

Erin Sterling

PSC Reviews

March 2010

Love, D. Anne SEMIPRECIOUS AD Grades 7th-10th

When almost-13-year-old Garnett's mother decides to pursue a singing career in Nashville in the 1960s, Garnett and her older sister are forced to go live with an aunt they have never met in Oklahoma, with the promise that their father will take them back to Texas for the start of school once he gets back from traveling. But when their father gets badly burned, they find themselves staying longer than planned. Things go from bad to worse for Garnett—there is no TV in the house, disability checks don't arrive, they're forced to eat government food, and she makes no friends unlike her popular sister. The only thing that saves Garnett is her art teacher and art. A rather depressing and mediocre coming-of-age story in which the only glimmers of hope seem to come at the very end. While it is set in the early 1960s, the time setting has little to do with the plot.

Reef, Catherine HEMINGWAY: A WRITER'S LIFE R Grades 6-12

Readable, engaging biography on a man who many middle school and high school students are required to read. Captioned black-and-white photographs of Hemingway's family and friends accompany the wordy text. Ends with extensive notes on quotations, a 4 ½ page selected bibliography, a list of Hemingway's major works, picture credits, and an index. While the book might feel and look daunting to some readers with full pages of text and only black-and-white or sepia-toned photography, the information is well-researched and interesting—especially tidbits of thwarted love, sneaking out of the house at night as a teenager, and his adventures around the globe. The only disappointment were the chapter headings, many of which were somewhat obscure and inexplicable quotations or phrases, such as "Into the Furnace of Suffering," "Generations," "Life Is Now." Dates or subtitle would be helpful for students interested in a certain part of his life without having to go straight to the index.

Chris Wooding MALICE Rating: R Grade Level: 7th-12th

A book readers will have trouble putting down once they have picked it up, with a sequel Havoc that comes out later this year. A rumor of a horrific comic book which traps real kids in its terrible world does not stop Luke from whispering the chant as a challenge. But when he does get trapped in the creepy steampunk world with mechanical creatures that live by sucking human souls out, his friends on the inside and out try to work together to get him and all the other trapped kids out. Between alternating text and graphic novel, fast-paced action, creepy characters, and the reliance on teens to save themselves, the novel is a gripping read.

Silas House

ELI THE GOOD

Rating: AD/AD-

Grade Level: 6th – 10th

Despite being well-written, the first-person voice did not sound like a ten-year-old. The voice sounded more like an adult looking back at his life as a ten-year-old, which maybe was the intention of the author based on the epilogue which is told from the boy's adult self. Nonetheless, the thoughtful, observant, precocious, and reflective speech was jarring. Set in the mid 1970s, ten-year-old Eli is the only one that pulls his family and friends together--between his rebellious, anti-war 16-year-old sister, his dad the Vietnam vet experiencing traumatic PTSD, his aunt Nell the war protester who Eli finds out has cancer, his distant mother, and his best friend whose parents are going through a terrible divorce. A sweet sad story about the devastating effects of war and circumstances that can break families apart or help them grow stronger.

Venezia, Mike LUIS ALVAREZ WILD IDEA MAN Rating: AD+ Grade Level: 3rd-6th

Part of a series called "Getting to Know the World's Greatest Inventors and Scientists," this book combines humor with history in an easy-to-read, conversational manner. The colorful cover with a silly comic will attract students, and the information about the scientist Luis Alvarez who won the Noble Prize for his work on the bubble chamber, researched nuclear and subatomic physics, and developed a theory with his geologist son that the extinction of dinosaurs was caused by a gigantic asteroid hitting the Earth. Historical photographs are interspersed with silly comics. At the back is an index and a glossary of terms that were in bold throughout the text. One criticism is that there is no table of contents as the book is not divided into chapters, which would have been helpful.

López, Susana

THE BEST FAMILY IN THE WORLD

Rating: R

Grade Level: K-

2

First published in Spain. A girl in an orphanage gets exciting news: she's going to be adopted! As she goes to sleep, she dreams of what the best family in the world would be: a family of astronauts, a family of tiger-trainers, a family of pastry chefs, or perhaps a family of pirates. Sweet story of an older child getting adopted (of which there aren't as many stories as those of babies getting adopted) with bright, realistic illustrations and great facial expressions.

Cadena, Beth

SUPERSISTER

Rating: R

Grade Level: PreK-2

Bright watercolor illustrations that feature occasional comic book style panels and expressive faces. A fun, cute story about a supersister who thinks up all sorts of ways to help her mother, some of which are more helpful than the others. She wears a superhero costume when she helps set the table for dinner or works hard at school and is always ready to help her mother with a big "yes!" The one confusing thing was that the baby was never seen, finally explained by the end in which you find out that the baby has not been born yet.

Dixon, Norma

FOCUS ON: FLIES

Rating: R

Grade Level: 3rd-6th

This book pulls readers in with a chapter on the horrible (aka gross) habits of the housefly, and in eight short chapters, does an excellent job discussing flies, with big photo close-ups of different kinds of flies combined with some illustrations as well. Dixon covers types of flies, anatomy, the lifecycle while also suggesting different hands-on activities, such as classifying flies and catching fruit flies using a large plastic bottle. The book ends with interesting fly facts and feats, a glossary, further reading, and an index.