

Middle-Grade Book Club Picks

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It is especially important for middle-graders, ages eight through twelve, to develop a love of reading, since reading for fun declines as kids approach their tween and teen years. Kids who choose their own books are more likely to enjoy reading. The following are some of the titles chosen by our 4th & 5th grade Book Club members.

Middle-graders, who are searching for just the right book or series may be inspired to try these peer recommendations. Themes of friendship, acceptance, inclusivity, kindness, courage, collaboration, perseverance, and redemption are explored.

A funny mystery/adventure book by Chris Grabenstein, *The Smartest Kid in the Universe*, tells the story of Jake McQuade, a twelve-year-old who mistakenly eats the world's first knowledge pills, thinking they are jelly beans. When word gets out about his new intelligence, Jake is sought out by the government and big corporations, including some with bad motives. As Jake navigates all of this, his middle school is in danger of being shut down by a scheming new principal. Grace and Kojo, his best friends, are convinced that they can use his smarts to save their school. The sequel, *Genius Camp*, is expected to be available in November.

Dan Gutman's Genius Files series begins with *Mission Unstoppable*. Twelve-year-old brother and sister twins, Coke and Pepsi McDonald, are not very excited to be going on a cross-country road trip with their parents. Their feelings change when they realize that they have been chosen to be part of a top-secret organization, and they are soon being chased off cliffs, locked in a burning school, and receiving mysterious codes and ciphers. There are plenty of laughs to go along with the action in this mystery/adventure series of five titles.

Another novel filled with mystery codes and ciphers is *Book Scavenger* by Jennifer Chambliss Bertman. In the first book of three in this series, we meet Emily Crane, a twelve-year-old book enthusiast and puzzle solver whose family is constantly moving. . She's just moved into a San Francisco apartment, where she befriends James Lee, a cipher-solving whiz, when she learns that Garrison Griswold, the mastermind behind her favorite online game, has been attacked and is in a coma. As Emily and James set out to unravel clues and find the culprits, they discover an odd book, which they believe leads to a valuable prize. They race to solve puzzles and outwit others also on the hunt for the book.

In *Remarkable*, by Lizzie K. Foley, ten-year-old Jane Doe, who is barely noticed, is the only student average enough to be excluded from the School for the Remarkably Gifted.

Jane's life changes when the mischievous Grimlet twins join her at the public school. They lead her on a series of adventures involving a strange pirate captain, a missing composer, an out-of-control science project, and the town's beloved lake monster. As Jane discovers new daring, she proves that an ordinary person really can do extraordinary things.

For middle-grade readers who enjoy fantasy and science fiction along with mystery and adventure, *The Journal of Curious Letters* by James Dashner, the first book of four in the 13th Reality series is sure to please. Atticus Higginbottom, known as Tick, is an average thirteen-year-old until the day he receives a strange letter, warning of possible deadly events, even the destruction of reality. He will be sent twelve riddles that if solved, reveal details of an extraordinary happening.

In Max Brallier's fast-paced, illustrated science fiction adventure, *The Last Kids On Earth*, Jack Sullivan and his friends are surviving a monster-zombie apocalypse by escaping to a tree house. Jack, who is both brave and geeky, and has a good sense of humor, is very relatable. Douglas Holgate's illustrations are integral to the story, which is loaded with monsters, zombies, gadgets, and gizmos. The seventh book in the series, *The Last Kids on Earth and the Doomsday Race* is expected to be available in September.

Pi In the Sky by Wendy Mass takes readers on an extraterrestrial adventure to the Realms, home of thirteen-year-old Joss, the seventh son of the Supreme Overlord, whose job is to deliver pies. When Annika Klutzman sees a pie baker through her telescope, the Earth suddenly disappears, and she finds herself materializing in the Realms. She and Joss must work together to rebuild the Earth's solar system, discovering that the universe is even stranger than they imagined.

Realistic fiction fans may enjoy *The Unteachables* by Gordon Korman. The story, told in alternating voices, is about Mr. Kermit, a teacher who is eagerly approaching retirement, and his eighth-grade class of misfits. Mr. Kermit surprisingly stands up for one of the kids, leading to a series of events over the course of the year that change all of their lives.

Wishtree by Katherine Applegate is a thoughtful and powerful book, narrated by Red, a two-hundred-year-old oak tree that is home to many animal characters in the story. People write down their wishes every May and hang them in Red's branches, hoping they will come true. When a Muslim family, including ten-year-old Samar, moves to the neighborhood, residents are not very welcoming. A boy even carves "LEAVE" into Red's trunk. The story unfolds as Samar ties her wish on a branch, "I wish for a friend. "

Nature and technology collide in Peter Brown's action-packed novel, *The Wild Robot*. The story begins with Roz, a robot, finding herself stranded on a remote island. She soon realizes that in order to survive, she must learn to adapt to her surroundings, and find a way to gain the trust and friendship of the animal inhabitants who consider her a monster. Roz adopts a gosling and comes to love her home when she is sought out by other robots threatening to take her away. The adventure continues in the sequel, *The Wild Robot Escapes*.

Sharon M. Draper's *Out of My Mind* is told through the eyes and ears of Melody Brooks, an eleven-year-old who is diagnosed with cerebral palsy, and is unable to speak or walk. Although she is very smart, Melody is often dismissed as being mentally challenged. Her life changes when she becomes part of a newly integrated fifth-grade class. Her parents get her an electric wheelchair and a device that helps her communicate. Melody is happy when she earns a place on the Whiz Kids team, but soon realizes that things are not always as they seem. The sequel, *Out of My Heart* is expected to be available in September.

Brave, a realistic graphic novel by Svetlana Chmakova, the second book of four in the Berrybrook Middle School Series, tells the story of Jensen Graham, a character introduced in *Awkward*, the first title in the series. Jensen daydreams about being a hero and saving the world. But his reality is very different, as he struggles to navigate middle school life, dealing with bullies, weird friends, and a project working with the spirited duo, Akilah and Jenny.

Please visit, call the Wyckoff Rizzo Children's Library at #201-891-4866 x.3, or email denise.marchetti@wyckoff.bccls.org for more suggestions and to inquire about our book clubs for kids of all ages.