

KEYSTONE TO READING SECONDARY BOOK AWARDS 2021-2022
ANNOTATED MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOK LIST

A Place at the Table by Saadia Faruqi & Laura Shovan

Sixth graders Sara and Elizabeth could not be more different. Sara is at a new school that is completely unlike the small Islamic school she used to attend. Elizabeth has her own problems: her British mum has been struggling with depression. The girls meet in an after-school South Asian cooking class, which Elizabeth takes because her mom has stopped cooking, and which Sara, who hates to cook, is forced to attend because her mother is the teacher. The girls form a shaky alliance that gradually deepens, and they make plans to create the most amazing, mouth-watering cross-cultural dish together. They win a spot on a local food show. They make good cooking partners, but can they learn to trust each other enough to become true friends?

(Realistic Fiction, grades 6-8)

A Wish in the Dark by Christina Soontornvat

All light in Chattana is created by one man — the Governor, who appeared after the Great Fire to bring peace and order to the city. For Pong, who was born in Namwon Prison, the magical lights represent freedom, and he dreams of the day he will be able to walk among them. But when Pong escapes from prison, he realizes that the world outside is no fairer than the one behind bars. The wealthy dine and dance under bright orb light, while the poor toil away in darkness. Worst of all, Pong's prison tattoo marks him as a fugitive who can never be truly free. Nok, the prison warden's perfect daughter, is bent on tracking Pong down and restoring her family's good name. But as Nok hunts Pong through the alleys and canals of Chattana, she uncovers secrets that make her question the truths she has always held dear. (Fantasy, grades 6-8)

American as Paneer Pie by Supriya Kelkar

As the only Indian American kid in her small town, Lekha Divekar feels like she has two versions of herself: Home Lekha, who loves watching Bollywood movies and eating Indian food, and School Lekha, who pins her hair over her bindi birthmark and avoids confrontation at all costs, especially when someone teases her for being Indian. When a girl Lekha's age moves in across the street, Lekha is excited to hear that her name is Avantika and she's Desi, too! Finally, there will be someone else around who *gets* it. But as soon as Avantika speaks, Lekha realizes she has an accent. She's new to this country, and not at all like Lekha. To Lekha's surprise, Avantika does not feel the same way as Lekha about having two separate lives or about the bullying at school. Avantika doesn't take the bullying quietly. And she proudly displays her culture no matter where she is: at home or at school. When a racist incident rocks Lekha's community, Lekha realizes she must make a choice: continue to remain silent or find her voice before it's too late. (Realistic Fiction, grades 6-8)

Black Brother Black Brother by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Sometimes 12-year-old Donte wishes he were invisible. As one of the few black boys at Middlefield Prep, most of the students don't look like him. They don't like him either. Dubbing him "Black Brother," Donte's teachers and classmates make it clear they wish he were more like his lighter-skinned brother, Trey. When he's bullied and framed by the captain of the fencing team, "King" Alan, he's suspended from school and arrested for something he didn't do. Terrified, searching for a place where he belongs, Donte joins a local youth center and meets former Olympic fencer Arden Jones. With Arden's help, he begins training as a competitive fencer, setting his sights on taking down the fencing team captain, no matter what. As Donte hones his fencing skills and grows closer to achieving his goal, he learns the fight for justice is far from over. Now Donte must confront his bullies, racism, and the corrupt systems of power that led to his arrest.

(Realistic Fiction, grades 6-8)

Eleanor, Alice, and the Roosevelt Ghosts by Dianne K. Salerni

It's 1898 in New York City and ghosts exist among humans. When an unusual spirit takes up residence at the Roosevelt house, thirteen-year-old Eleanor and fourteen-year-old Alice are suspicious. The cousins don't get along, but they know something is not right. This ghost is more than a pesky nuisance. The authorities claim he's safe to be around, even as his mischievous behavior grows stranger and more menacing. It's almost like he wants to scare the Roosevelts out of their home - and no one seems to care! Meanwhile, Eleanor and Alice discover a dangerous ghost in the house where Alice was born and her mother died. Is someone else haunting the family? Introverted Eleanor and unruly Alice develop an unlikely friendship as they explore the family's dark, complicated history. It's up to them to destroy both ghosts and come to terms with their family's losses. (Fantasy/Mystery, grades 4-8)

Letters From Cuba by Ruth Behar

The situation is becoming dire for Jews in Poland on the eve of World War II. Esther's father has fled to Cuba, and she is the first one to join him. It's heartbreaking to be separated from her beloved sister, so Esther promises to write down everything that happens until they're reunited. And she does, recording both the good--the kindness of the Cuban people and her discovery of a valuable hidden talent--and the bad: the fact that Nazism has found a foothold even in Cuba. Esther's evocative letters are full of her appreciation for life and reveal a resourceful, determined girl with a rare ability to bring people together, while striving to get the rest of their family out of Poland before it's too late. (Realistic Fiction, grades 4-8)

Seven Clues to Home by Gae Polisner & Nora Raleigh Baskin

Joy Fonseca is dreading her 13th birthday, dreading being reminded again about her best friend Lukas's senseless death on this day, one year ago -- and dreading the fact he may have heard what she accidentally blurted to him the night before. Or maybe she's more worried he didn't hear. Either way, she's made her decision: Finally she's going to open the first clue to their annual birthday scavenger hunt, the one Lukas left for her the morning he died. She hopes the rest of the clues are still out there. If they are, they might lead Joy to whatever last words Lukas wrote, and toward understanding how to grab onto the future that is meant to be hers. (Realistic Fiction, grades 4-8)

The Elephant's Girl by Celesta Rimington

An elephant never forgets, but Lexington Willow can't remember what happened before a tornado swept her away when she was a toddler. All she knows is that she landed near an enclosure in a Nebraska zoo; and there an elephant named Nyah protected her from the storm. With no trace of her birth family, Lex grows up at the zoo with Nyah and her elephant family including her foster father, Roger; her best friend, Fisher; and the wind whispering in her ear. Now that she's twelve, Lex is finally old enough to help with the elephants. But during their first training session, Nyah sends her a telepathic image of the woods outside the zoo. Despite the wind's protests, Lex decides to investigate Nyah's message and gets wrapped up in an adventure involving ghosts, lost treasure, and a puzzle that might be the key to finding her family. As she hunts for answers, Lex must summon the courage to leave the secure borders of her zoo to discover who she really is--and why the tornado brought her here all those years ago. (Realistic Fiction, grades 3-8)

The List of Things that Will Not Change by Rebecca Stead

After her parents' divorce, Bea's life became different in many ways. But she can always look back at the list she keeps in her green notebook to remember the things that will stay the same. The first and most important: Mom and Dad will always love Bea, and each other. When Dad tells Bea that he and his boyfriend, Jesse, are getting married, Bea is thrilled. Bea loves Jesse, and when he and Dad get married, she'll finally (finally!) have what she's always wanted--a sister. Even though she's never met Jesse's daughter, Sonia, Bea is sure that they'll be "just like sisters anywhere." (Realistic Fiction, grades 4-8)

Tyrannosaurus Wrecks by Stuart Gibbs

Teddy was all set for a campout at his friend Sage's family ranch—but then Sage gets terrible news: The skull of a rare dinosaur that was being excavated on his property has mysteriously vanished overnight in the middle of a rainstorm, even though it weighed 500 pounds. Not a single footprint has been left behind. Since the dinosaur was top secret, the police don't believe anyone outside the dig could have stolen it. A T-rex skull can sell for millions of dollars, and everyone is a suspect—including J.J. McCracken, the owner of FunJungle. Meanwhile, Teddy's old foes, the Barksdale twins, have gotten into trouble with an illegally purchased anaconda, and Teddy's girlfriend Summer wants to find out who's behind the local trade in black market reptiles. The two cases will drag Teddy into more danger and chaos than ever before, in this mystery that's stranger than fiction. (Mystery, grades 4-8)

War Stories by Gordon Korman

There are two things Trevor loves more than anything else: playing war-based video games and his great-grandfather Jacob, who is a true-blue, bona fide war hero. At the height of the war, Jacob helped liberate a small French village and was given a hero's welcome upon his return to America. Now it's decades later, and Jacob wants to retrace the steps he took during the war - from training to invasion to the village he is said to have saved. Trevor thinks this is the coolest idea ever. But as they get to the village, Trevor discovers there's more to the story than what he's heard his whole life, causing him to wonder about his great-grandfather's heroism, the truth about the battle he fought, and the importance of genuine valor. (Historical Fiction/Realistic Fiction, grades 4-8)

When Stars are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson & Omar Mohamed

Omar and his younger brother, Hassan, have spent most of their lives in Dadaab, a refugee camp in Kenya. Life is hard there: never enough food, achingly dull, and without access to the medical care Omar knows his nonverbal brother needs. So when Omar has the opportunity to go to school, he knows it might be a chance to change their future . . . but it would also mean leaving his brother, the only family member he has left, every day. (Graphic Novel, grades 3-8)

The Keystone to Reading Secondary Book Awards lists are created to give students a voice in the selection of the children's choice book awards presented each year at the annual KSLA Conference. The information presented in these annotations represents the thoughts and opinions of the reviewers and does not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the Keystone State Literacy Association. (The book descriptions have been taken from outside sources.)