

KEYSTONE TO READING SECONDARY BOOK AWARDS 2022-2023

ANNOTATED MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOK LIST

***Attack of the Black Rectangles* by A.S. King**

When Mac first opens his classroom copy of Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* and finds some words blacked out, he thinks it must be a mistake. But then when he and his friends discover what the missing words are, he's outraged.

Someone in his school is trying to prevent kids from reading the full story.

But who?

Even though his unreliable dad tells him to not get so emotional about a book (or anything else), Mac has been raised by his mom and grandad to call out things that are wrong. He and his friends head to the principal's office to protest the censorship... but her response doesn't take them seriously.

So many adults want Mac to keep his words to himself.

Mac's about to see the power of letting them out.

(Realistic Fiction, grades 6-8)

***Crash From Outer Space* by Candace Fleming**

In 1947, during the early years of the Cold War, a field in Roswell, New Mexico was disturbed by a strange crash and smattering of debris. Some say the bodies of extraterrestrial beings were strewn across the ground, that a UFO had crashed there, and that the government was covering up the evidence in a massive conspiracy.

But what really happened at Roswell?

The infamous "crash from outer space" has become a fixture in our culture, inspiring a surge of UFO sightings and conspiracy theories. But at its heart is the story of military scientists, a city on the brink of the Cold War, and a debris field scattered with mystery. What was it that actually crashed at Roswell? Were alien bodies found? Was it Russian spies? Secret military technology? And did the government try to hide what they found?

(Nonfiction, grades 6-8)

Dear Student by Elly Swartz

Starting Middle School is rough for Autumn after her one and only BFF moves to California. Uncertain and anxious, she struggles to connect with her new classmates. The two potential friends she meets could not be more different: bold Logan who has big ideas and quiet Cooper who's a bit mysterious. But Autumn has a dilemma: what do you do when the new friends you make don't like each other?

When Autumn is picked to be the secret voice of the Dear Student letters in the Hillview newspaper, she finds herself smack in the middle of a problem with Logan and Cooper on opposite sides. But before Autumn can figure out what to do, the unthinkable happens. Her secret identity as Dear Student is threatened. Now, it's time for Autumn to find her voice, her courage, and follow her heart, even when it's divided. (Realistic Fiction, grades 6-8)

Hummingbird by Natalie Lloyd

Twelve-year-old homeschooled Olive is tired of being seen as “fragile” just because she has *osteogenesis imperfecta* (otherwise known as brittle bone disease) so she's thrilled when she finally convinces her parents to let her attend Macklemore Elementary. Olive can't wait to go to a traditional school and make the friends she's always longed for, until a disastrous first day dashes her hopes of ever fitting in.

Then Olive hears whispers about a magical, wish-granting hummingbird that supposedly lives near Macklemore. It'll be the solution to all her problems! If she can find the bird and prove herself worthy, the creature will make her most desperate, secret wish come true.

When it becomes clear that she can't solve the mystery on her own, Olive teams up with some unlikely allies who help her learn the truth about the bird. And on the way, she just might learn that our fragile places lead us to the most wonderful magic of all . . .

(Fantasy, grades 6-8)

Odder by Katherine Applegate

Odder spends her days off the coast of central California, practicing her underwater acrobatics and spinning the quirky stories for which she's known. She's a fearless daredevil, curious to a fault. But when Odder comes face-to-face with a hungry great white shark, her life takes a dramatic turn, one that will challenge everything she believes about herself—and about the humans who hope to save her.

(Novel in Verse, grades 4-8)

Omar Rising by Gordon Korman

Omar knows his scholarship to Ghalib Academy Boarding School is a game changer, providing him—the son of a servant—with an opportunity to improve his station in life. He can't wait to experience all the school has to offer, especially science club and hopefully the soccer team; but when he arrives, his hopes are dashed. First-year scholarship students aren't allowed to join clubs or

teams—and not only that, they have to earn their keep doing menial chores. At first Omar is dejected—but then he gets angry when he learns something even worse—the school deliberately "weeds out" kids like him by requiring them to get significantly higher grades than kids who can pay tuition, making it nearly impossible for scholarship students to graduate. It's a good thing that in his favorite class, he's learned the importance of being stubbornly optimistic. So with the help of his tightknit new group of friends—and with the threat of expulsion looming over him—he sets out to do what seems impossible: change a rigged system.

(Realistic Fiction, grades 4-9)

The Elephant Girl by James Patterson & Ellen Bandu-Aaku

Clever, sensitive Jama likes elephants better than people. While her classmates gossip—especially about the new boy, Leku—twelve-year-old Jama takes refuge at the watering hole outside her village. There she befriends a baby elephant she names Mbegu, Swahili for seed.

When Mbegu's mother, frightened by poachers, stampedes, Jama and Mbegu are blamed for two deaths—one elephant and one human. Now Leku, whose mysterious and imposing father is head ranger at the conservancy, may be their only lifeline.

(Realistic Fiction, grades 5-9)

The Fort by Gordon Korman

The morning after Hurricane Leo rips through the town of Canaan, residents awaken to widespread destruction -- power outages, downed branches, uprooted trees, broken windows and damaged roofs. Four eighth-grade friends -- Evan, Jason, Mitchell, and CJ -- meet to explore the devastation. The tight-knit group is dismayed to find that Evan has brought along a stray -- Ricky, who is new to their town and school, and doesn't have any friends yet.

Ricky is the one to find the strange trap door that's appeared in the middle of the woods -- the door to an old bomb shelter, unearthed by the hurricane. Inside, the boys find a completely intact underground lair, complete with electricity, food, and entertainment (in the form of videocassettes). The boys vow to keep the place's existence to themselves.

Things soon get tense. Some bad locals keep snooping around. And what started out as a fun place to escape soon becomes a serious refuge for one of the kids who is trying to avoid an abusive home situation. In order to save the shelter, the friends must keep its secret... and in order to save themselves, they're going to have to share their individual secrets, and build the safest place they can.

(Realistic Fiction, grades 3-8)

The Tryout by Christina Soontornvat

When cheerleading tryouts are announced, Christina and her best friend, Megan, literally jump at the chance to join the squad. As two of the only kids of color in the school, they have always yearned to fit in—and the middle school cheerleaders are popular and accepted by everyone. But will the girls survive the terrifying tryouts, with their whole grade watching? And will their friendship withstand the pressures of competition?

(Graphic Novel, grades 3-8)

Thirst by Varsha Bajaj

Minni lives in the poorest part of Mumbai, where access to water is limited to a few hours a day and the communal taps have long lines. Lately, though, even that access is threatened by severe water shortages and thieves who are stealing this precious commodity—an act that Minni accidentally witnesses one night. Meanwhile, in the high-rise building where she just started to work, she discovers that water streams out of every faucet *and* there's even a rooftop swimming pool. What Minni also discovers there is one of the water mafia bosses. Now she must decide whether to expose him and risk her job and maybe her life. How did something as simple as access to water get so complicated?

(Realistic Fiction, grades 4-8)

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.)