiet attic.

What do these two have in common? Years ago— as children on a field trip to the Victoria Seaquarium—they witnessed a fatal accident when a young woman trainer fell into the killer whale pool and was drowned by the whales. Forever, they are both haunted by images and dreams of this horrific event.

Offering no support, Cassie's psychologist father is too busy with patients to recognize her trauma, while Holden's dad deals with his wife's four-year desertion, her sudden return home, and her newly discovered case of full-blown AIDS. Holden deals with his pain by turning to painting and drinking, and Cassie turns to Holden for emotional and physical support.

With mutual support, but not without struggle, they are ultimately able to help each other and continue on with their lives. Although this is a busy novel, young adults will relate to the family struggles as well wrestle with the issue of holding whales in captivity.

Kay Haas
Ottawa, Kansas

No More Dead Dogs by Gordon Korman
Hyperion Books, 2000, 180 pp., $11.99

This funny tale begins when a high school football player with the unlikely name of Wallace Wallace is asked by his eighth-grade English teacher to write a book review on Old Shep, My Pal. Humor results when Wallace Wallace, a boy renowned for his unbridled honesty, tells his teacher that this is "the most boring book that he has ever read" because he knew that Old Shep, the dog, was going to die before he even read page one. As Wallace Wallace says matter of factly to his teacher, "every book with a dog on its cover always dies."

His teacher, though, takes affront at Wallace Wallace's remarks. His teacher loves the book, and moreover, is directing the school play entitled— that's right— Old Shep, My Pal. The play becomes the source for his teacher's punishment for Wallace Wallace's blunt review, and soon, Wallace finds himself assigned to a part in the production. The teacher hopes to change his student's independent mind, but Wallace Wallace has different plans.

Wallace Wallace begins to ad-lib, and soon this touching story of a boy and his beloved dog becomes a rollicking "roller-blade, rock and roll" rendition of a classic tale of friendship and love. Young teens will enjoy this story of a young boy who could not tell even a tiny lie.

Selenia Rodríguez
Orlando, Florida

Carolina Crow Girl by Valerie Hobbs

This funny tale begins when a high school football player with the unlikely name of Wallace Wallace is asked by his eighth-grade English teacher to write a book review on Old Shep, My Pal. Humor results when Wallace Wallace, a boy renowned for his unbridled honesty, tells his teacher that this is "the most boring book that he has ever read" because he knew that Old Shep, the dog, was going to die before he even read page one. As Wallace Wallace says matter of factly to his teacher, "every book with a dog on its cover always dies."

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Selenia Rodríguez
Orlando, Florida


The World at Her Fingertips: The Story of Helen Keller by Joan Dash
Scholastic Press, 2001, 256 pp., $15.95

The author paints a comprehensive picture of Helen Keller with this fascinating biography. Readers will gain new perspective of the historical, political and cultural climate in which Ms. Keller lived and worked, along with an understanding of her relationships with those close to her.

Besides enjoying the wealth of new information unearthed by the author, young readers may take comfort in the typically familiar vignettes of Ms. Keller's life. Notes from her own autobiography and descriptions of movie scenes from The Miracle Worker are woven throughout the story.

With flowing narrative, the author offers insight into Helen Keller's determination to bridge the gap between two worlds. A couple of awkward moments, with which younger students may identify, are woven throughout the story.

Kristen Stromberg
Deland, Florida

The Princess Diaries by Meg Cabot
HarperCollins, 2000, 238 pp., $15.95

The Princess Diaries is the diary of Mia Thermopolis, who is living a confused and hard to believe life. She is the not most popular girl in school, but is in love with the most popular boy. She lives in New York City with her artist mom, who is divorced and is dating her algebra teacher— a class Mia is failing.

One day, her father arrives and upsets her troubled life. He tells her that he has cancer, and then, to her disbelief, that she is the Princess of Genvoia. That's right! As it turns out, her father is not just the European politician he's always led to her believe, but actually the prince of a small country. Before long, the New York paparazzi arrive at her school and front door, eager to take pictures of real live princess.

Mia will win the hearts of teenage girls dying to fit in without too much fanfare, and Meg Cabot's writing is silly and entertaining enough to capture the fancy of young readers who are looking for a fun story about ordinary people caught in extraordinary circumstances. With tons of pop culture references, this book will make today's teens feel right at home.

Michelle Rich
Oviedo, Florida

The Colors of My World by Lynn Joseph
HarperCollins, 2000, 138 pp., $14.95

With flowing narrative, the author offers insight into Helen Keller's determination to bridge the gap between two worlds. A couple of awkward moments, with which younger students may identify, are woven throughout the story.

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Kristen Stromberg
Deland, Florida
Ana Rosa is about to turn 13. Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, she now dreams of becoming a writer. Yet Ana knows how unusual this wish is since the only person she knows who write books in her country is the nation’s leader, President Baluaguer. Moreover, Ana’s mother fears for her daughter’s safety if she writes. As her mother says, those brave enough “to hurl words at the government,” have died.

Much to her mother’s dismay, though, Ana does write. Encouraged by her older brother, Guario, Ana begins writing her thoughts on her brother’s notepad, but soon, Ana’s words become deadly. When the government evicts the residents in her town to make room for foreign investors, Ana Rosa writes an article for the local newspaper, quoting her older brother’s anger, and as a result, Guario is brutally shot down.

Sadness ensues, but Ana does not lose her desire to write. Soon, as a gift, Ana receives a typewriter and hundreds of sheets of paper. Enthused, she begins typing furiously her brother’s story. Ana’s dream is that the world will know of her brother’s short but heroic life.

With every chapter beginning with a poem, readers of all ages will relate to this moving story of the triumph of the human will.

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