

# TOP SHELF

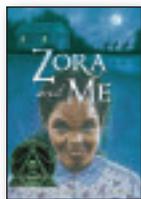
## Fiction for Middle School Readers 2011

As teachers and librarians, our goal is to move books off of our shelves into children's hands and hearts and minds.

We all know how the conversation starts. "I need to find a book." It might be they need a book because a report is due or because they are looking forward to a long weekend with time to read, but our conversation is the same. "What do you like to read? Tell me about a favorite book you read in the past year." Then we start introducing them to books we love until we find a match. We have clustered this year's Top Shelf books into categories that appeal to children with the hopes that they will find well-written books that hook them and also push them to explore some unexpected genres along the way. For example, someone looking for a creepy tale might find themselves reading a fairy tale, a graphic novel, a realistic novel-in-verse, a mystery, or even an imagined childhood of a beloved writer. **Creepy Tales** are for readers who want to be scared and thrilled as they encounter mystery, guilt, prejudice, and the supernatural. **Books for Younger Readers** address some serious topics that matter to middle schoolers in a fun, fast-paced way. **Finding Your Place in the World** is a collection of books about discovering and chasing your dreams. In these books authors introduced us to worlds we didn't even know existed or invented whole new worlds. **Surviving Against the Odds** honors children who face challenges with ingenuity, bravery, humor, and honesty. **Romance with a Twist** demonstrates that love stories are about taking risks, making friends, and examining life through time. Many of these books are rich enough to fall into every category, but we hope you discover some new favorites to share with the readers in your life. If you love all of these books as much as we did, the total cost for the list would be \$469.

### CREEPY TALES

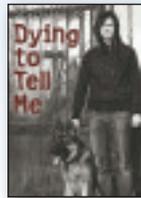
Bond, Victoria, and T. R. Simon. **Zora and Me**. Candlewick, 2010. 170p. \$16.99. 978-0763643003.



In a small Florida town, a confident, energetic girl named Zora invents colorful stories that captivate her listeners but cause them to doubt. Is it really true that quiet Mr. Pendir who lives by the lake turns into a gator at night? Then, when the body of a young man is discovered just outside town, Zora and her friends search for the truth, working to unravel the circumstances surrounding his mysterious death. Loosely based on the childhood of Zora Neale Hurston, this beautifully written mystery captures the power of storytelling, the magic of friendship, and the need to confront both good and evil.

Maeanna (7th grade) "liked seeing the different sides of the [main] character" as her understanding of the mystery and her world grew.

Clark, Sherryl. **Dying to Tell Me**. Kane Miller, 2011. 272p. \$15.99. 978-1610670630. VOYA October 2011. 3Q 3P MJ



What is a girl to do? Imagine that your mom has left, your dad moves you to a hick town for a new police job, and the house you are to live in is a dump. Sasha decides to try to give it all a chance for her dad's sake. Her intentions are tested when she discovers that she can telepathically communicate with a retired police dog, King, who comes to live with them. It gets downright creepy when she starts dreaming about locals past and present, and seeing things that only the dead should know. Does she believe her visions, her dad's advice, or the common sense reactions of a German Shepherd?

Eames, Brian. **The Dagger Quick**. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2011. 320p. \$15.99. 978-1442423114.



First time novelist Brian Eames has concocted a thrilling page-turner sure to appeal to the adventurer in everyone. Twelve-year-old Kitto was born with a club foot in the latter half of the 1600s when his infirmity is considered not just bad luck, but possibly devilish, and makes him a target for the town bullies. But Kitto is stronger and braver than he looks and he wants to go to sea. Kitto's father is a cooper who believes the only way Kitto can succeed is to learn a steady trade and stay on dry land. Then Kitto's uncle, the pirate captain, comes to town, and the story rockets out of England and onto the high seas in a search for treasure and redemption. This is the first of what promises to be a most satisfactory series.

Frost, Helen. **Hidden**. Francis Foster/ Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011. 147p. \$16.99. 978-0374382216. VOYA June 2011. 5Q 5P J



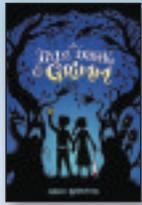
In tightly plotted free verse, eight-year-old Wren Abbott describes the carjacking that leads to her accidental kidnapping. Wren knows enough to stay hidden until she can escape and receives unexpected assistance from the daughter of the carjacker. But this is also the story of what happens after the dust has settled and two little girls meet years later. Can they overcome feelings from the

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past and help each other heal? This slim volume will attract reluctant readers.

Gracie (7th grade) “thought it was interesting that they were eight and couldn’t articulate their feelings as well . . . [then] they had the chance to be older and look back.”

Gidwitz, Adam. **A Tale Dark and Grimm**. Dutton Children’s Books/Penguin, 2010. 256p. \$16.99. 978-0525423348.



The Brothers Grimm have been retold and rewritten in dozens of ways, but few as charmingly as this wry look that explains how grim these tales were when originally written. But, it’s okay, as the narrator constantly reassures the reader. The really gory bits have forewarnings to keep the little ones from being too shocked. So you know which pages to skip if you can’t take the gore. But, of course, the narrator’s gentle teasing/goading only makes us want to read more. This is suitable for any reader who enjoys fairy tales, as well as anyone with a sense of humor.

Tan, Shaun. **Lost and Found**. Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic, 2011. Unpaged. \$21.99. 978-0545229241.

As beautiful and moving as Tan’s **The Arrival** (Arthur A. Levine, 2007/**VOYA** August 2007), **Lost and Found** is a stunning graphic novel which tells three powerful stories with intricate illustrations and minimal words. When we displayed this book in our classrooms, students wanted to examine and talk about the amazing details of the artwork. This book deals with some very grown-up feelings: a girl’s despair, a lost thing’s loneliness, and the horror of invasion and loss of home. Common themes of what we lose and find will resonate personally with readers.



Thomson, Sarah L. **Mercy: The Last New England Vampire**. Islandport, 2011. 178p. \$16.95. 978-1934031360. **VOYA** October 2011. **4Q 4P J S**



Don’t read this book alone at night. This is a classic horror story where every detail of Haley’s life seems real and ordinary except for the smell of death and clay in Aunt Brown’s house; a beloved cousin wasting away from an unexplainable blood disease; and an ancestor’s glove that appears to have crawled

out of its box. Haley is researching Mercy, an ancestor who died of tuberculosis in 1892. As others in her family died, hysteria grew in this small New England town, until someone whispered the word *vampire*. But did Mercy ever die or is she still feeding? Thomson sharply captures images in words the way her character Haley captures them with her camera.

## BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Broach, Elise. **Missing on Superstition Mountain**. Henry Holt, 2011. 262p. \$15.99. 978-0805090475.



Three brothers have moved to Arizona, in the shadow of Superstition Mountain. The more the boys are told to stay away from the mountain, the more they feel the need to explore. Finding three skulls and reading the history of people missing and people shot just add to their curiosity. Are the rumors and warnings just superstition or is there real danger?

Harper, Suzanne. **The Unseen World of Poppy Malone: A Gaggle of Goblins**. Greenwillow / HarperCollins, 2011. 300p. \$16.99. 978-0061996078.



Poppy has an overly dramatic older sister, a twin brother who shirks every chore, and a five-year-old brother who destroys everything. But that’s not her problem. She’s tired of her parents dragging the family from house to house (eighteen moves!) as they track down rumors of ghosts, aliens, and paranormal activity. Unpacking in their latest home, she meets the goblin in the attic, who cannot possibly be real because that would mean her parents were right! She tries to keep the goblin a secret until she realizes that her suddenly tidy, well-mannered little brother must be a changeling.

Ibbotson, Eva. **The Ogre of Oglefort**. Dutton Children’s Books/Penguin, 2011. 247p. \$16.99. 978-0525423829.



A group of Unusual Creatures and their familiars, one being an orphaned human boy, are sent to rescue a princess, but she doesn’t want to be rescued. Young readers will laugh at the depressed

## SELECTION CRITERIA APPLIED FOR TOP SHELF FICTION 2011

- 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 2010 and September 2011 are 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.

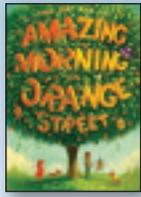
## PUBLISHERS: HOW TO NOMINATE YOUR BOOKS FOR VOYA’S NEXT TOP SHELF FICTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS

1. Select your finest fiction published between October 2011 and September 2012. You are limited to five titles from each imprint.
2. Send five copies of each nominated title to our selection committee chair: **Susan Allen, Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers Selection Committee, Nichols School, 1250 Amherst Street, Buffalo, NY 14216**.
3. Be sure that the committee receives your books as early as possible but **no later than August 31, 2012**.
4. Winning selections will be featured in the next edition of Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers, an annotated booklist, in the February 2013 issue of **VOYA**.
5. Refer procedural inquiries to **VOYA** Editor-in-Chief RoseMary Honnold by e-mail to rhonnold@voya.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.

ogre that takes to his bed when the Unusual Creatures arrive, letting them take over the running of the castle, whether they want to or not. A romp full of magic, ghosts and fun!

Rocklin, Joanne. **One Day and One Amazing Morning on Orange Street.** Amulet/Harry N. Abrams, 2011. 207p. \$16.95. 978-0810997196.



Any young reader will be fascinated by a day-and-a-half spent near, around, under, and in the amazing orange tree on Orange Street. What does a mysterious stranger have to do with this magical tree? How can it help to keep a child safe? Can an elderly neighbor shine a light on its history? This one tree in the empty lot of an LA neighborhood is the meeting spot for all the kids in the neighborhood. As we read, we learn secrets, fears, and hopes that feel real and true and wonderful to all of us.

Smith, Cleve Barrett. **Aliens on Vacation.** Disney/Hyperion, 2011. 251p. \$16.99. 978-1423133636.



What would you do if you were shipped off to your grandmother's to spend the summer and discovered that her house was full of extraterrestrial guests? Join Scrub for an immensely fun adventure at the zany Intergalactic Bed and Breakfast where his job is to disguise alien visitors, so they won't further arouse the suspicions of the local sheriff. Will the transporters work and remove the nonhuman guests, before Sheriff Tate finds out the truth? Will Scrub move from social outcast to super hero and save the day? And most importantly, will the girl he likes return Scrub's kiss?

Michael (6th grade) thought the characters were "interesting and funny." He liked how the author blended together two stories: of a boy who went to his grandmother's house in the summer and the aliens who come to his grandmother's house and go on vacation.

## FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

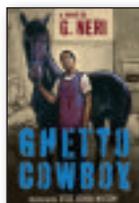
Bauer, Joan. **Close to Famous.** Viking/Penguin, 2011. 250p. \$16.99. 978-0670012824.



Foster McFee and her mom flee from an abusive Elvis impersonator in Memphis to a small town in West Virginia, where they both just want to start over. Foster has learned great secrets to baking by watching Sonny Kroll, her favorite chef, on the cooking channel and she uses her baking skills to make friends and earn some much needed cash to fund her baking experiments. But Foster has a secret she is ashamed to confess. She can't read, but she's not sure what to do about that. When she finds a book in the bookmobile written by Sonny Kroll, she decides it's time to tackle reading head on. This is a warm, well-plotted book, full of sweet eccentrics, who all have dreams and are looking for ways to bring their dreams to life, just like Foster.

Students like Andee (6th grade) and Leah (7th grade) pick up the book because they "like cupcakes," but end up saying it's "one of the best books I have read."

Neri, G. **Ghetto Cowboy.** Candlewick, 2011. 218p. \$15.99. 978-0763649227. VOYA October 2011. 3Q 3P M J



Cole's mom really means she cannot "take it" anymore. She drives him to Philadelphia and leaves him with a father he does not know in the midst of a city, but surrounded by horses and cowboys. What are horses and cowboys doing in the middle of

the city? Cleaning stalls, grooming horses, and learning to ride changes Cole, but the city wants the land. Will the life he is just becoming a part of disappear?

O'Connor, Sheila. **Sparrow Road.** G. P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin, 2011. 247p. \$16.99. 978-0399254581.



This is a story full of secrets. Raine's mother won't tell her why they're spending the summer months away from their home living in a big, creepy house. She will not explain her connection to the owner or her fear when Raine wants to go off on her own and explore. The artist residents and even the house itself, with its unusual history as an orphanage, seem mysterious. Does any of this have to do with the father Raine never knew? Sheila O'Connor creates a highly interesting world in which Raine discovers the answers to questions she never knew she had.

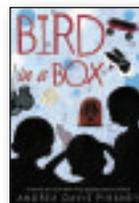
Peters, Andrew. **Ravenwood.** Chicken House/Scholastic, 2011. 350p. \$16.99. 978-0545305501.



As a plumber's boy who carries a wrench as a weapon, Ark travels some of the darkest and smelliest places in Arborium, but that means he often unwittingly witnesses the secrets of his world. When he accidentally overhears a plot for treason, his life is at risk. Andrew Peters creates a unique, fantastical world where people live in intricate bridge systems up in the trees and fear the poisoned ground. Lovers of word play and mythology will chuckle and groan at the puns that are planted in this story, as the characters pray to Diana, warn of the River Sticks, and spew curses such as "Woodrot!" and "Flipping fungus!"

Pia (5th grade) commented, "I read a lot of fantasy, and it's not every day that you come across a land in the sky."

Pinkney, Andrea Davis. **Bird in a Box.** Little, Brown, 2011. 278p. \$16.99. 978-0316074032.



It's the Great Depression, and Joe Louis is a promise that hope can conquer hardship. This book is told in the strong, unique voices of three different children. Hibernia wants to move past her reverend father's strict rejection of swing music to pursue her dream of becoming a performer at the Savoy Ballroom. Willie tries to be a fighter in every sense of the word, despite his damaged hands and separation from his mother. Otis holds tightly to a few precious possessions, until he learns that love means being willing to transform them into gifts. This book teaches us that it is senseless to ram angrily against walls we can't break down, but rather to use wit and imagination to redefine our world.

## SURVIVING AGAINST THE ODDS

Aronson, Sarah. **Beyond Lucky.** Dial Books for Young Readers/Penguin, 2011. 250p. \$16.99. 978-0803735200.



Ari Fish, a superstitious, twelve-year-old soccer player, who questions his own abilities to be good at anything, can't quite believe it when he is chosen to be the goalie for his traveling soccer team. Even though his best friend Mac is furious about it, Ari thinks the new girl who has just joined the team might be a good addition. In a well-written, sports-oriented novel sure to appeal to all middle school students, Sarah Aronson has given us a likeable protagonist who works his way through his problems, constantly worried that he's making the wrong decisions.

Ashrut (6th grade) commented, "I like the book a lot because . . . I've been playing soccer for about eight years. I like the trying . . . to figure out who took the card."

Cerrito, Angela. **The End of the Line**. Holiday House, 2011. 213p. \$17.95. 978-0823422876. VOYA April 2011. 3Q 3P M J



Thirteen-year-old Robbie narrates this taut and beautifully written account of how he killed another boy. In the opening pages, he labels himself a murderer and describes the school (prison, really) he now attends, where he ponders his own despair. Then he turns to the past and how he ended up in a locked room with a table, a pencil, and a few pieces of paper as his only companions. Even reluctant readers will tear through this electrically-charged story of friendship, neglect, and possible redemption.

Josh (6th grade) commented that the book “built up to the end. It made me wonder how the characters [ever] got to that state.”

Cowing, Sue. **You Will Call Me Drog**. Carolrhoda Books, 2011. 281p. \$16.95. 978-0761360766. VOYA Online. August 2011. 4Q 2P M J

If only Parker had listened to his best friend Wren and left the weird looking puppet in the trash can, none of this would be happening. But now Parker’s hand is stuck inside an obnoxious puppet named Drog who makes outrageous, insulting comments that Parker would never say. The worst part is that everyone blames Parker. Wren no longer wants to spend time with him, his parents are worried sick, the kids at school tease him, and no one believes that all Parker wants is to get Drog off of his hand and out of his life. What does Parker need to learn about himself to make this happen?



Andrew (6th grade) was in suspense. “I keep wondering when will he get it off? How long will he have it on?”

Jacobson, Jennifer Richard. **Small As an Elephant**. Candlewick, 2011. 275p. \$15.99. 978-0763641559. VOYA February 2011. 3Q 3P M J



When Jack wakes up in a tent on a Mount Desert Island campsite in Maine, his mom is gone. Here begin many challenges for Jack. This is a story of survival as Jack finds different ways to eat, sleep, and travel home to Massachusetts with only a sleeping bag, comic books, and a little spending money. It is also a mystery. Why won’t Jack call the police and ask adults for help? Where does he believe his mom went? Jack also loves elephants, and the fascinating facts that start each chapter reveal how much Jack knows, not just about elephants, but about relationships and family. We worry and root for Jack as he tries to keep ahead of his problems, but those questions make this an exciting read.

Jacobson struck the perfect balance for Nina (5th grade): “I liked that the adventure never stopped and Jack never lost hope.”

Yee, Lisa. **Warp Speed**. Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic, 2011. 310p. \$16.99. 978-0545122764.

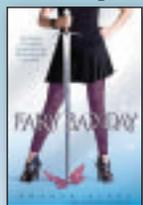
Lisa Yee gets middle school, and Lisa Yee gets geeks. Marley wakes up every morning full of questions. What if I get shoved into a locker? What if the new history teacher thinks it’s cool to rap her lessons? What if the only kid who is as big a *Star Trek* fan as me is now on the basketball team and not my friend? What if people don’t notice I exist or even worse, the bullies see me? But his humor, his friends, and his newly discovered ability to run make this a welcome antidote to whatever the school day may bring. This book rings true and strong to middle school readers.



Abhi (6th grade) claims, “It didn’t have fakeness. It was all possible. It showed the bravery of a kid who didn’t give up even when people he looked [to] for help rendered him invisible.”

## ROMANCE WITH A TWIST

Ashby, Amanda. **Fairy Bad Day**. Speak/Penguin, 2011. 336p. \$7.99 Trade pb. 978-0142412596. VOYA June 2011. 3Q 4P M J S



Emma longed to be out in the dark, cold forest hunting dragons, as her famous mother had done. Instead, she must spend her time at the mall attempting to hunt annoying fairies that pelt her with ice cubes and howl with laughter as they high five each other. When a giant, killer fairy appears, who will be Emma’s allies? This is a laugh-out-loud, original, humorous adventure appropriate for middle- and high school- aged readers.

Vera (7th grade) approves: “I liked the characters. The fairies were hilarious, and I didn’t expect the ending.”

Buffie, Margaret. **Winter Shadows**. Tundra, 2010. 327p. \$19.95. 978-0887769689. VOYA December 2010. 4Q 4P M J



This engaging book plays with the idea of time by overlapping the lives of two young women from the same family who are separated by five generations. Every other chapter tells the story of Cass, a modern teenager who is fed up with her father’s bossy new wife and her pesky, lying, younger stepsister. Cass finds comfort in a journal that appears magically in her bedroom and was written more than a century earlier by Beatrice. Rich details bring each girl’s story to life, and as interesting twists offer glimpses into each other’s struggles, they both realize the strength and hope that they are giving each other.

Samantha (7th grade) says, “I thought it was a good book because it was mystery and historical fiction. It was interesting how the girls could talk to each other and see each other through 150 years’ separation.”

Burgis, Stephanie. **Kat, Incurrigible**. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2011. 298p. \$16.99. 978-1416994473.



In-cor-ri-gi-ble (*adjective*): willful, unruly, uncontrollable; *an incurrigible child*. If you had a brother with problems, two older sisters who needed help finding their true loves, and a stepmother who, much to your dismay, insisted that you always follow the rules, wouldn’t you use your magical powers to help your family? Set in nineteenth-century England, this is a delightful story about a courageous, spirited, loveable girl who refuses to conform to society’s expectations. There’s plenty of humor, romance, and mystery as Kat cuts off her hair, disguises herself as a boy, and turns the lives of those around her upside down.

Meira (6th grade) liked that “even though its fantasy, it relates to the real world in the way the sisters interact.”

Dessen, Sarah. **What Happened to Goodbye**. Viking/ Penguin, 2011. 402p. \$19.99. 978-0670012947. VOYA June 2011. 5Q 5P J S

After the implosion of her parent’s marriage three years earlier, average and unremarkable McLean has lost faith in relationships. Choosing to reside with her father, a restaurant consultant, McLean reinvents herself with each move: Eliza who fell in easily with the jocks and rah-rahs; Lizbet who took up with the drama mamas and dancers; and Beth the all-around joiner. When McLean moves to Lakeview the second semester of her senior year of high school, will she finally put down roots? This great story will be every bit as popular as Dessen’s previous titles.

Gier, Kerstin. **Ruby Red**. Translated by Anthea Bell. Henry Holt, 2011. 330p. \$16.99. 978-0805092523. VOYA April 2011. 4Q 4P J S

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# TOP OF THE TOP SHELF

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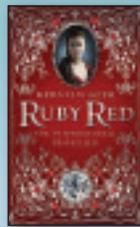


## Ruby Red by Kerstin Gier.

Destined to inherit the family time-traveling gene, Charlotte had been taught dancing, fencing, riding, foreign languages, and history. Her first cousin Gwen was not envious of the attention devoted to Charlotte. Gwen was grateful to have a normal life playing with friends, going shopping, and to the cinema. Unfortunately Gwen is completely unprepared when she is the one who inherits the time-traveling gene! Readers of series fiction will be excited to hear that this is the first book in the Ruby Red Trilogy, having been recently translated from German. This reviewer is not a fan of time travel, yet I was unable to put this book down!



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One of our student readers considered buying the next book in German and running it through **Google Translator**, so she wouldn't have to wait to see what happened.

Putney, Mary Jo. **Dark Mirror**. St. Martin's Griffin, 2011. 312p. \$9.99 Trade pb. 978-0312622848. VOYA April 2011. **3Q 4P MJS**

The daughter of an English earl is looking forward to her first London season, selecting a husband, and living a "magical" life. But Tory can do magic, and her skills lead her into a world far from what she expected and circumstances that she could not have foreseen. The characters have a stubborn streak, and if they really want something, they find some way to achieve it, even if it means going against everything they were taught as children. Danger, romance, magic, and challenges abound.



Georgia (7th grade) read it in one night. "It was all about how, even though they have something (illegal), they end up using it to save 100,000 lives." ■

## TOP SHELF SELECTION COMMITTEE 2011

Talking to middle and high school students about what they are reading is a part of **Susan Allen's** job as director of libraries at the Nichols School in Buffalo, NY. Selecting books for the 579 students, grades five through twelve, is a labor of love as well. Add writing reviews for **VOYA** for a wide variety of genres, which Susan has done for several years, and you get the perfect blend of what this librarian loves to do.

**Kimberly Conrad** is a "second career" school library media specialist at Kenmore West High School, located in a first ring suburb of Buffalo, New York. A former nonfiction reader, she places an enormous emphasis on maintaining a strong multi-genre YA fiction collection from Ellen Hopkins to Masashi Kishimoto that has something for each of her 1,400 students. Personally, Mrs. Conrad is a huge chick lit aficionado.

**Deborah Regan Howe** feels lucky that reading and talking about books is a big part of her job teaching sixth and seventh grade English at Nichols School. On her own, she might pick up a mystery or historical fiction first, but her students have shared many great fantasy, romance, and humor books with her each and every year. Now she is able to return the favor. She also wants to thank her daughter and her friend who made the arrival of each new batch feel like Christmas morning or a treasure hunt.

**Patricia E. Smith** has been a school librarian for over twenty years at the middle and high school levels. In a world of ever-changing technology that has taken over libraries in the past two decades, one constant has never changed: Children who read are better equipped to succeed in school and in life. Putting a good book in the hands of a patron is still her top priority. These days it might be in the form of an ereader or a Playaway, but a book is a book (to misquote Gertrude Stein).

An important part of **Mary Sykes'** job as an English and history teacher at Nichols School in Buffalo is nurturing a love of reading among her fifth graders. Mary and her students spend the first ten minutes of class every day reading their outside books. This year's varied and engaging *Top Shelf* selections are circulating with great enthusiasm among her young readers.