

KEYSTONE TO READING SECONDARY
ANNOTATED HIGH SCHOOL BOOK AWARD LIST
2017-2018

Everland by Wendy Spinale

With London crippled by bombings and a deadly disease outbreak, Gwen Darling and her siblings, Joanna and Mikey, are bent on just surviving until they find a way out. Besides the demolished state of their home, they face serious obstacles, the loss of their parents and the city's other adults being just one. They must also evade Capt. Hans Otto Oswald Kretschmer—Hook for short. Hook and his army of Marauders go about snatching up the bombings' survivors for experimentation for a cure for the Horologia virus. Those taken by Hook never return. One day they snatch Joanna, and in Gwen's quest to rescue her sister, she joins forces with a fearless boy named Pete and his equally bold friend, Bella. The question then becomes: will this team, together with the Lost Boys, be enough to outsmart and outrun Hook and his German army and rescue Joanna without putting any other lives at risk? The characters are fickle and impulsive in ways that feel designed to ensure that readers never forget that they are children. (Urban fantasy. 14-18)

Love and Gelato by Jenna Evans Welch

Her life already upended by her mother's short illness and death, Lina, 16, moves to Tuscany to live with the father she's never met. Lina's repulsed to discover that her father, Howard, is the caretaker of a World War II cemetery in Italy. She's had enough of death, thanks, and doesn't need to see all those crosses outside her bedroom window. Determined not to stay, Lina secures a promise from her best friend, Addie, to help her return to Seattle. But as readers probably know by now, Tuscany is irresistible. Soon Lina's seduced by its rolling hills and Florence's myriad beauties and attractions. Gelato and a guy play their parts. Lorenzo, known as Ren, a handsome, half-Italian, half-American neighbor, attends the school she'll be enrolled in if she stays. He introduces her to classmates who welcome her into their close-knit posse, including a wealthy—and hot—Brit, Thomas. Howard proves both likable and an ideal parent—caring but not hovering. Why her mother never mentioned him until she became ill, and why Lina looks nothing like him, remain mysteries she's determined to solve. The journal her mother mailed to Italy—detailing her own year in Florence as a photography student—holds some but not all the answers. Lina narrates in a breezy style, her mother's journal entries interwoven to provide revelations at carefully paced intervals. (Fiction. 12-16)

Rebel of the Sands by Alwyn Hamilton

A sassy desert sharpshooter swashbuckles through a six-gun Arabian Nights in this fantasy debut. Once upon a time in Miraji, fiery Djinn bartered for wishes and heroes rode immortal steeds of wind and sand; now the hardscrabble folk of Dustwalk make weapons for the Sultan's foreign allies and trade whispered rumors about the Rebel

Prince. Orphaned, barely tolerated, and stifled in a culture that considers females worthless, Amani is so desperate to get out of the Last County that she dresses as a boy and enters a shooting contest. But that's before she meets the charming foreign scoundrel Jin, and then the barn burns down, and the factory blows up, and the army arrives....From the irresistible opening paragraph, this rollicking caper expertly mashes up a gritty Middle East with a steampunk Old West, succeeding through the infectious voice of its heroine: brash, witty, cynical, and fierce, with an aching, vulnerable core and a suppressed streak of idealism. The secondary characters are just as memorable, from snarky, secretive Jin to their various foes, who range from cartoonish to terrifying to darkly tragic. Amani's adventures through this immersive alternative landscape continually veer off into unpredictable detours, looping back to an almost overstuffed climax that manages to deliciously satisfy while dangling tempting hints for a sequel. (Fantasy. 12 & up)

Salt to the Sea by Ruta Sepetys

Returning to the successful formula of her highly lauded debut, *Between Shades of Gray* (2011), Sepetys combines research (described in extensive back matter) with well-crafted fiction to bring to life another little-known story: the sinking (from Soviet torpedoes) of the German ship *Wilhelm Gustloff*. Told in four alternating voices—Lithuanian nurse Joana, Polish Emilia, Prussian forger Florian, and German soldier Alfred—with often contemporary cadences, this stints on neither history nor fiction. The three sympathetic refugees and their motley companions (especially an orphaned boy and an elderly shoemaker) make it clear that while the *Gustloff* was a German ship full of German civilians and soldiers during World War II, its sinking was still a tragedy. Only Alfred, stationed on the *Gustloff*, lacks sympathy; almost a caricature, he is self-delusional, unlikable, a Hitler worshiper. As a vehicle for exposition, however, and a reminder of Germany's role in the war, he serves an invaluable purpose that almost makes up for the mustache-twirling quality of his petty villainy. The inevitability of the ending (including the loss of several characters) doesn't change its poignancy, and the short chapters and slowly revealed backstories for each character guarantee the pages keep turning. (Historical fiction. 12-16).

Tell Me Three Things by Julie Buxbaum

Jessie's unassimilated grief over her mother's death makes her dad's abrupt marriage to Rachel, a wealthy widow he met online, and their subsequent move from Chicago to her mansion in Los Angeles feel like betrayal. Rachel's son wants nothing to do with Jessie. Her first week at his private school is agonizing. When she gets an email from "Somebody Nobody," claiming to be a male student in the school and offering to act as her "virtual spirit guide," Jessie's suspicious, but she accepts—she needs help. SN's a smart, funny, supportive guide, advising her whom to befriend and whom to avoid while remaining stubbornly anonymous. Meanwhile, Jessie makes friends, is picked as study partner by the coolest guy in AP English, and finds a job in a bookstore, working with the owner's son, Liam. But questions abound. Why is Liam's girlfriend bullying her? What should she do about SN now that she's crushing on study-partner Ethan? Readers will have answers long before Jessie does. It's over-familiar territory: a

protagonist unaware she's gorgeous, oblivious to male admiration; a jealous, mean-girl antagonist; a secret admirer, easily identified. It's the authentic depiction of grief—how Jessie and other characters respond to loss, get stuck, struggle to break through—devoid of cliché that will keep readers engaged. Though one of Jessie's friends has a Spanish surname, rich, beautiful, mostly white people are the order of the day. (Fiction. 12-16)

***The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* by John Boyne**

Seven-year-old Pierrot Fischer and his frail French mother live in Paris. His German father, a bitter ex-soldier, returned to Germany and died there. Pierrot's best friend is Anshel Bronstein, a deaf Jewish boy. After his mother dies, he lives in an orphanage, until his aunt Beatrix sends for him to join her at the Berghof mountain retreat in Austria, where she is housekeeper for Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun. It is here that he becomes ever more enthralled with Hitler and grows up, proudly wearing the uniform of the Hitler Youth, treating others with great disdain, basking in his self-importance, and then committing a terrible act of betrayal against his aunt. He witnesses vicious acts against Jews, and he hears firsthand of plans for extermination camps. Yet at war's end he maintains that he was only a child and didn't really understand. An epilogue has him returning to Paris, where he finds Anshel and begins a kind of catharsis. Boyne includes real Nazi leaders and historical details in his relentless depiction of Pierrot's inevitable corruption and self-delusion. As with *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2006), readers both need to know what Pierrot disingenuously doesn't and are expected to accept his extreme naiveté, his total lack of awareness and comprehension in spite of what is right in front of him. (Historical fiction. 12-14)

***The Forgetting* by Sharon Cameron**

Every 12 years, the people of Canaan lose their memories and must reconstitute identity and relationships from books recording their personal histories—but with her memory secretly intact, Nadia dreads the chaos and violence the imminent Forgetting will bring. Last time, Nadia saw her father replace his family's books with fakes, leaving her mother to raise three daughters alone. Their residual unease has led her mother and older sister to reject Nadia, now 18; only little Genivee accepts her as family. Isolated by what she knows and can't tell, Nadia's become a silent—but observant—loner. She's witnessed floggings and the plight of the Lost: those who've awakened without books, nameless, forced into servitude, penned into fenced quarters at night. She's alarmed at Jonathan's growing power within the governing Council. When handsome, sociable Gray, the glassblower's son, discovers she forages outside city walls, he blackmails her into taking him along. Smarter and tougher than she'd thought, he becomes an ally and friend—but Gray has secrets too. Effective worldbuilding and strong characterization (even minor players have emotional depth) add substance to the fast-paced plot. A cosmetic resemblance to blockbuster teen dystopias allows Cameron to toy slyly with readers' expectations, but this is no retread. *The Forgetting* ensures racial categories have no meaning, but characters do display differences in skin and hair color (Nadia is blonde with light eyes). (Science fiction. 12-16).

The Memory of Things by Gae Polisner

On Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001, white, 16-year-old Kyle Donohue flees from Stuyvesant High School in downtown Manhattan toward his home in Brooklyn Heights. While running across the Brooklyn Bridge, he spots a white girl covered in ash and wearing elaborate costume wings, so he makes a split-second decision to keep her safe. Kyle takes the scared "bird girl" to his apartment, where his uncle, who uses a wheelchair and is recovering from a spinal-cord injury, is the only person waiting. Kyle's dad is an NYPD officer who's working around the clock at ground zero, while his mother and younger sister are stuck at LAX, unable to return to New York. The bird girl can't remember much of anything, but as the days unfold, she begins to recover flashes of her memory and to become attached to sweet Kyle, who's clearly smitten. But they both know she'll eventually need to leave the bubble of security they've created. The author tells their story in alternating points of view, his in prose and hers in spare, erratically spaced verse that effectively communicates her disorientation. A love letter to the New Yorkers who rallied together, this is also an exploration of the intense bonds that form during a crisis. Detailed and well-researched, it's sure to make young readers curious about those unforgettable days after the twin towers fell. (Fiction. 12-17)

The Serpent King by Jeff Zentner

This is Jeff Zentner's debut novel. Neither Dill, Travis, nor Lydia feels at home in Forrestville, a small Tennessee town named after the founder of the Klu Klux Klan. Lydia's loving, prosperous parents have given her the tools to create a popular blog and the glittering prospect of college life in New York City. Travis, on the other hand, escapes his father's drunken brutality and his own heartbreak over his soldier brother's death by retreating into a fictional fantasy world. And Dillard Early Jr. can't escape his name: his snake-handling preacher father became notorious in these parts when he was incarcerated for child porn. Some—Dill's mother among them—blame Dill for his father's conviction. Lydia is determined to realize her dreams, and she is equally determined that the boys dream, too. Dill just wants Lydia to stay. Writing in third-person chapters that alternate among the three characters, Zentner covers the whole of their senior year, with heartbreak and a hopeful conclusion. Characters, incidents, dialogue, the poverty of the rural South, enduring friendship, a desperate clinging to strange faiths, fear of the unknown, and an awareness of the courage it takes to survive, let alone thrive, are among this fine novel's strengths. (Fiction. 14 & up).

The Sun is also a Star by Nicola Yoon

The Sun Is Also a Star by Nicola Yoon (*Everything, Everything*) won a 2017 Michael J. Printz Honor and was a 2016 National Book Award finalist for Young People's Literature. Natasha and Daniel meet, get existential, and fall in love during 12 intense hours in New York City. Natasha believes in science and facts, things she can quantify. Fact: undocumented immigrants in the U.S., her family is being deported to Jamaica in a matter of hours. Daniel's a poet who believes in love, something that can't be explained. Fact: his parents, Korean immigrants, expect him to attend an Ivy League school and become an M.D. When Natasha and Daniel meet, Natasha's

understandably distracted—and doesn't want to be distracted by Daniel. Daniel feels what in Japanese is called *koi no yokan*, “the feeling when you meet someone that you're going to fall in love with them.” The narrative alternates between the pair, their first-person accounts punctuated by musings that include compelling character histories. Daniel—sure they're meant to be—is determined to get Natasha to fall in love with him (using a scientific list). Meanwhile, Natasha desperately attempts to forestall her family's deportation and, despite herself, begins to fall for sweet, disarmingly earnest Daniel. This could be a sappy, saccharine story of love conquering all, but Yoon's lush prose chronicles an authentic romance that's also a meditation on family, immigration, and fate. (Fiction. 14 & up)

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 KSRA Conference. The information presented in these books represents the thoughts and opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the Keystone State Reading Association. As this is the high school list, these titles are mature in nature.