



## Middle School

**BRASWELL, Liz.** *Part of Your World: A Twisted Tale.* 480p. Disney-Hyperion. Sept. 2018. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9781368013819.

**Gr 7 Up**—The film version of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* ended with happily ever after. But what if Ariel never married Eric or defeated Ursula? In this twisted tale, Braswell has taken the beloved characters and written a what-if story that takes wild turns. A wiser Ariel returns to life in Atlantica alone under the sea with her sisters and sea creature friends—Scuttle, Flounder, Sebastian, and Threll. Prince Eric is now married to Ursula, the sea witch disguised as princess Vanessa using Ariel's voice. Ariel's father, King Triton, is being held captive by the demonic sea witch, and now it's up to the little mermaid to rescue him and get revenge and her lost love. An underwater sea battle ensues. Braswell has written an action-packed read that teens will not be able to put down. Fans of the previous twisted Disney tales will devour this captivating installment full of humor. **VERDICT** Purchase where retellings and mermaid fantasies are popular.—*Anisha Jeffries, Cleveland Public Library*

**BROOKS, Kevin.** *Born Scared.* 256p. Candlewick. Sept. 2018. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9780763695651.

**Gr 7-10**—Elliot's list of phobias is so exhaustive, he describes himself as being "chronically afraid of almost everything." He never leaves the house and uses medication to tame his fears, but a mix-up with his prescription sends his mother out into a snowstorm to restock. She gets caught up in a plot and held hostage by some criminal types in Santa suits, and when she doesn't return, Elliot faces the unknown to look for her. His fears quickly overwhelm him, leading to emotional depletion and a self-described feeling of being dead, which somehow allows him to make calculated decisions at the story's climax. Ellamay, Elliot's twin sister who died at birth,

provides guidance as her voice comes and goes at convenient moments. It's not clear if Ellamay is intended as an element of magical realism or as a manifestation of psychosis, but her character succeeds as neither. The points of view are split between Elliot, the bad Santas, and a hapless bank manager who spends most of his portion of the novel driving under the influence of drugs. While the split narrative is useful to tie the plot together, too much time is spent on adult characters, whose stories may be less relatable to youth. Elliot's fears are endlessly mentioned in the narrative, but the way he feels and experiences them is never adequately explored. Disturbingly, Elliot's mother and their trusted family doctor don't seek psychological help for him beyond medication and isolation. **VERDICT** Not recommended.—*Alex Graves, Manchester City Library, NH*

**ELLIS, Sarah.** *Dodger Boy.* 176p. Groundwood. Sept. 2018. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 9781773060729.

**Gr 6-9**—Charlotte and her best friend Dawn are newly minted 13-year-olds coping with teen angst in 1970 Vancouver. They form a pact to be as "unteen" as possible—no giggling, no whining, and, most importantly, no being silly about boys. This is easier for bookish Charlotte, who draws daily inspiration from Jane Austen, than for Dawn, who comes home from music camp with a new hairdo and new attitude. Things are complicated by the arrival of Tom Ed, a draft-dodging 18-year-old with a winsome Texas drawl. Tom takes up residence with Charlotte's Quaker family, and, as Dawn descends further into "un-unteen" behavior over the charming new boy, her friendship with Charlotte becomes increasingly strained. As Charlotte navigates a fluctuating world full of obstacles, including

ensorship challenges at school, discussions of pacifism and women's liberation with Tom that rock her worldview, and discoveries about the nature of Tom's relationship with her older brother James, she proves to be a deeply introspective and likable protagonist, offering up insights that cut right to the heart of the coming-of-age experience. Charlotte's deteriorating relationship with Dawn is a realistic depiction of a struggling friendship. Some of the attitudes and language employed when discussing the LGBTQ+ community are presented as insensitive and problematic. **VERDICT** A unique piece of historical fiction that packs a punch. Purchase where historical fiction circulates well, as well as where there is an interest in Canada.—*Darla Salva Cruz, Suffolk Cooperative Library System, Bellport, NY*

**GRIFFIN, N.** *Just Wreck It All.* 336p. S. & S./Atheneum. Oct. 2018. Tr \$18.99. ISBN 9781481465182.

**Gr 7 Up**—Bett used to be known for being a daredevil. There wasn't a challenge she would back down from. She and her best friend, Stephanie, became experts at dreaming up the next physical obstacle for her to conquer. Suddenly, Bett's entire world is up-ended. A terrible accident is the catalyst to a dramatic change. She has lost hearing in her left ear and her self-confidence. She becomes withdrawn and stops engaging in the physical activities she once loved so passionately. Her father has left her family for another woman. To make matters worse, her high school is being terrorized by a vandal, leaving everyone scared and on edge. Bett's struggles with reclaiming her identity after personal upheaval are messy, heartrending, and leave readers unable to turn away. Her disconnect between how she thinks others feel about her and the reality is something any teen will relate to.

**KEY:** ★ Excellent in relation to other titles on the same subject or in the same genre | **Tr** Hardcover trade binding | **lib. ed.** Publisher's library binding | **Board** Board book | **pap.** Paperback | **e** eBook original | **BL** Bilingual | **POP** Popular Picks

part of world history curriculum, students will find Masih's novel compelling. The story of the human spirit is richly embedded in the lives of a family trying desperately to not just stay alive but to stay together and to retain their faith. **VERDICT** A strong choice for young adult shelves.—*Christina Paolozzi, Bonaire Elementary School, GA*

**MILAN, Maura. *Ignite the Stars*. 400p. Albert Whitman. Sept. 2018. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780807536254. **POP****

**Gr 7 Up**—In the year 8921, the Olympus Commonwealth boasts the most powerful military in the galaxy. The Commonwealth intends to explore and conquer as many star systems as possible and advance their political agenda throughout the known universe. Brinn Tarver is a 16-year-old citizen who loves the Commonwealth so much that she joins the Royal Star Force, its military arm. Ia Cōcha is a 17-year-old girl who lives among the fringe planets with her older brother. She is considered the “most dangerous criminal in Commonwealth history.” Circumstances bring Brinn and Ia together, forcing them to open their minds to the possibility that not everything is as it seems. Milan has produced an incredible novel that is particularly relevant in the current political climate. Each chapter switches between the protagonists' perspectives, giving readers multiple points of view throughout. Milan is excellent at establishing relatable, complex characters. The action-packed sequences, with spaceship battles and academic competition, are so engaging, teens won't be able to put the book down. The author provides elaborate detail about the Royal Star Force academy, space, and the Commonwealth, immersing readers in a fully developed alternate world. **VERDICT** A strong first book in a sure-to-be successful science fiction series.—*Davia Schmidt, Queens Public Library, NY*

★ **QUIGLEY, Dawn. *Apple in the Middle*. 264p. North Dakota State University. Aug. 2018. Tr \$25.95. ISBN 9781946163073.**

**Gr 6 Up**—This coming-of-age debut tackles what it means to belong. Apple is quirky, blurts things out to classmates, pretends to be a foreign exchange student, and feels responsible for her mother's death. She is Native, living with her nonindigenous family. Her dad and stepmom decide to send her to Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation to stay with her grandparents, strangers to her, over the summer. Apple's cousin Junior becomes her protector, and her cousin Nezzie, her first best friend. Apple is threatened by Karl, a man who knew her mother growing up and does not think she is “Indian” enough. The prologue sets readers up for a scene in which Karl's son chases her into an open grave, where she finally realizes that her mother has been with her all along. An accident at the end of the book challenges the protago-

nist to figure out her own misgivings and how she can bridge both worlds. Quigley shares the dynamics of reservation life—phrases, puckered lips to point, and extended families with aunts and cousins—with authenticity and warmth. The author drops nuggets of Native history and challenges readers to learn more. **VERDICT** A strong story with themes that resonate with many adolescents as they try to figure out who they are in life. Highly recommended.—*Amy Zembroski, Indian Community School, Franklin, WI*

**STEPHENS, Ronnie K. *The Kaleidoscope Sisters*. 266p. Akashic/Kaylie Jones Bks. Sept. 2018. pap. \$17.95. ISBN 9781617757020.**

**Gr 7 Up**—When Riley was born, Quinn was only eight years old and couldn't even say the word *strenosis* let alone fully grasp what it would mean to have a sister with this disease. Although the doctors didn't expect Riley to live very long, she beat the odds and lived for seven years, becoming a sister that Quinn loved dearly and a cherished daughter to their mother Jane. During a moment of anguish and despair over Riley's failing health, Quinn stumbles across a portal to a strange and mysterious world. There, she finds Aimee and Meelie, travelers who also discovered the portal by accident. They go on an adventure in this place full of luminescent creatures and two moons to help Quinn find a heart flower that can heal her sister. Before returning home, Quinn discovers that there is a price to pay for taking a heart flower. Mainly told from the perspectives of Riley, Quinn, and their mother, this novel is a heartrending story of the deep love of family and the hardships of terminal disease and loss. In his debut, Stevens has created a touching novel that is Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper* mixed with Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* or Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. **VERDICT** A unique story for teens who enjoy fantasy and tragedy. Give this to fans of *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak or *If I Stay* by Gayle Forman.—*Ellen Fitzgerald, Naperville Public Library, IL*

★ **VAN DAM, Katrin. *Come November*. 384p. Scholastic. Oct. 2018. Tr \$18.99. ISBN 9781338268423.**

**Gr 7 Up**—For years, Roonie has been taking care of her little brother, Daniel, as their mother spirals deeper and deeper into the New

World Society. While their mother prepares for Departure Day, the day Society members will be taken up by aliens to another planet, Roonie uses the income from her after-school job to purchase food for the family. In desperation, she reaches out to her estranged father for support. Reconnecting with her father proves unexpectedly disquieting, as he shares with Roonie information that her mother has withheld. However, when her father announces his desire to assume custody of her and her brother, Roonie resists. She assumes life will return to normal after an anticlimactic Departure Day, only to learn that the family's problems are bigger than she realized. In the tradition of Cynthia Voigt's *Homecoming* and Margaret Peterson Haddix's *Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey*, Roonie is a teen thrust too early into adulthood. The stress she experiences is palpable as she single-mindedly strives to care for Daniel, the one person she allows herself to love. Years of living on the edge with her irresponsible mother have drained her so emotionally that when she meets Carol, her father's new wife, she is taken aback to realize the woman radiates happiness, and she no longer knows how that feels. **VERDICT** With an engaging plot premise, a strong, flawed heroine and a touch of romance, this book will fly off the shelf.—*Nancy Nadig, Penn Manor School District, Lancaster, PA*

**WARD, Kaitlin. *Where She Fell*. 304p. Scholastic/Point. Oct. 2018. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9781338230079.**

**Gr 7 Up**—Timid caving enthusiast Eliza lets her friends talk her into going to a dangerous swamp on a dare, only to fall into a sinkhole and subsequent caverns deep underground. She stumbles onto the Colony, a ragtag collection of subterranean survivors like herself. Quickly accepted into the odd underground settlement, Eliza is confused by the group dynamics and puzzled at their lack of desire to find freedom. She bonds quickly with fellow teens Eleanor and good-looking Grayson and becomes an intern to the cryptic geologist Mary. A routine of hunting and fighting off massive insects, cleaning the cave, and social interaction becomes her new normal, until Eliza rebels. She leads a small group on a bloody and deadly journey filled with animal and humanoid enemies, while constantly battling the desire to return and live safely at the Colony.

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