

Summer Reading List

2030: A Day in the Life of Tomorrow's Kids by Amy Zuckerman and Jim Daly, illustrated by John Manders (Dutton, 2009).

The Contest: Everest #1 by Gordon Korman (Scholastic, 2002).

In *The Contest*, the first installment of Gordon Korman's *Everest* trilogy, 20 young mountaineers vie for four spots on Summit Quest — the world's youngest team to ascend Mt. Everest.

The Cricket in Times Square by George Selden (Square Fish, 2008).

The Cricket in Times Square has been initiating bookworms since 1960 and shows no sign of stopping. These days, fantasy-series books rule the bookshelves, yet this quiet tale of friendship endures.

Crickwing by Janell Cannon (Voyager Books, 2005).

This is the story of an unfortunate cockroach named Crickwing, called this because of a twisted wing earned when fleeing a predator. Crickwing finds he has a talent for food presentation: He is a food sculptor!

The Misadventures of Maude March by Audrey Coulombis (Yearling, 2007).

The Misadventures of Maude March is a Wild West story about two orphan girls who become outlaws.

Pirateology by Dugald A. Steer, illustrated by Anne Yvonne Gilbert, Ian Andrew and Helen Ward (Candlewick Press, 2006). The richly detailed *Pirateology* (the latest of the popular 'Ology books) is a standout among pirate merchandise, and a treat for both children and adults. This hefty volume centers on the search for treasure left by the "notorious" (i.e., fictional) pirate Arabella Drummond and comes with a host of pirate gear: a compass, maps and scraps of flags, among others.

The Quest Begins: Seekers #1 by Erin Hunter (HarperCollins, 2008).

Erin Hunter, author of the popular *Warriors* series, brings us a new series to love. *The Quest Begins* follows three young bears — a polar bear named Kallik, a black bear named Lusa and a grizzly named Toklo — whose stories begin to connect when they're all separated from their families. Classic Childhood Favorites

Beezus and Ramona by Beverly Cleary, illustrated by Arthur Dorros, Tracy Dockray (HarperCollins Children's Books, 2006).

The first *Ramona* book is a treat for all ages. Despite being more than 50 years old, *Beezus and Ramona* has lost none of its charm for this generation of young readers. While there is no Internet, PlayStation or cable television in the Quimby world, the frustrations of being an older sibling to a rambunctious preschooler are the same no matter what the era. Kids will still sympathize with gentle Beezus as she struggles with little sister Ramona. 176 pages.

Chronicles of Prydain #01: The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander (Henry Holt, 2006, originally published in 1964).

Ah, the fantasy series, how we love thee. For children today, there is no higher praise than to compare a book to the *Harry Potter* series. *The Book of Three* is the first of the fabulous *Chronicles of Prydain* series and has Taran and his Psychic pig, Henwyn, taking on the evil Horned King. This is a great "under the covers, past your bedtime, flashlight" read. Most highly recommended. 224 pages.

The Great Brain by John D. Fitzgerald, illustrated by Mercer Mayer (Puffin, 2004).

Set in the early 1900s, Tom Fitzgerald, aka "The Great Brain," is of the "Tom Sawyer" ilk. He is a shrewd and wily kid with a keen ability to earn a penny. Nevertheless, his intelligence ends up saving the day when he and his younger brother get lost in Skeleton Cave.

James and the Giant Peach by Roald Dahl, illustrated by Quentin Blake (Puffin, 2007).

Jumanji by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

Judy and Peter's parents go to the opera, leaving them with instructions "to keep the house neat." The children soon find themselves bored with their toys, after making a mess with them as soon as Mom and Dad have walked out the door. They go to the park, where they find a board game and bring it home only to discover that it is not the usual run-of-the-mill game.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr, illustrated by Ronald Himler (Putnam, 1999, originally published in 1977).

This is a book to teach your child about the horrors of war and illness, but most importantly about hope. Based on a true story set in World War II Japan, Sadako attempts to carry out the legend that the crafting of 1,000 paper cranes would heal her disease.

Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor (Simon and Schuster, 1991).

Nothing is simple in this taut, unforgettable drama. Kids love this edge-of-the-seat story of a boy going up against a really scary mean man to protect an abused dog.

Bone #1: Out From Boneville by Jeff Smith (Scholastic, 2005).

The first book of this humorous full-color graphic novel series describes the misadventures of the three Bone cousins as they explore a forested valley populated with frightening creatures.

The Boy Who Painted Dragons by Demi (Simon & Schuster, 2007).

Author/artist Demi has created another stunningly illustrated children's book, *The Boy Who Painted Dragons*. It's the story of Ping, a talented young boy who secretly fears the dragons whose images he paints. As he attempts to hide his fear, he covers every possible surface with brilliant golden dragons.

The Dark Is Rising by Susan Cooper (Simon and Schuster, 1973).

This is the second book in a five-book series and actually the best one to start with. Cooper convincingly combines fantasy elements with folklore and mythology.

The Gruesome Guide to World Monsters by Judy Sierra, illustrated by Henrik Drescher (Candlewick Press, 2005).

How do you protect yourself from a sisiutl? Read this book to be safe! Based on monster folklore around the world, it shares a gruesomeness rating, description and survival tip for encounters with 63 monsters.

Magyk: Septimus Heap Book One by Angie Sage (HarperCollins, 2005).

This story of babies switched at birth is complete with midwives, wizards, witches, spells and mischief. It is a fun read full of imagination and intrigue.

The Trouble With Wishes by Diane Stanley (HarperCollins, 2007).

Noted writer Diane Stanley's newest picture book is a humorous take on both the Greek myth "Pygmalion," and the old adage "Be careful what you wish for." Set in ancient Greece, the story follows a young sculptor named Pyg and his quest to win the heart of a stone goddess. Observing the action is a real flesh-and-blood girl named Jane, whose own desire (to become a renowned sculptor) is far more attainable than Pyg's. The stone goddess comes to life thanks to Pyg's artistic talents, but his ideas of perfect beauty are severely challenged as he learns the woman is as cold and disdainful as she is lovely.

Walter the Giant Storyteller's Giant Book of Giant Stories by Walter M. Mayes, illustrated by Kevin O'Malley. (Walker Books for Young Readers, 2005).

Using both tall-tale and fairy-tale giants, this book tells short stories from each giant's point of view. The author provides personality and humor for each of the characters as they plead their case to the readers.

Walter, the Story of a Rat by Barbara Wersba, illustrated by Donna Diamond (Front Street Books, 2005).

Walter is a lonely but literate rat. He lives in the home of Miss Pomeroy, an elderly, reclusive children's book author. A quiet friendship develops between the writer and this furry reader as they pen notes back and forth.

Horse Hooves and Chicken Feet: Mexican Folktales by Neil Philip, illustrated by Jacqueline Mair (Clarion Books, 2003).

Alternately funny, spooky, thought-provoking and magical, this is a vividly illustrated and accessible collection of Mexican folktales.

Porch Lies: Tales of Slicksters, Tricksters, and Other Wily Characters by Patricia C. McKissack, illustrated by Andre Carrilho (Random House, 2006).

Pour the lemonade, climb aboard the porch swing and prepare to pass the time listening to these nine original stories hung on the bones of the "slicksters, tricksters and other wily characters" the author came to know and love as a child growing up in the rural south. The storytelling cadence is just right; the characters are a colorful mix of guile and gumption; and the lessons vary from laugh-out-loud funny to touching. ... A thoroughly engaging collection handsomely presented: what more can you ask?

The Earth Dragon Awakes by Laurence Yep (HarperCollins Publishers, 2006).

This story is a short, powerful example of historical fiction. Readers see the experiences of a wealthy white family and an immigrant Chinese family at the time of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. A subplot describes discrimination that is experienced and overcome.

Homesick by Jean Fritz (Puffin, reissue edition, 2007).

Celebrated children's author Jean Fritz turns her eye on her own childhood. Born in China of American parents, young Jean feels torn between her homesickness for the America of her grandmother's letters and the devout love she feels for the Chinese people and their culture.

Keeping Score by Linda Sue Park (Clarion Books, 2008).

Linda Sue Park is familiar to readers as the winner of the 2002 Newbery Medal for her book, *A Single Shard*. A daughter of Korean immigrants, Linda grew up outside of Chicago as an avid baseball fan. She wrote *Keeping Score*, about a girl living in Brooklyn during the Korean War, combining her passion for baseball with her own family's past.

The Shakespeare Stealer by Gary Blackwood (Dutton Children's Books, 1998).

This book has found a ready audience among the upper-elementary and middle-school set. With a little luck, children may want to know more about the Shakespearean plays mentioned here, as well as the period. Also worth discussing is the ethical dilemma Widge is in: to risk his life or betray his new friends.

Bunnicula Meets Edgar Allan Crow by James Howe, illustrated by Eric Fortune (Atheneum, 2006).

The Monroe family is visited by the famous author of the *FleshCrawlers* books. When the author and his crow show an unusual interest in Bunnicula, the Monroe pets are sure that their favorite rabbit is in danger.

Circle of Doom by Tim Kennemore (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

The Sharp children live in Cleve Cottage at the end of Cleve Road. Lizzie, the eldest, is 13, Dan is 10, and Max is 7. When their only neighbors, the ancient Potwards, complain and ruin her birthday party, Lizzie decides to become a witch and cast a spell on them. When Lizzie agrees to let younger brother Max be the "witch's assistant," he is ecstatic to be playing with his sister instead of his imaginary friends. With coincidences piling up on top of spells, Lizzie begins to believe in her own power, Dan becomes uneasy and Max is absolutely positive that Lizzie can work magic and that magic runs in the family. This book is a wonderful combination - ludicrously funny and touching.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney (Abrams Books, 2007).

The main character Greg is a kid who usually doesn't do the right thing the first time around. His cluelessness about what would keep him out of trouble and why parents, teachers and friends are upset with him is part of the book's humor, which leads the reader to any lesson Greg should be learning. Parents will appreciate that his friend's dad looks up video games on a parent Web site to see if they have too much violence. Also, you can tell that Greg's mom is working hard to raise respectful sons. When a bikini picture from her oldest son Rodrick's heavy metal magazine ends up in her youngest son's hands for show-and-tell, she makes Rodrick apologize to all women on paper. Parents will also be thrilled to know that despite the fact that the book is written in less-formal journal style with fun cartoons, everything is spelled *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules* by Jeff Kinney (Amulet Books, 2008).

This book has sibling rivalry, one wild party and some scheming to cheat on tests and get out of chores. The great thing is, like most middle school kids, the characters get caught and are punished. Families can talk about lying and friendship. Why was Greg's mother more upset when she found out he lied? How would you feel if your friends treated you like Greg did Chirag? Have you ever done something in school that made other people feel bad, but made you feel cool and popular

The Not-Just-Anybody Family by Betsy Byars (Yearling, 1987).

The Blossoms are not an ordinary family. With a mother who is a rodeo trick rider, a grandfather who innocently manages to scare the local citizenry and get himself arrested, and a dog who wears a red bandana - not to mention a boy who thinks he can fly - it is not surprising that the Blossoms attract misadventures.

Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar, illustrated by Julie Brinckloe (HarperTrophy, 2004).

On the 30th floor of the wacky Wayside School is Mrs. Jewl's class. Sharie falls asleep and rolls out the window. Joe counts all wrong and gets the right answer. Calvin is sent to the 19th floor to deliver a note, but there is no 19th floor - the builder forgot it. This nutty world is built on the sort of playful twists of logic that kids love.

Mysteries Boy of a Thousand Faces by Brian Selznick (Harper, 2000).

Ten-year-old Alonzo King is an expert about monster movies. He spends hours with Scotch tape and makeup trying to master his beloved monster faces in the mirror. When a mysterious beast is rumored to be stomping on flower beds and scratching up cars, Alonzo is called on for his monster expertise

Edgar & Ellen Under Town by Charles Ogden, illustrated by Rick Carton (Tricycle Press/Star Farm Productions, 2004).

The cover art on this book immediately draws children's attention. The concept of twins and the mystery of a prankster draw students into the story plot.

Framed by Frank Boyce (HarperCollins Children's Books, 2006).

The story is told by a young boy who is endearingly naive and who understands less than the reader about what is really going on. He is missing a parent and doing the best he can with his limited understanding to make things better for everyone. And his well-meaning but clueless actions change not only his family, but his town. Dylan lives with his sisters and parents, and is the only boy in a small, rainy town in Wales. They run a small garage, the Snowdonia Oasis Auto Marvel, on the brink of insolvency. Dylan is obsessed with the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, as is Tom, the man who tried to rob them and whom they hire instead. Then a series of seemingly unrelated events starts to change things in their lives and community.

Jim Ugly by Sid Fleischman (Harper, 1992).

The year is 1894. Jake Bannock and his father Sam are on the run and hiding out in Blowfly, Nevada. When Sam unexpectedly disappears and is presumed dead, it's up to Jake and Sam's dog, Jim Ugly, (who is part wolf and part dog) to get to the bottom of the mystery.

The Missing 'Gator of Gumbo Limbo: An Eco Mystery by Jean Craighead George (Harper, 1992).

Liza and her mother are seeking refuge in Gumbo Limbo, a lush hammock of trees in the Florida Everglades. Also in residence is Dajun the alligator, caretaker of this precious ecosystem. When Dajun is seen as a threat to the nearby condos in development, he is ordered killed and Liza becomes determined to keep him safe at any cost.

Atherton Book 1: The House of Power by Patrick Carman (Little, Brown Young Readers, 2007).

While this is a pertinent title for the San Francisco Peninsula, this book has nothing to do with the small, affluent town just north of Kepler's Books! It is, however, a fantastic adventure based in a three-tiered world. As the Earth begins to shake, the residents of Atherton wonder what is happening to their world and their societies as the upper echelon begins to sink into the lower tier. How will the inhabitants overcome the rules of their existence and work together to face down the unthinkable? The first in a series, this installment will leave the reader clamoring for more. 330 pages. [Kepler's Books](#)

Do the Funky Pickle by Jerry Spinelli (Scholastic, 1992).

Eddie Mott has been in love with his friend Sunny from the first time he met her. The school dance is coming up and he has asked his friends Pickles and Salem for help. This hilarious story describes Eddie's varied and unsuccessful attempts to get Sunny to notice him, while avoiding Angelpuss and her boyfriend Weasel, a tough and nasty eighth-grader, whose attention Eddie's antics has attracted.

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins Children's Books, 2003).

A terrific book for reluctant readers and discussion groups, it packs a load of emotional and intellectual depth into a very accessible package.

Lunch Money by Andrew Clements, illustrated by Brian Selznick (Simon and Schuster, 2005).

Parents should know that this is exactly the kind of book you hope your kids will find and love — showing the best examples of kids and adults behaving in caring, intelligent and positive ways. 222 pages.

No Talking by Andrew Clements, illustrated by Mark Elliott (Simon and Schuster, 2007).

While studying about India, fifth-grader Dave Packer discovers that Gandhi did not speak for one day every week to bring order to his mind. This amazes Dave, as he and his friends are all so vocal they are called the Unshushables. Dave tries to stay quiet for a whole day. But when a girl at the table next to him just won't keep quiet, he can't resist and breaks his silence with an insult. This leads to a challenge: Which group, the boys or the girls, can be quieter for two days? How does this contest affect the fifth-graders, their teachers and their principal? What do they learn about language and the power of words? This is a very funny book that will make everyone think about how much we talk and all those wasted words. It is also the perfect choice for a book group or for a literature circle.

Picklemania by Jerry Spinelli (Scholastic, 1993).

Eddie, Sunny, Salem and Pickles are now in the sixth grade and their adventures are still going strong. Eddie wants to bulk up, Sunny desperately wants to take karate and Salem is trying to figure out who sent her a mysterious Valentine's Day message in the school newspaper. And Pickles? Well, he just finished building a new invention, but he won't unveil it until it starts snowing. 132 pages.

Prizefighter en mi Casa by e. E. Charlton-Trujillo (Random House, 2006).

Chula Sanchez wished her parents hadn't decided against naming her Esperanza. "Cause Chula means pretty and there ain't nothing pretty 'bout me now." Pape was driving drunk when he and Chula crashed. With the head of the household now paralyzed and unable to work, and Chula scarred with a disfigured face and the onset of epilepsy, the Sanchez family is struggling to make ends meet. Humiliated but still determined, Pape is convinced that El Jefe, the most revered prizefighter in Mexico, is their ticket to financial salvation. ... As readers will learn, neither El Jefe, nor Chula are who or what they appear to be.

Sahara Special by Esme Codell (Hyperion Books for Children, 2003).

Esme 'aji Codell's first novel for children is not a new story: Unconventional Teacher Bucks Authority, Changes Student Lives. It has a noble pedigree, from *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* to *Conrack* to *Miss Nelson is Missing*. But Codell's lyrical take on it is sharply observed and poignantly funny. This is a lovely, moving book.

The School Story by Andrew Clements (Simon & Schuster, 2001).

Readers will grin from beginning to end of this enchanting story. A kid getting a novel published — too ridiculous to be believable, right? Just ask Gordon Korman, whose first novel, which he wrote as a seventh-grade English project, was published when he was 12. It sold very well, and he had five more published before he graduated from high school. Publishers are looking for good school stories — who better to write one than a kid? This book should prompt many fruitful family discussions, and inspire young authors to reach for their dreams. 196 pages.

There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom by Louis Sachar (Scholastic, 1987).

This book tells the story of Bradley Chalkers, a boy who tells enormous lies, picks fights with girls, spits on people and is considered by his teachers to have behavioral issues. Bradley has no friends, is disliked by all the students and teachers in the school and, always sits by himself in the last seat, last row. Things start to

change when Jeff Fishkin, a new student, arrives and is placed in the only empty seat left in the room, right next to Bradley. The school hires a new counselor, Carla, who sees potential in Bradley and works with him to make him see the potential in himself, a difficult task for a boy who sees himself as a monster.

Waiting for Normal by Leslie Connor (Katherine Tegen Books, 2008).

Sixth-grader Addie's life is complicated. Her "Mommers" is given to long absences and immature outbursts. Addie has dyslexia, so learning is an act of will and persistence. Her father died when she was small, but her stepfather, Dwight, now divorced from her mom, cares deeply for her and the couple's other two natural children. The court awards him custody of the younger girls, but not of Addie, because he is not her "real" dad. As Mommers falters, he continues to support them, but the only home he can purchase for them is a small trailer parked across from a mini-mart. Addie attempts to "normalize" her life around meals, learning pieces on her flute and visiting her beloved "neighbors" at the convenience store. I found it impossible to leave Addie until I had finished. This book will force you to think about "normal" - about what you, and all of us, really desire and where to find joy.

Brian's Winter by Gary Paulsen (Laurel Leaf, 1998).

In the Newbery Honor book, *Hatchet*, 13-year-old Brian Robeson learned to survive alone in the Canadian wilderness, armed only with his hatchet. As millions of readers know, he was finally rescued at the end of the summer. In this sequel to *Hatchet*, Paulsen imagines our hero as if he hadn't been rescued, revisiting Brian at the onset of a punishing Canadian winter and portraying him surviving a winter in the wilderness. This book easily stands alone; one need not read *Hatchet* first, although it does make for an interesting discussion. Full of cliffhangers and tension, this is the perfect winter read for the adventurous child in your life.

Snow Treasure by Marie McSwigan (Puffin, 2006).

Ever dream of saving the world by sled? During World War II and the German occupation of Norway, children in a small Norwegian town prevented \$9 million worth of gold from reaching their captors by smuggling it on their sleds in the form of bricks. This suspenseful tale is based on a true story and makes for an amazing read. 208 pages.

Extreme Animals: The Toughest Creatures on Earth by Nicola Davies, illustrated by Neal Layton (Candlewick Press, 2006).

A book to engender a lot of "Did you know...?" conversations, *Extreme Animals* will amaze readers with facts about animals that withstand earth's extreme conditions. The most amazing animal of all can live through all of the extremes scientists can produce.

Oh, Rats! The Story of Rats and People by Albert Marrin (Dutton, 2006).

The life-like picture of a rat on the cover of this book will be enough to pique the interest of many kids. "Revolting, revealing, and riveting," says the book's back cover, and it's an apt description of the nine fact-filled chapters about these "champions of survival." The author provides information about rats' habits and intelligence, as well as their role as disease carriers, lab animals, predators, pests, pets and even as food. The gross-out factor alone will make this a must-read for many kids. 48 pages.

Owen & Mzee: The Language of Friendship by Isabella and Craig Hatkoff and Paula Kuhumbu, illustrated by Peter Greste (Scholastic Press, 2007).

This book tells the true story of the friendship that developed at a Kenyan wildlife sanctuary between Owen, a baby hippopotamus orphaned by the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami, and Mzee, a 130-year-old giant Aldabra tortoise. The authors detail the animals' system of communication (nudges, nips and a special call), how they play together and how Owen acts more like a tortoise than a hippo. The text is clearly written and accompanied by full-color photos of this unique pair. 40 pages.

Quest for the Tree Kangaroo: An Expedition to the Cloud Forest of New Guinea by Sy Montgomery, photographs by Nic Bishop (Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

The author and photographer accompanied scientist Lisa Dabek and her team on a trek through the remote forests of Papua New Guinea in search of the elusive Matschie's tree kangaroo. Little is known about this rare animal that looks like a bear, has a pocket like a kangaroo and lives in trees. The book is filled with

wonderful photographs of the tree kangaroos, their lush forest habitat, and other exotic plants and animals. Information included about Dabek's background may be of special interest to aspiring young naturalists and biologists. None of her friends, family or teachers encouraged her in her passionate interest in animals when she was growing up, thinking it was strange, and she struggled with the challenge of asthma. This book provides fascinating information about a little-known place on Earth, a newly discovered species and how one woman overcame the odds to follow her dreams. 79 pages.

Interest grade level: 4-6. [Ellen Phillips](#)

Crafts *The Book Club Kit* by Patti Kelley Criswell, illustrated by Ali Douglass (American Girl Publishing, 2007).

The World Record Paper Airplane Book by Ken Blackburn and Jeff Lammers (Workman Publishing, 2006).

This revised new edition of the popular paper-airplane book soars with 112 ready—to—crease airplanes based on 20 very cool and colorful designs — all of them easy enough for young paper—plane pilots to cut out of the book, fold according to directions and toss into the air. The co-authors are gurus in the world of amateur aerodynamics. Aerospace engineer Blackburn holds the Guinness World Record for paper airplane tossing "time aloft," and Lammers is an engineer and part-time pilot. Together they share folding and tossing secrets that will make anyone into a paper—airplane connoisseur. ... But this book isn't about educational text; it's about educational experience and the thrill of flight. The real stars here are the paper airplanes themselves. From the Stunt plane to the Eagle, and the Space Shuttle replica to a Hammerhead, this book is fueled by science and fun. ... 256 pages.

Friends: Making Them and Keeping Them by Patty Kelley Criswell, illustrated by Stacy Peterson (American Girl Publishing, 2006).

Making friends isn't always easy. In this book, girls learn the importance of friends and making a friendship work. These real-life stories, activities and quizzes can be read alone or with a friend. 80 pages. Fun Books

About Math *The Best of Times: Math Strategies That Multiply* by Gregory Tang, illustrated by Harry Briggs (Scholastic, 2002).

Does the thought of memorizing your multiplication facts drive you crazy? Are you tired of those pesky speed drills in math class? If you want a fun way to learn how to multiply, you must read this clever picture book. Tang uses simple rhymes and puzzles to help students understand the concept of multiplication. Today's kids are mesmerized by rap and rhyme, so this book is sure to motivate as well as encourage children to use different strategies to solve multiplication problems. 32 pages

Fooled You! Fakes and Hoaxes Through the Years by Elaine Pascoe (Henry Holt and Co., 2005).

This book outlines over a dozen famous frauds from the 1800s to the present, including P.T. Barnum's bogus Feejee mermaid, the Piltdown Man fossil fraud, Bigfoot film footage and the discovery of "mysterious" crop circles in England. The author begins and ends the book with familiar examples of present-day Internet hoaxes and encourages healthy skepticism by urging readers to ask themselves, "Would I have been fooled?" Kids will enjoy reading about how people were so easily fooled, and the resource list at the back of the book will encourage further research.

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village by Laura Schlitz, illustrated by Robert Byrd (Candlewick Press, 2007).

The book will appeal to many kids, including those who don't usually choose nonfiction, and will be useful for history classes and drama productions and workshops. Even reluctant readers will enjoy the clear, direct text, short length, and dramatic content. We can even hope that this brilliant book, with its awards and attendant success, may lead to a renaissance of books for kids that make history come alive. In 19 monologues and two dialogs in verse and prose, the lives of a cast of characters from a medieval village — nobles and peasants, but all children — are illuminated. Through them, along with margin notes and periodic background sections, a portrait of life in the Middle Ages is created.

Science and Nature

The Down-to-Earth Guide to Global Warming by Laurie David and Cambria Gordon (Orchard Books, 2007).

Laurie David and Cambria Gordon's *Down-to-Earth Guide to Global Warming* makes a concept as complicated as global warming easy to understand. With the first half devoted to the science behind climate change, it's still relevant and enjoyable for kids. Visuals abound and the book concludes with some significant ways for kids to make a difference. This guide will educate and empower young readers, leaving them with the knowledge they need to understand this problem and a sense of hope to inspire them into action.

50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth by the EarthWorks Group (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1990).

A practical guide to conserving resources and protecting the environment, each brief chapter of *50 Simple Things* provides information and tips designed to inspire ideas and action. Statistics and measurements are translated into age-appropriate terms, such as comparing children's weight to the amount of garbage thrown away in a year. The book also explains how everyday items — like a light switch or a toilet — are connected to the rest of the world. Fun ideas for the whole family to discuss and implement!

Gaia Girls: Enter the Earth by Lee Welles (Daisyworld Press, 2007).

Like eco—Nancy Drews, the characters of the Gaia Girls series will appeal to girls ready to take on modern-day environmental challenges. *Gaia Girls: Enter the Earth* is the first in the series and introduces Elizabeth, who possesses the power of "earth" — the ability to work with and command soil, trees and creatures in the soil. Illustrated throughout, this chapter book is for more mature fourth-grade readers, as it does not pull any punches when taking on subjects like factory farming. Highly recommended for its compelling story and sensitivity to current issues.

Natural Disasters by Claire Watts, illustrated by Trevor Day (DK Publishing, 2006).

With many natural disasters in the news recently, this book should answer questions that kids might have. Part of the Eyewitness Books series, it presents an overview of a wide variety of disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, volcanoes, landslides, hurricanes, tornadoes and epidemics. Written in plain language and illustrated with spectacular photos, maps and diagrams, there is a wealth of valuable information contained here. The book includes a timeline of major disasters throughout history, a glossary of technical terms, an index and a "Find Out More" page that directs readers to useful Web sites and places to visit to learn more (in this case, natural history and science museums). There are more than 100 titles in this series, from Amphibian to World War II--something for every reader.

Top Secret: A Handbook of Codes, Ciphers, and Secret Writing by Paul B. Janeczko, illustrated by Jenna LaReau (Candlewick Press, 2004).

This book has everything a budding spy or cryptographer wants to know about creating codes, ciphers, and the methods of concealment. An answer key provides a great opportunity to practice new skills from pictographs to Iqpay Atinlay.