

PSC Reviews

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Newbery, Linda CATCALL Rating: AD+ Grade Level: 4th-8th grade

After observing lions at a wildlife park, Josh's younger brother Jamie pretends to be possessed by the spirit of a lion. Or is he really pretending? Josh, who has always been obsessed with cats of all sizes, isn't sure. Told from Josh's point of view, this psychological drama explores how two brothers deal with changes in their life—a new baby sister, a sullen teenage step-brother--related to their parents' broken marriage. The book walks the line of reality and fantasy, leaving readers wondering what is actually going on. The ending explanation is not as satisfying as the journey, but the book is still a worthwhile read, particularly for kids going through family drama.

Fields, Terri MY FATHER'S SON Rating: AD+ Grade Level: 6th and up

When Kevin's father gets arrested by the police because of evidence that he is the DB25 serial killer, Kevin is convinced his father is innocent and will go to great lengths to prove it, including seeking out his estranged grandparents, risk getting suspended, and snooping through his father's stuff. The portrayal of a normal life destroyed by the power of guilt by association through a teenage boy's eyes, My Father's Son is fast-paced and suspenseful, although the relationships between characters feel contrived at times. The ending is abrupt, but satisfying. While there is no objectionable language or overt violence, the hint of romance and the middle school/high school setting will appeal to sixth graders and older.

Kline, Lisa Williams WRITE BEFORE YOUR EYES Rating: AD Grade Level: 3rd-7th grade

Gracie is the smart, quiet middle child in her family whose best friends is the school genius. When she discovers a journal where whatever she writes comes true, she tries to use it for good, only to discover that the truth isn't always what it seems. Starting with small, personal entries, such as giving her sister the date she's been wishing for or a perfect score for her brother on a test he didn't study for, her she really wants to solve bigger world problems, but doesn't want them to backfire as well. The story is a cute blend of fantasy and reality, if not slightly familiar with its literary references to Alice in Wonderland, Half-Magic, and a Prayer for Owen Meany. The ambiguous ending suggests a sequel, although it's unclear whether the book really warrants one. While the book does hint of romance, the subject matter is tame and will appeal to readers as young as third grade.

Napoli, Donna Jo FIRE IN THE HILLS Rating: R Grade Level: 6th grade and up

A heartrending story of war and loss, Fire in the Hills follows Roberto, an Italian 14 year old who has been forced to be a soldier by the Germans in World War II. Desperately trying to make his way back to

his home in Venice after escaping labor camps, he befriends a brave, strong-willed teenage girl who helps him become involved with the partigiani, a resistance movement to the Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italian fascism. The brutality and violence, such as the description of a boy whose entire family is killed point-blank while he's forced to eat a watermelon he stole from German soldiers, is raw and hard to read, particularly because of the historical truth behind the fiction. An honest and devastating depiction of a part of World War II that may be unfamiliar to many—the story of the Italian resistance movement—the book is a worthwhile addition to any library. Because of the harsh violence and at times slow-moving story, the book is recommended for sixth graders and up.

Jean, Mark and Carlson, Christopher PUDDLEJUMPERS Rating: R Grade Level: 5th grade and up

Ernie Banks is a 13 year old juvenile delinquent who knows very little of his past. Jumping back 13 years, the reader finds out about Puddlejumpers, miniature people who jump through puddles to an underground fantasy world. A human baby is discovered to be their Rainmaker, but after preparing him for a life of being a Puddlejumper, their world is threatened by the evil Troggs and the baby escapes. The story moves quickly, but jumps around a lot, sometimes leaving the reader wondering when it will pick up certain threads of the story again. While younger readers may enjoy the book, the beautiful but sometimes slow-moving passages seem to be meant for more mature readers.

Uehashi, Mahoko MORIBITO Rating: R Grade Level: 5th grade and up

Balsa is a female warrior, a fearless bodyguard hired for her prowess in fighting and devotion to the poor. When she's hired to protect the eleven-year-old Second Prince, who has survived numerous assassination attempts, she quickly discovers more than she bargained for since the child is a guardian of a water spirit. If she does not protect him from a ferocious demon and the emperor's politics, a drought will devastate the land. Set in a fantasy version of Japan, this book is fast-paced and well-written. Readers will fall in love with the characters—the child prince learning to outgrow his spoiled upbringing, the wise and snarky old woman who communicates with spirits, and a childhood friend of Balsa's, to mention a few. The book is the first in a series and has been turned into a television series as well as manga books.

Tubb, Kristen O'Donnell AUTUMN WINIFRED OLIVER DOES THINGS DIFFERENT Rating: R Grade Level: 4th -8th grade

A historical fiction novel set in the real town of Cades Cove in the Appalachian Mountains of east Tennessee, this book about the tiny town being turned into a national park is told through the eyes of eleven-year old Autumn. She is sassy, fun, and determined, whether she's filching explosives from the U.S. Government, riding an empty coffin down raging rapids, or scaring away mean boys by pretending to be a ghost. Well-written and engaging, this book would be a great read for upper elementary and middle school students studying the creation of national parks, the 1930s, or Appalachia.

Seidler, Tor GULLY'S TRAVELS Rating: R* Grade Level: 3rd grade and up

Gully is a snobby, purebred dog—a lhasa apso—who lives with a NYU professor in Manhattan and only associates with other purebred dogs, turning up his nose at mutts. He eats only Prime Premium dog food, travels to France each summer, and generally lives a plush life. When the professor leaves Gully at the house of their doorman Carlos because he marries a woman allergic to long-haired dogs, Gully goes into a culture shock of sorts. Forced to play with gregarious and overly enthusiastic children, associate with mutts, and eat regular dog food, he goes on all sorts of travels to find his professor, all the while falling in love with the new family. The writing is witty and clever and the story is equally endearing to children and adults. This book is highly recommended for children in grades three and up.