

NOVEL IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM:

TURN A FRESH PAGE WITH CONTEMPORARY BOOKS
AND ACTIVITIES FOR UPPER ELEMENTARY AND
LOWER HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSES



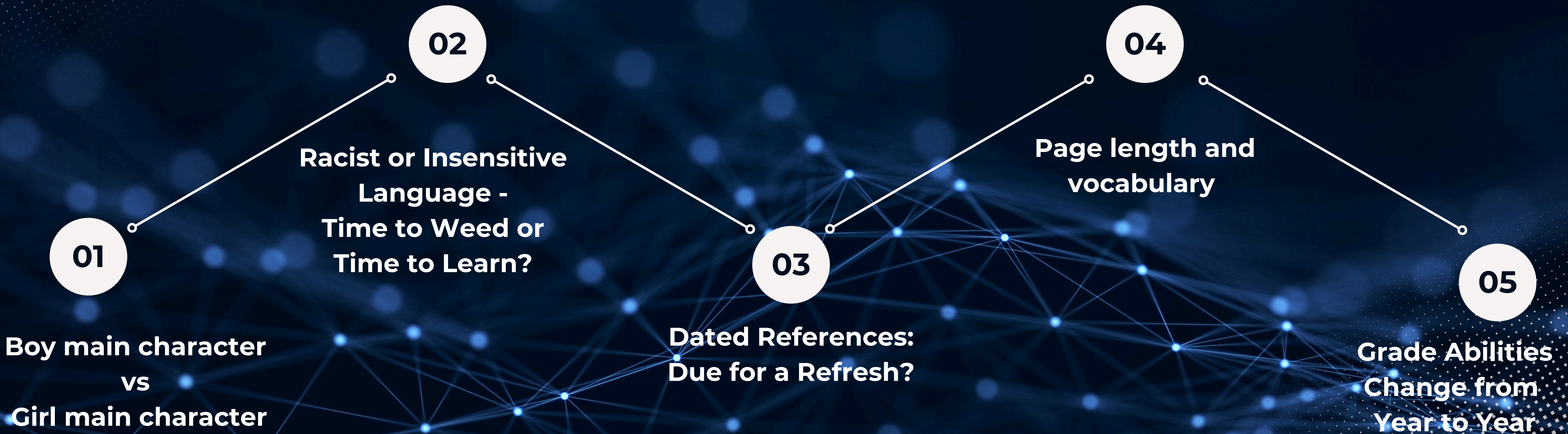
Karen Biskin
JPPS Bialik

Springboards Conference
Friday, March 21, 2025

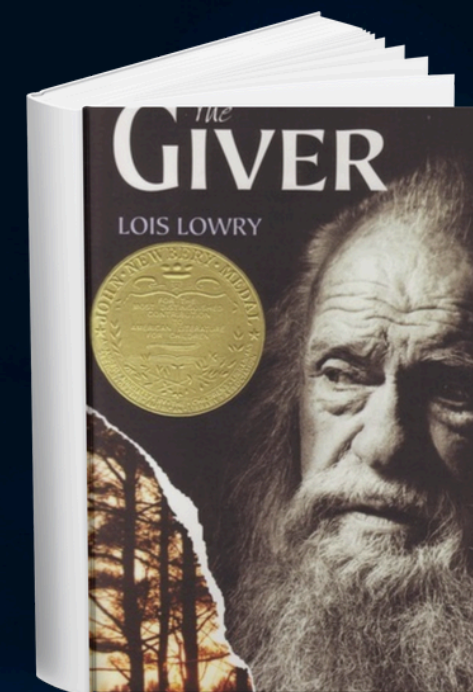
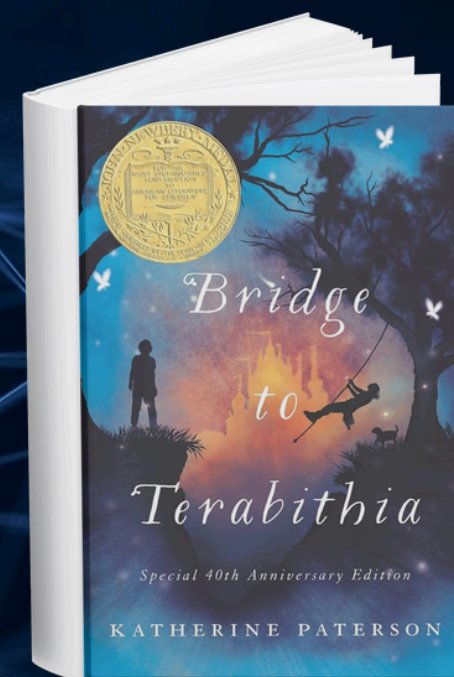
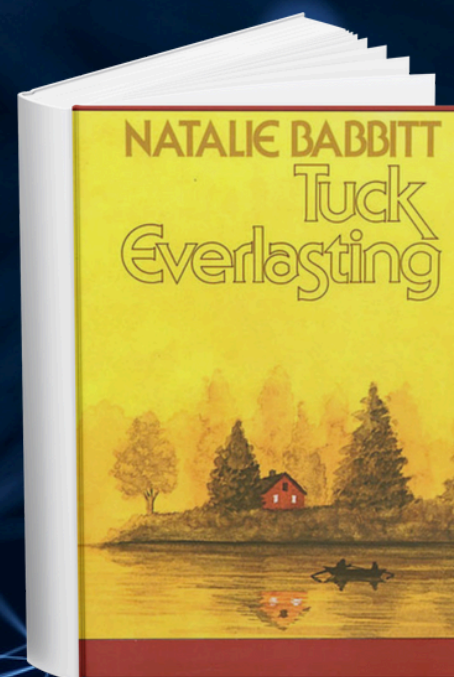
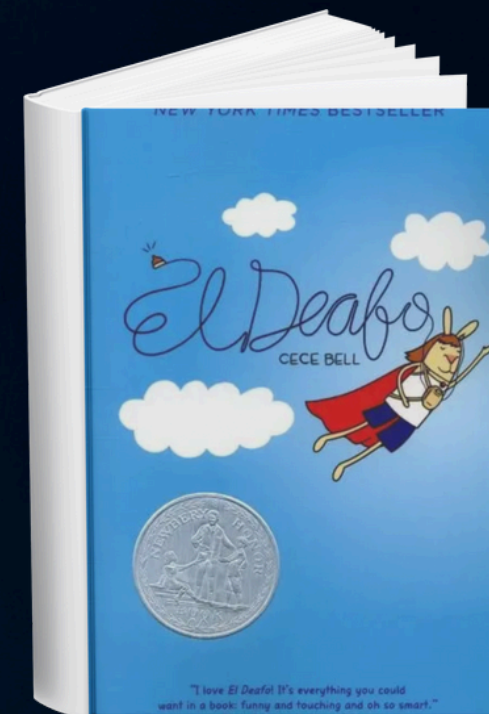
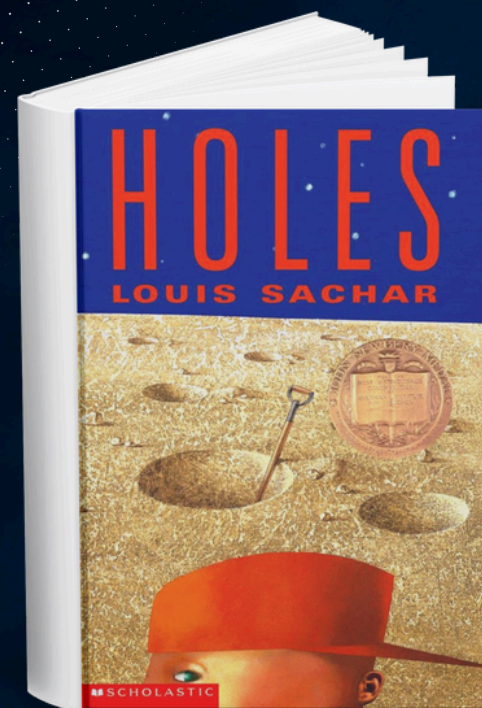
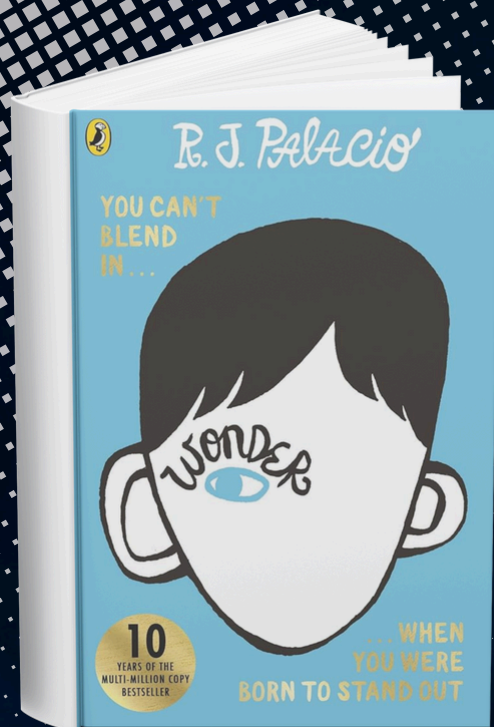


Zehava Cohn
Hebrew Academy

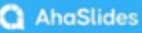
SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER




UPPER ELEMENTARY: MODERN CLASSICS



<https://ahaslides.com/JRS8S>



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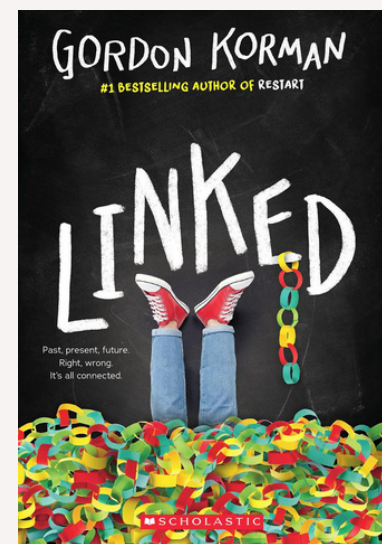


UPPER ELEMENTARY

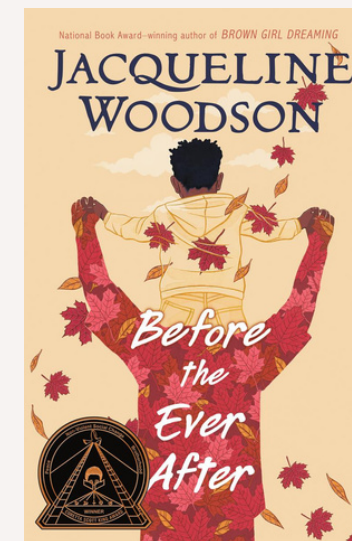


***Thirst* by Varsha Bajaj**

- Themes: Family, water crises, social inequality
- [Teacher's Guide](#)

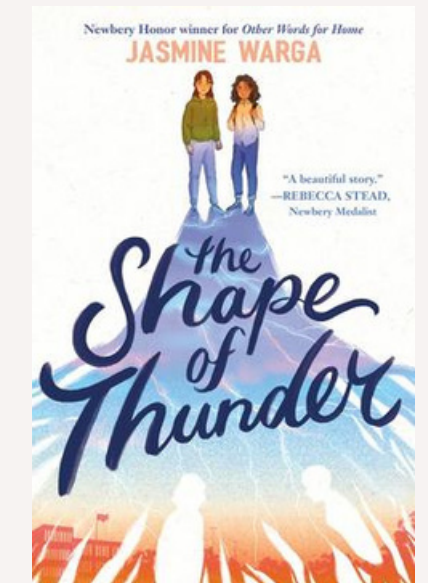


- ## ***Linked* by Gordon Korman**
- Themes: Social media, antisemitism and hate speech, community unity
 - [Teacher's Guide](#)



***Before the Ever After* by Jacqueline Woodson**

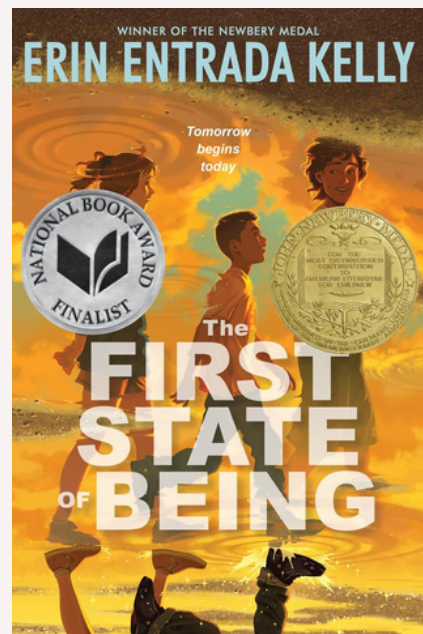
- Themes: Illness, Friendship, Individuality, Verse
- [Teacher's Guide](#)



***The Shape of Thunder* by Jasmine Warga**

- Themes: Tragedy, Friendship, Science
- [Teacher's Guide](#)

UPPER ELEMENTARY



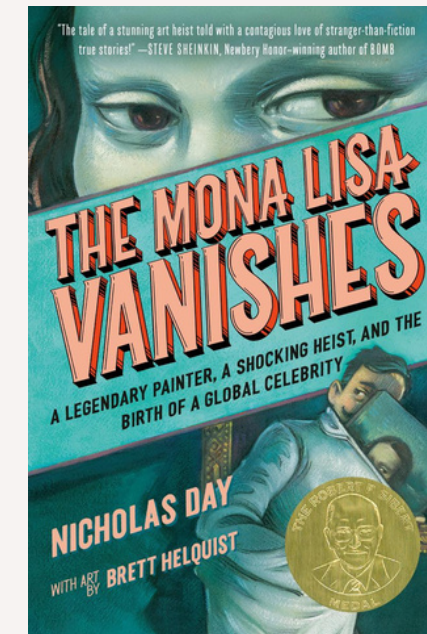
The First State of Being **by Erin Entrada Kelly**

- Themes: Time travel, Poverty, Friendship
- [Teacher's Guide](#)



And Then, Boom! **by Lisa Fipps**

- Themes: Poverty, Social Services, Seeking help
- [Teacher's Guide](#)



The Mona Lisa Vanishes **by Nicholas Day**

- Themes: Narrative Non-Fiction, Historical
- [Teacher's Guide](#)

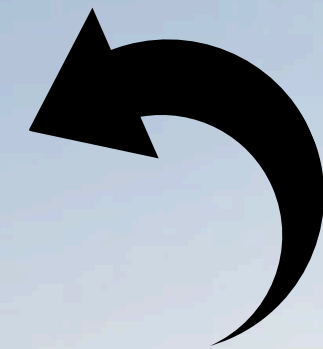
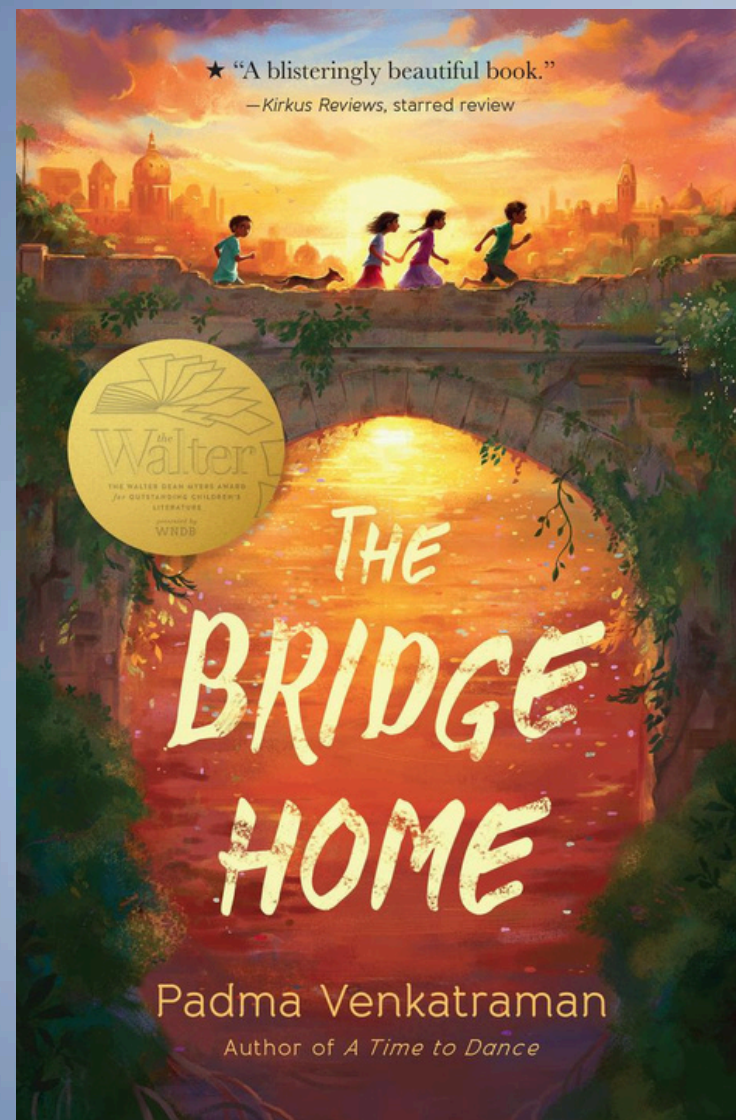


The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise **by Dan Gemeinhart**

- Themes: Bereavement, Cross-country Travel
- [Teacher's Guide](#)

AUTHOR HIGHLIGHT

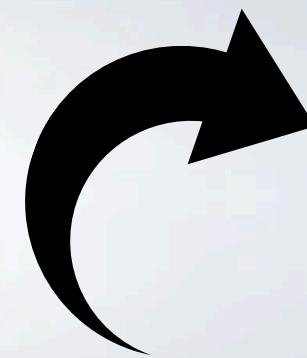
PADMA VENKATRAMAN



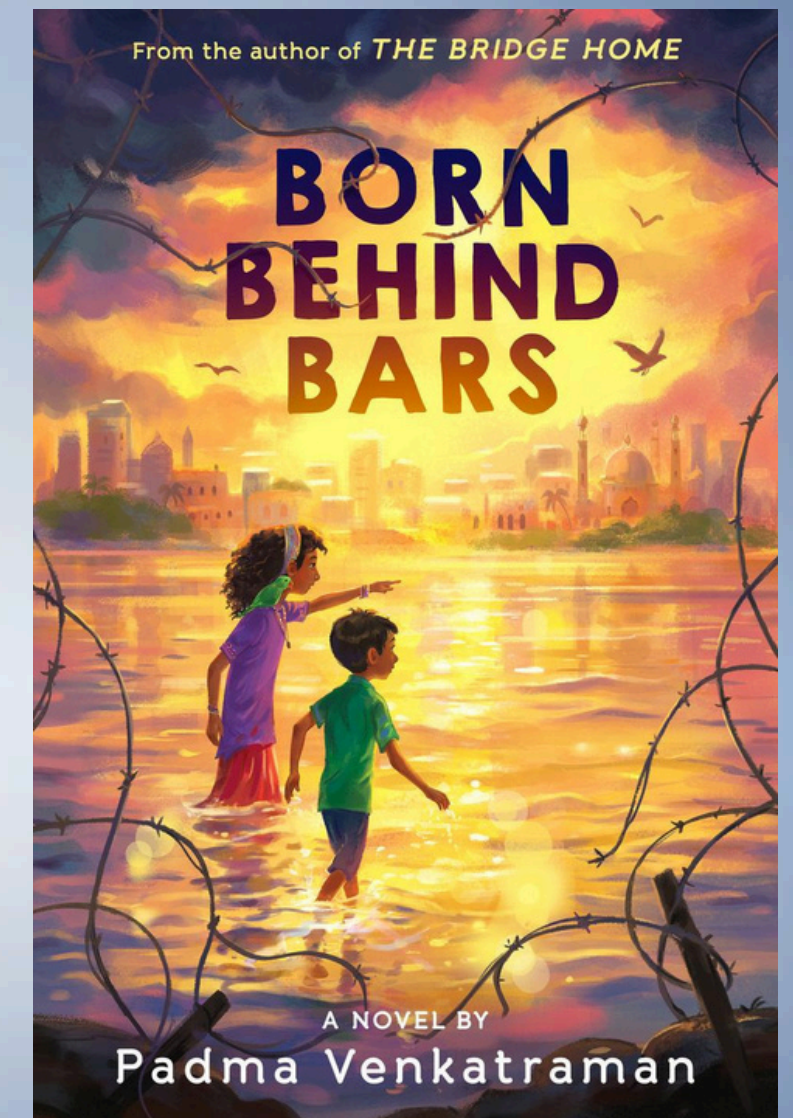
**Who can you trust
when adults prove
untrustworthy?**

- Themes: Poverty, Homelessness, Third World
- Teacher's Guide

Survival Stories
International
Inspirational

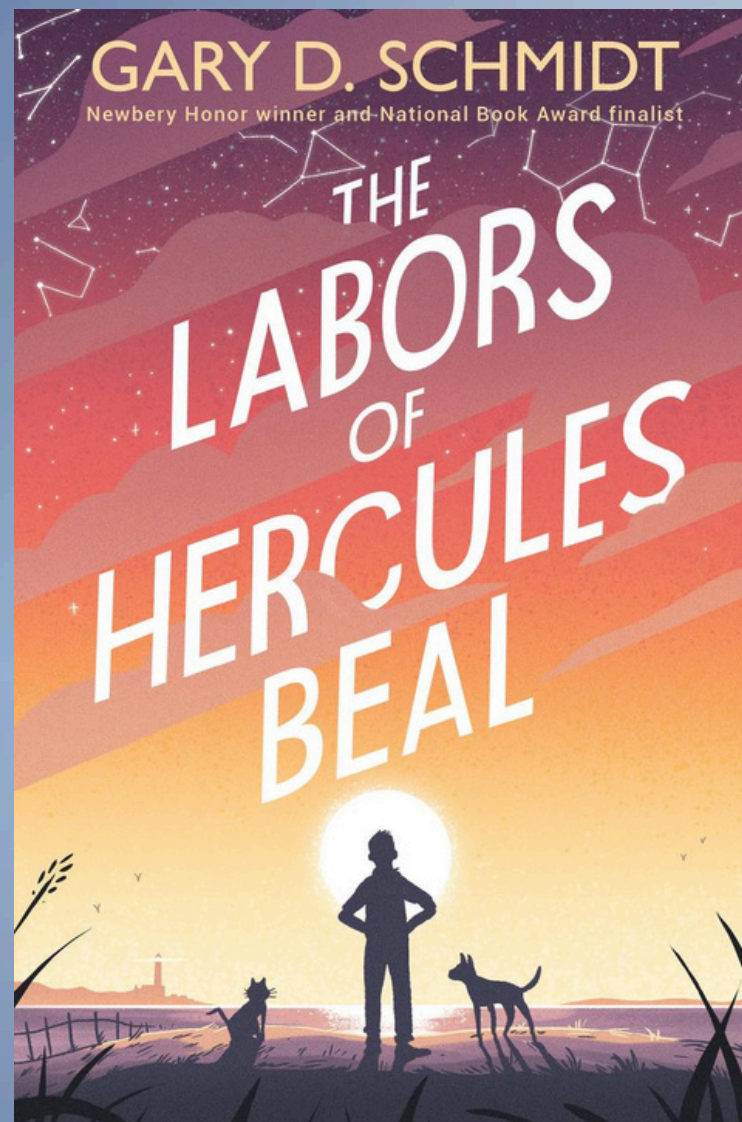


**Should you fight for
what you feel you
deserve?**



AUTHOR HIGHLIGHT

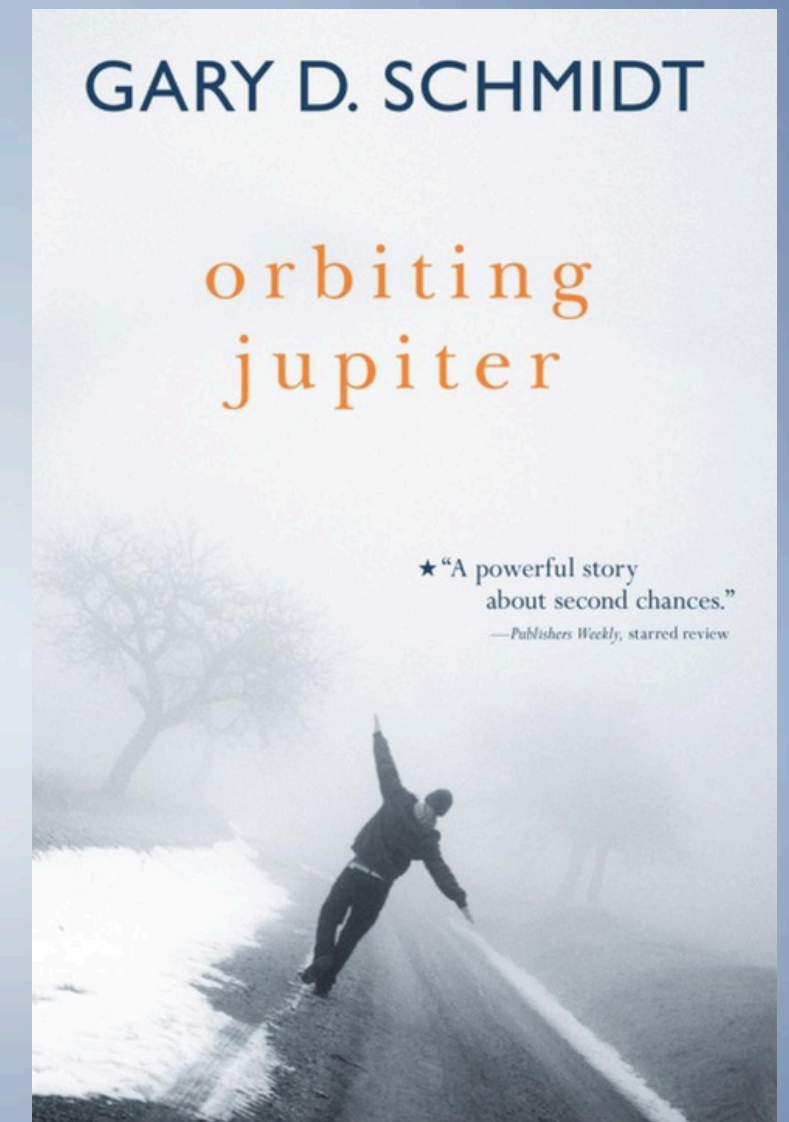
GARY D. SCHMIDT



Can heroes ask for help?

Realistic Stories
Trials of Spirit and Grit
Award-winning Author

What is the true meaning of sacrifice?



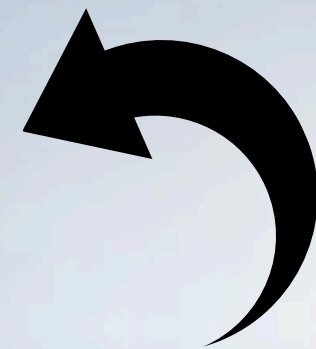
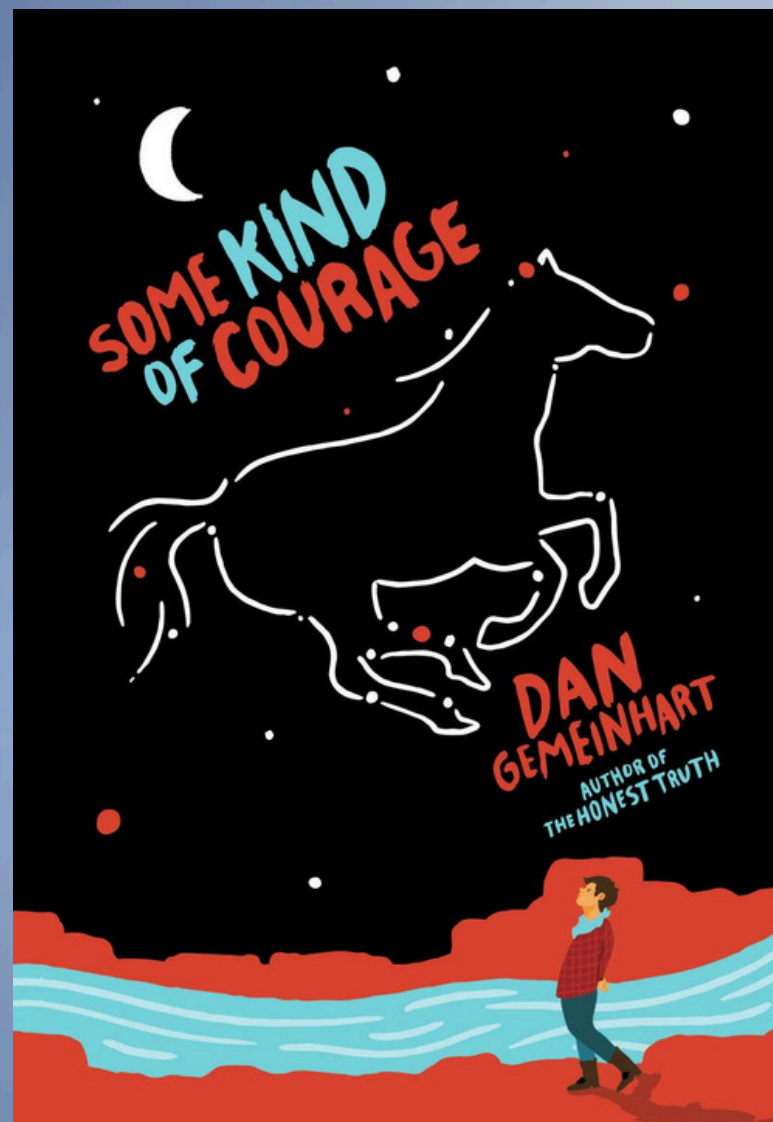
AUTHOR HIGHLIGHT

DAN GEMEINHART

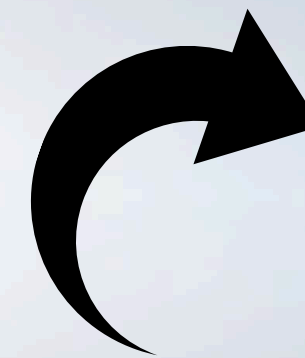
Boy-focused Stories

Relatable

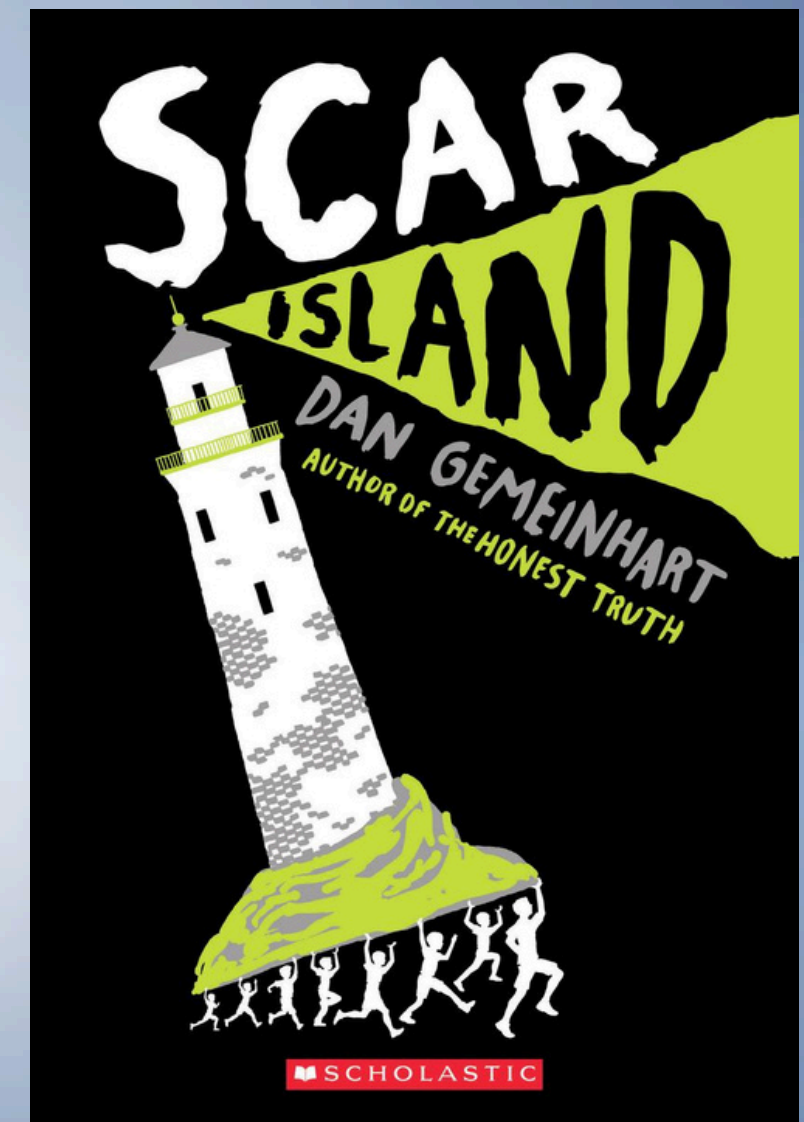
Redemptive



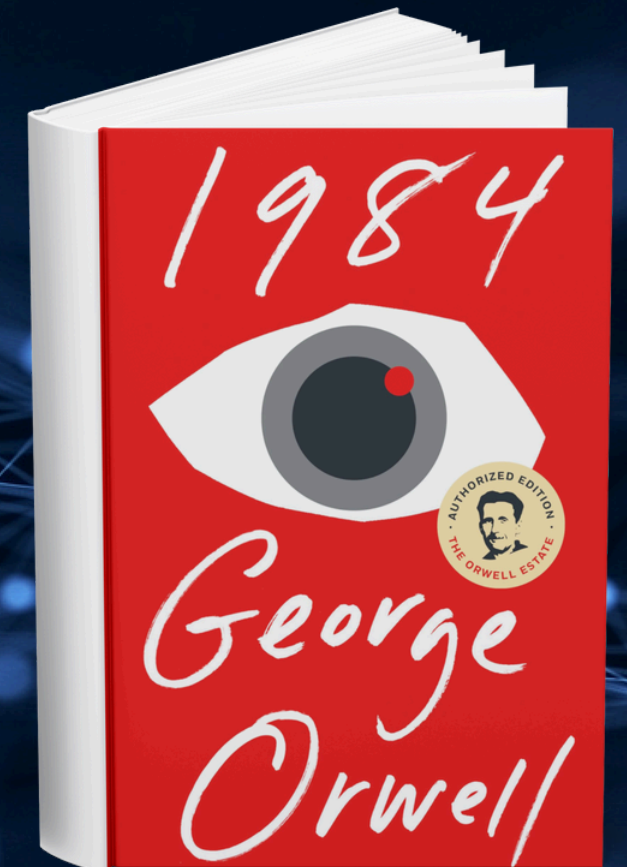
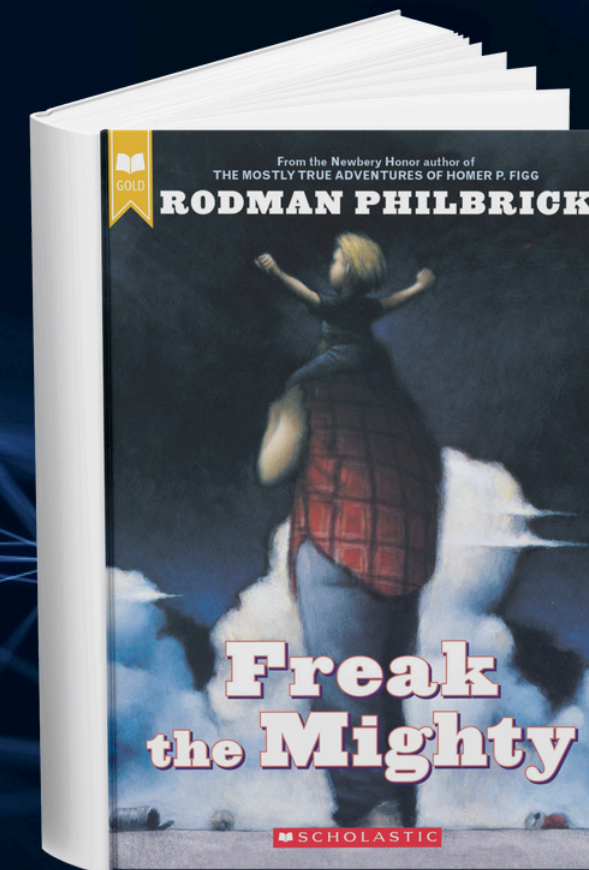
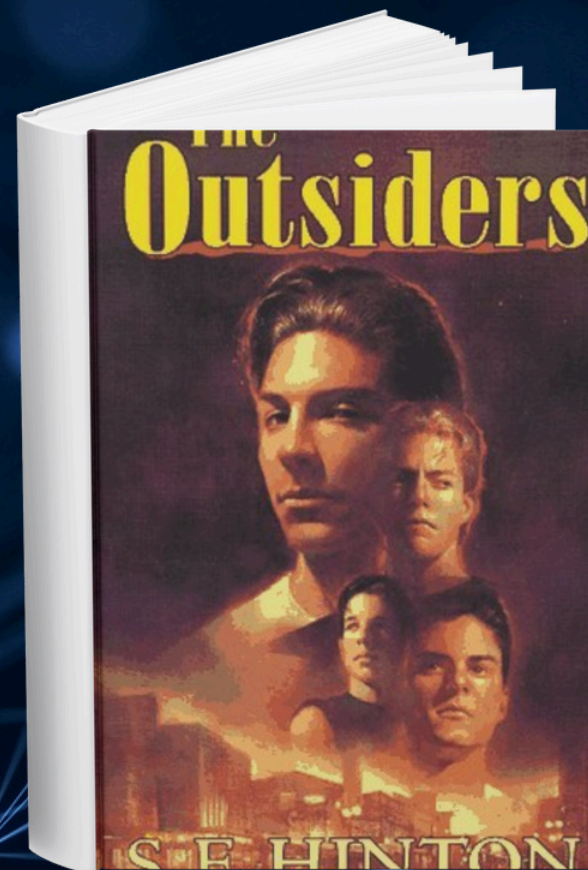
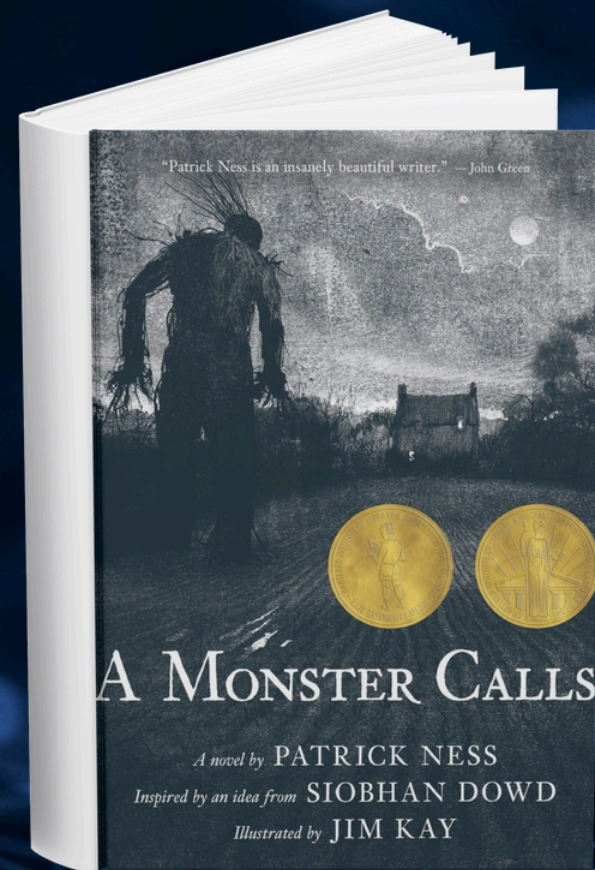
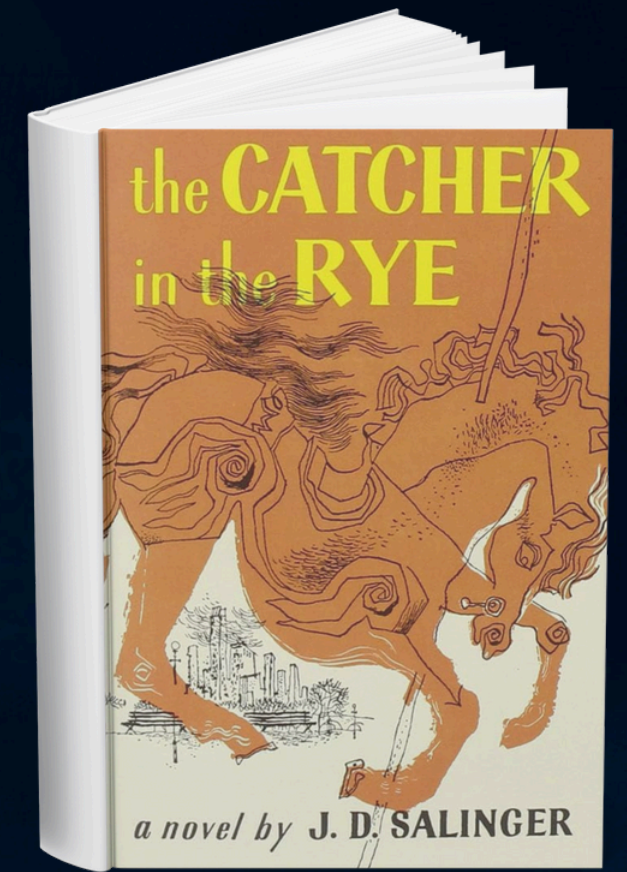
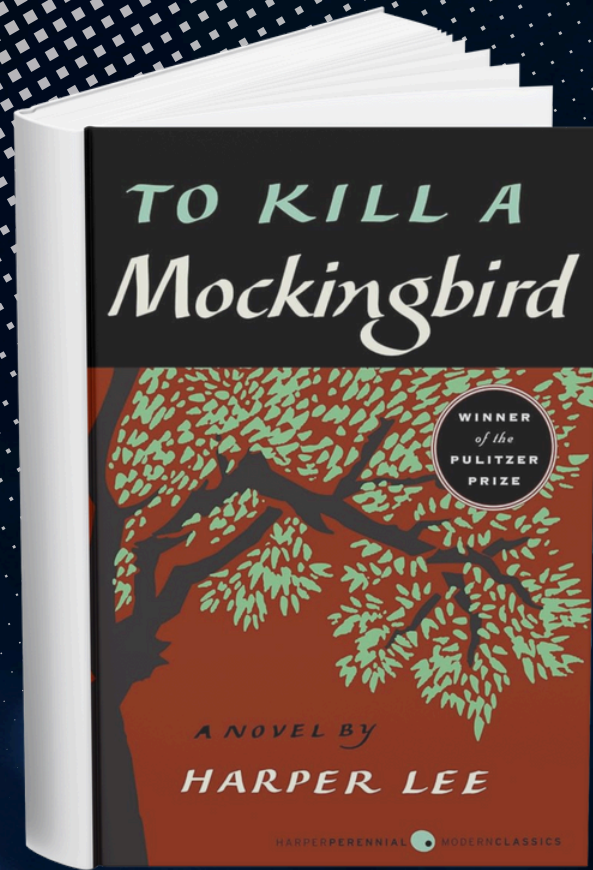
**Can you continue
your journey of
hope no matter
what?**



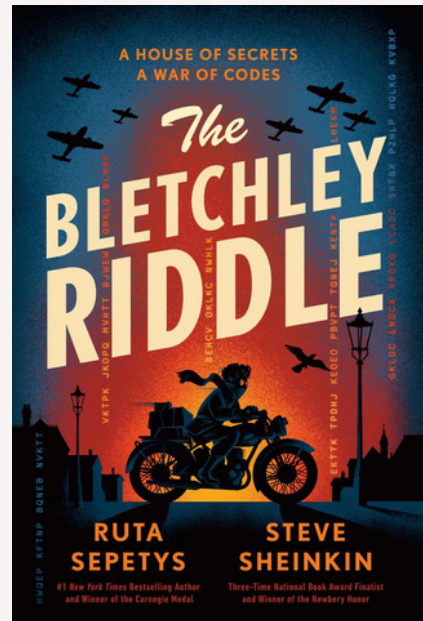
**Can a bad kid turn
good?**



JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL MODERN CLASSICS

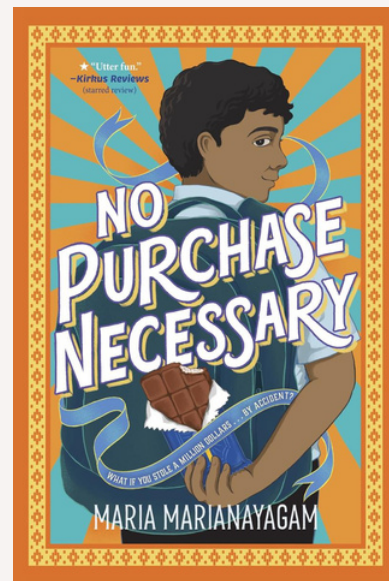


JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL



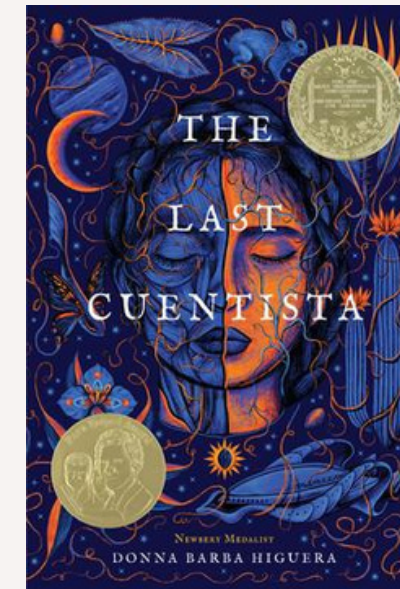
The Bletchley Riddle by Ruta Sepetys & Steve Sheinkin

- Themes: WWII, Codes, Quest, Family
- [Teacher's Guide](#)



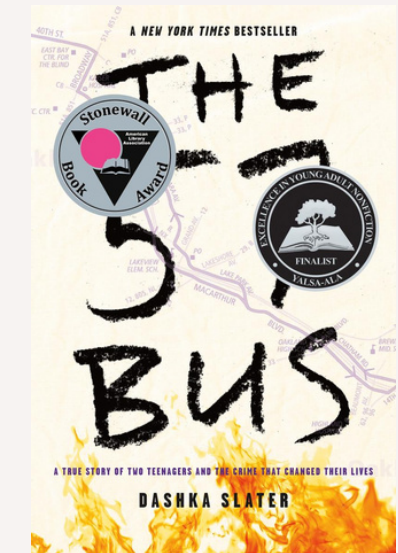
No Purchase Necessary by Maria Marianayagam

- Themes: Immigrant experience, Morality, Friendship
- [Teacher's Guide](#)



The Last Cuentista by Donna Barba Higuera

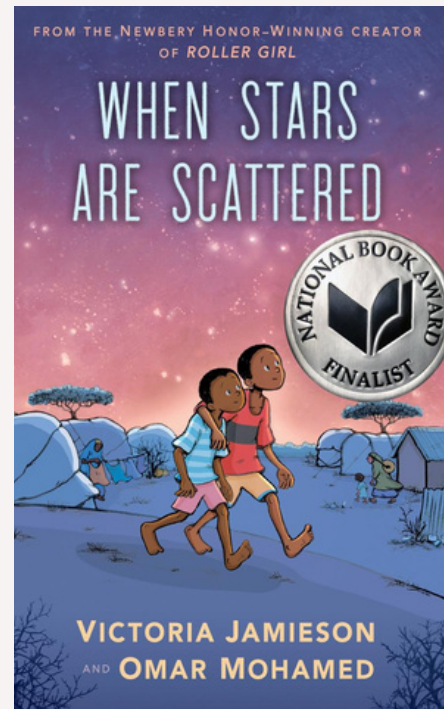
- Themes: Dystopia, Space Travel, Memory
- [Teacher's Guide](#)



The 57 Bus by Dashka Slater

- Themes: LGBTQ+, racism, law
- [Teacher's Guide](#)

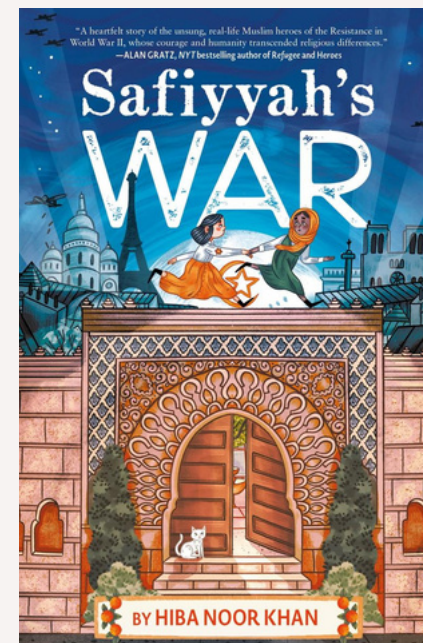
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL



When Stars are Scattered

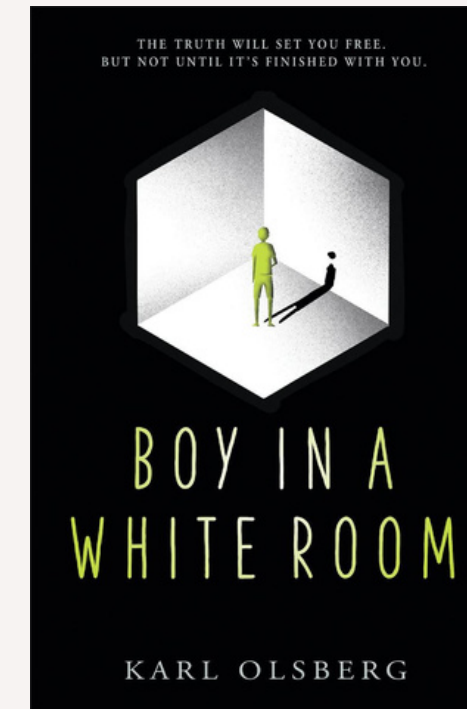
**by Victoria Jamieson
& Omar Mohamed**

- Themes: Graphic, Refugee, First Person
- Teacher's Guide



Safiyyah's War **by Hiba Noor Khan**

- Themes: Based on True Stories, WWII, Muslims and Jews
- Teacher's Guide



Boy in a White Room **by Karl Olsberg**

- Themes: AI, Thriller, Mystery
- Study: "Examining Portrayals of Intelligent Technology in Narrative Media from an Educational Perspective"



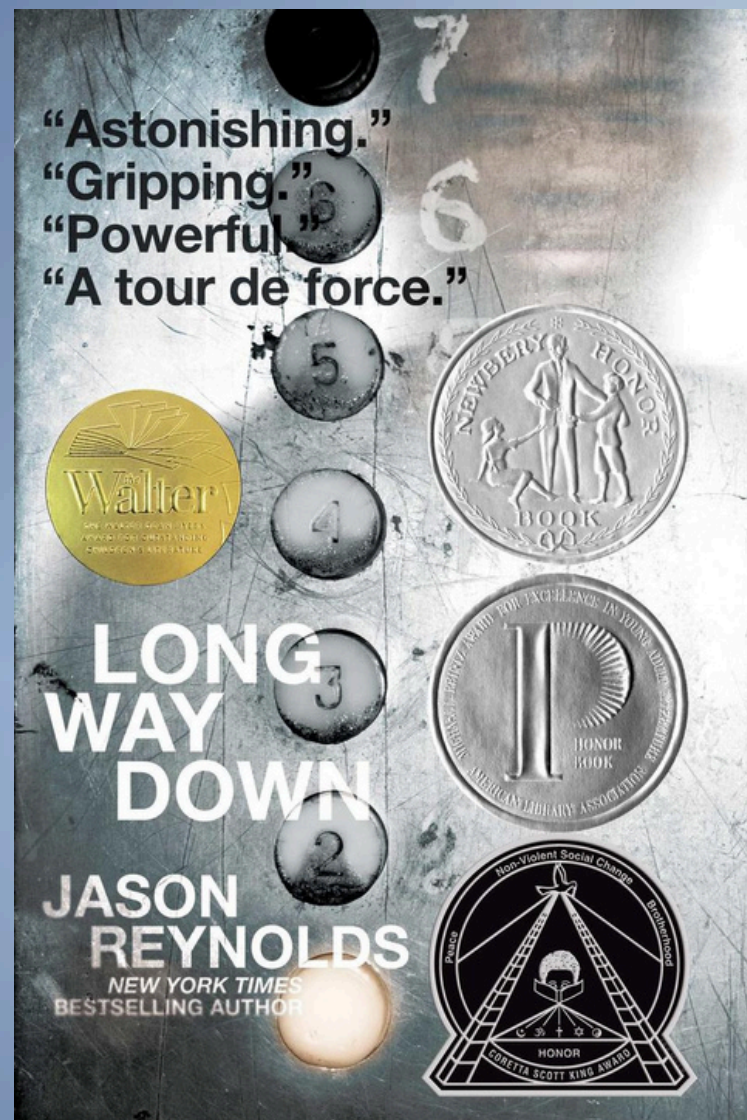
Promise Boys **by Nick Brooks**

- Themes: Justice, Racial Bias, Friendship
- Teacher's Guide

AUTHOR HIGHLIGHT

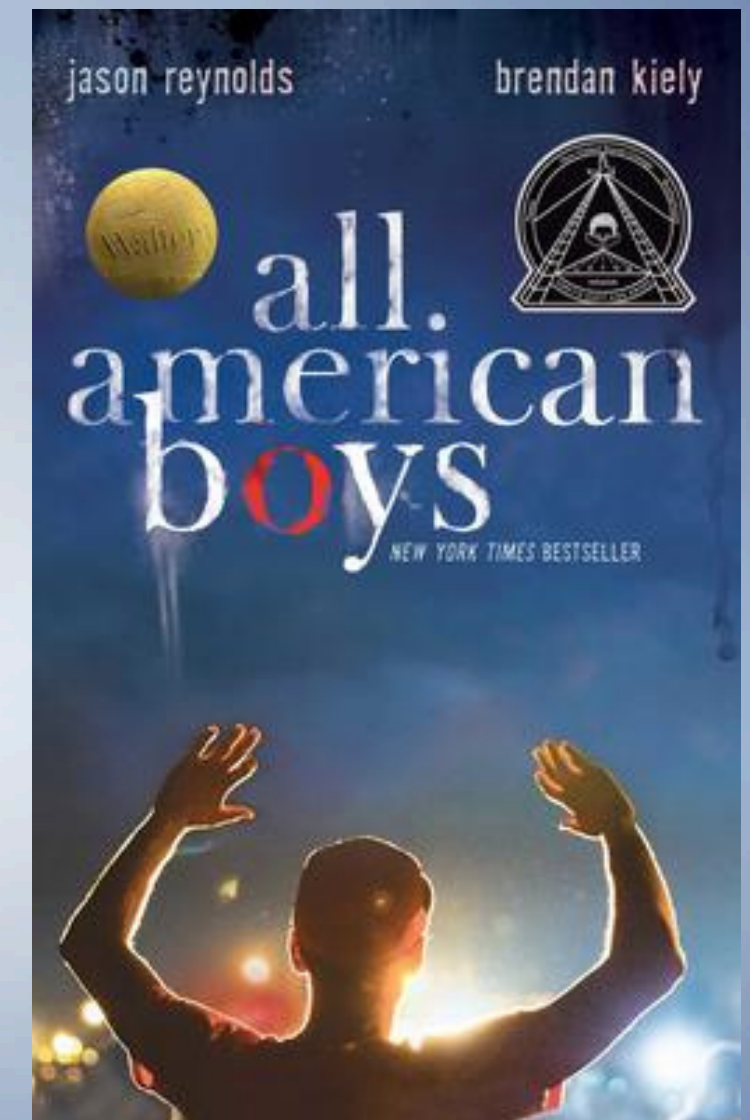
JASON REYNOLDS

Realistic Stories
Violence and Community
Social Dynamics



**Can one elevator
ride change
someone's fate?**

**Why do bad things
happen to good
people?**



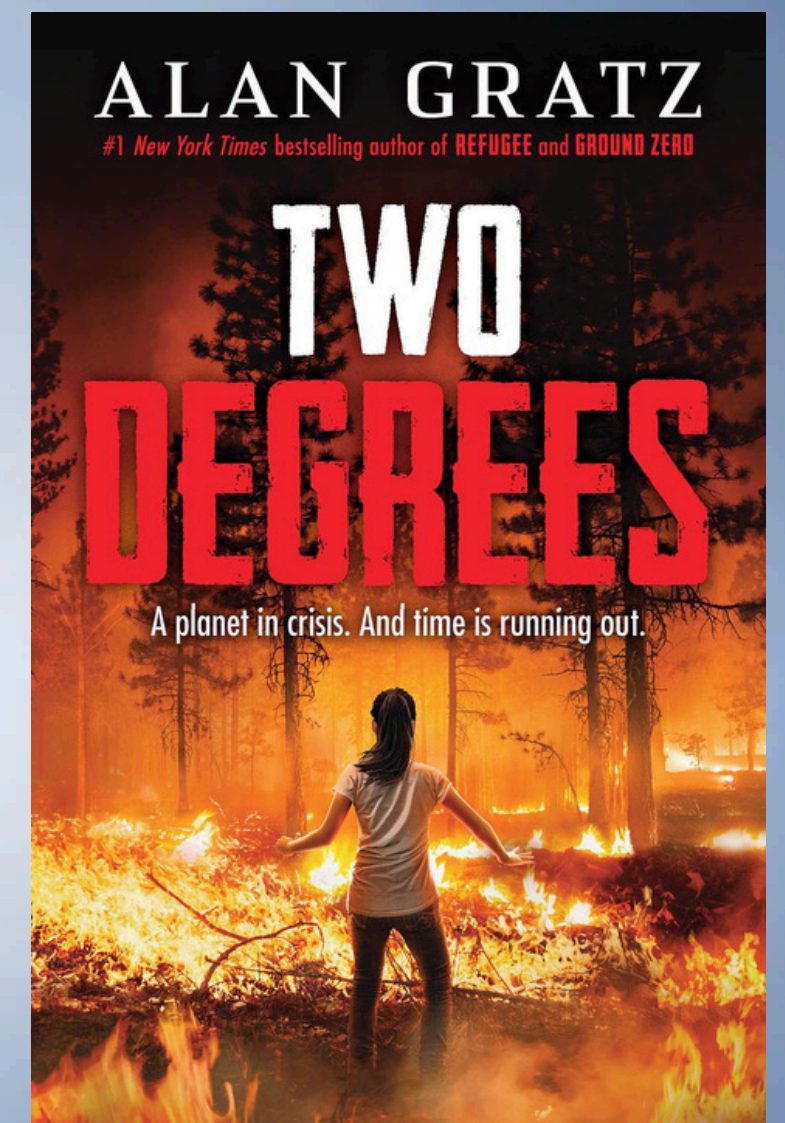
AUTHOR HIGHLIGHT

ALAN GRATZ

Three-stories-in-one
Survival
Action packed



Can three kids in war-torn countries find a new place to call home?

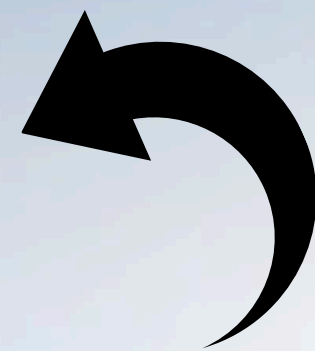
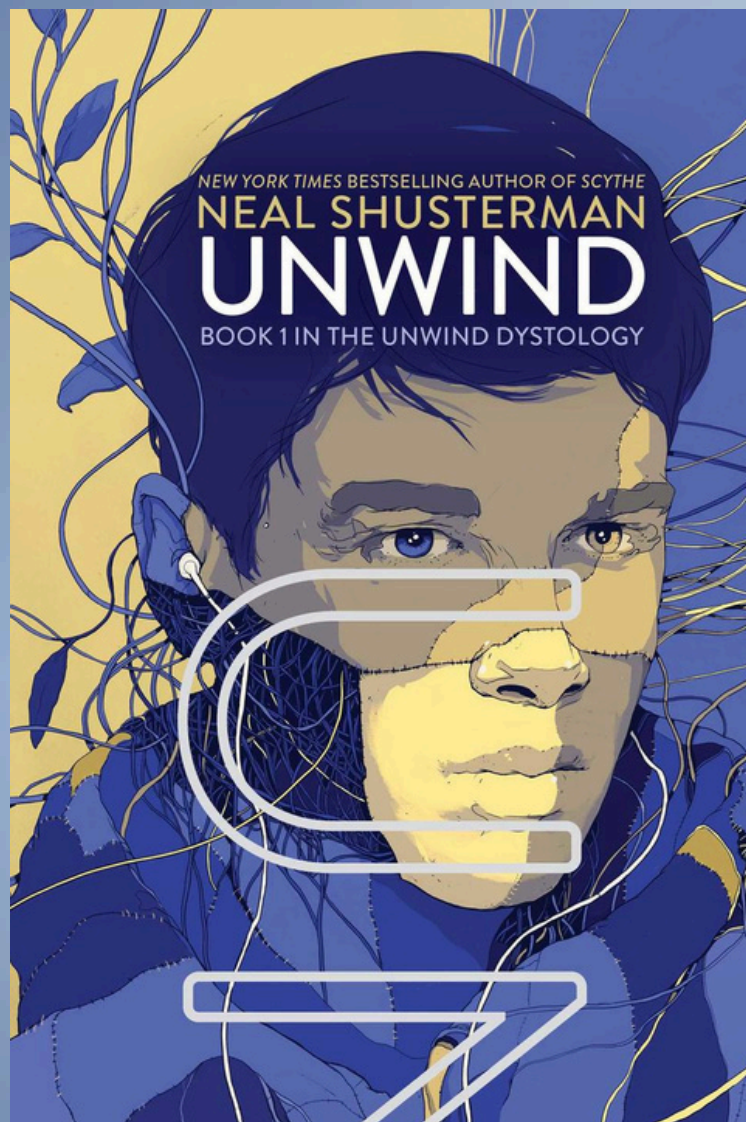


Can three kids make it to safety amid climate disasters?

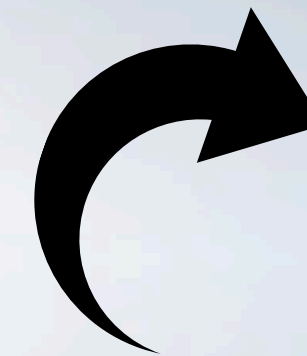
AUTHOR HIGHLIGHT

NEAL SHUSTERMAN

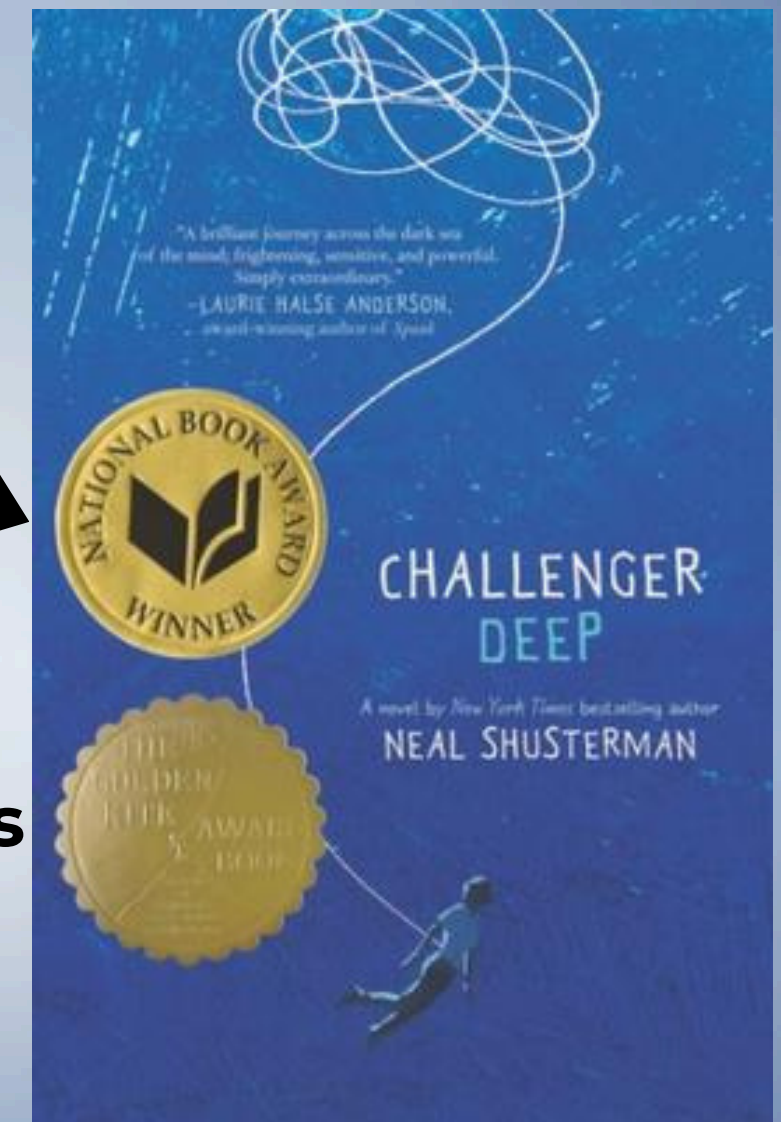
Psychological
Moral Challenges
Science Fiction



**Do society's
leaders know
what's best?**



**Is the world in his
mind the real
world?**



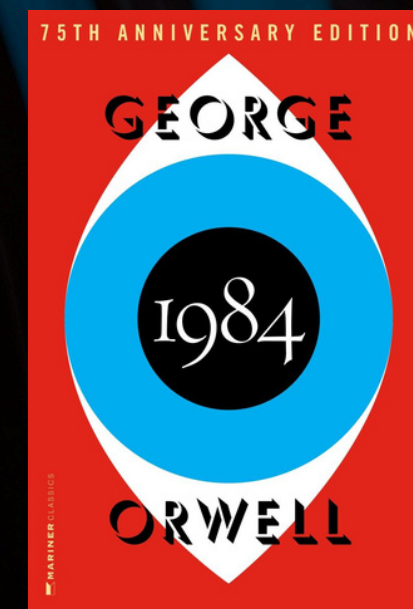
NEW SPIN ON A CLASSIC



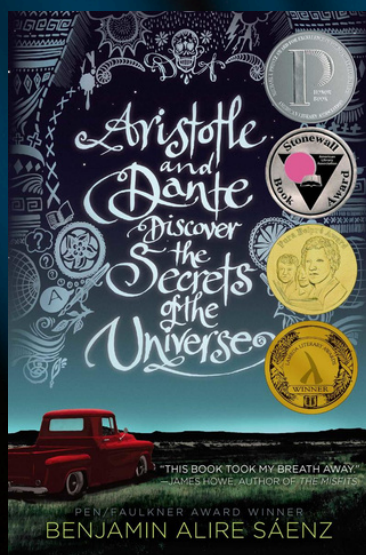
Of Mice and Men
by John Steinbeck



Lord of the Flies
by William Golding



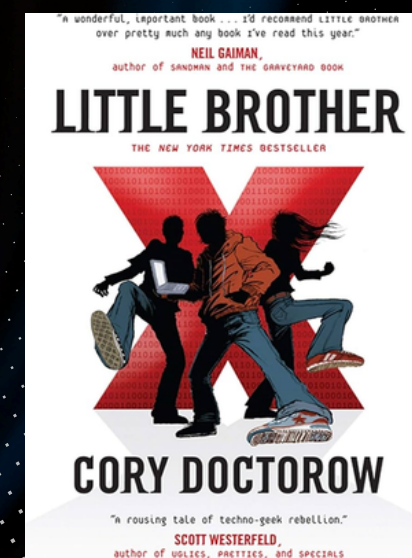
1984
by George Orwell



Aristotle and Dante Discover the
Secrets of the Universe
by Benjamin Alire Sáenz



Grace Year
by Kim Liggett



Little Brother
by Cory Doctorow

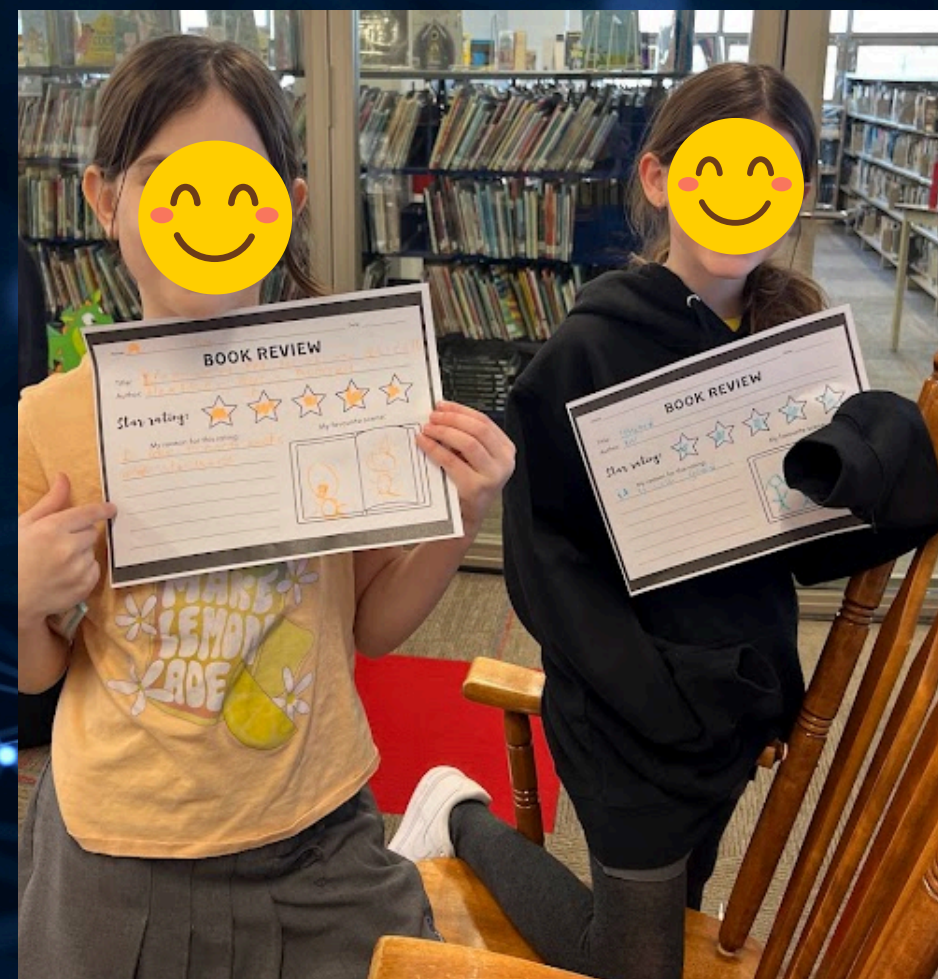
LITERACY ACTIVITIES: BOOK TASTING



- Gather books by genre, author, or theme
- Optional: menu, book reviews, invitations
- Set your table!
- Snacks for a full tasting experience!

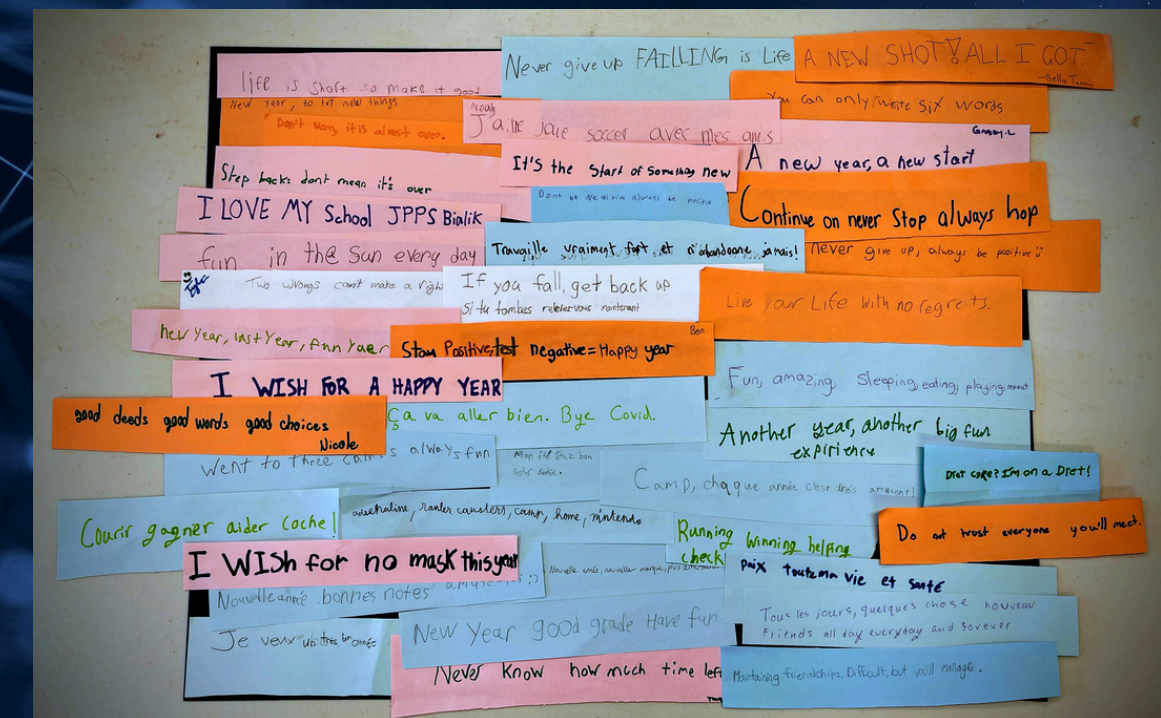
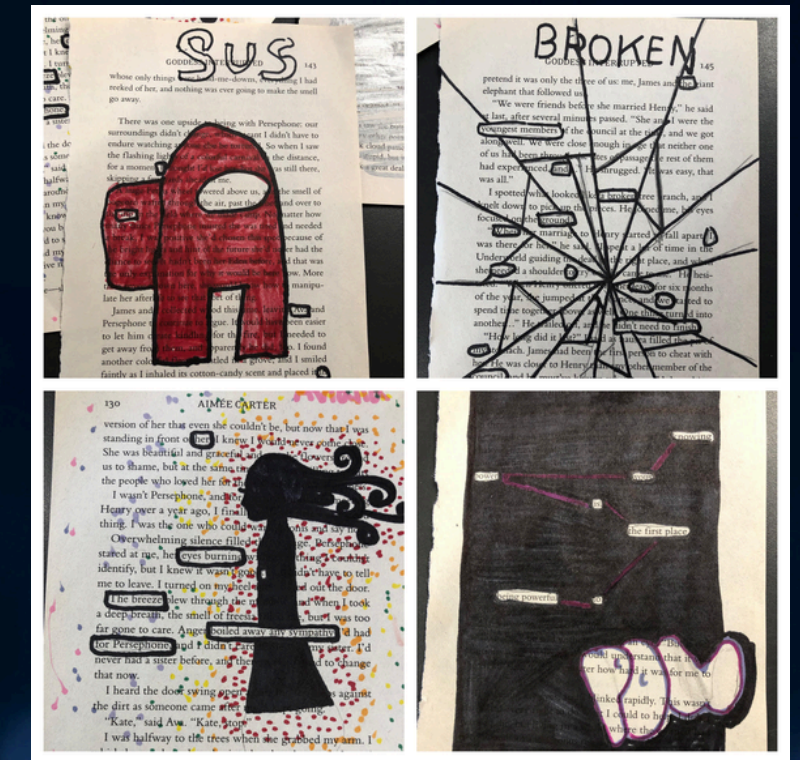


GAMES: MUSICAL CHAIRS & JENGA!

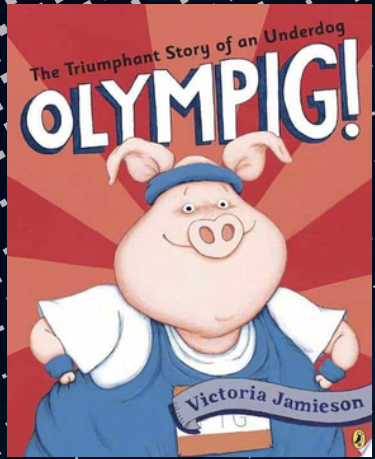


TEXT-BASED ACTIVITIES: BLACKOUT POETRY & 6-WORD MEMOIR

- Pick a book, newspaper, magazine -- anything!
- The students should first make a box around the words they want to keep
- Next, they blackout any words they are not using.
- They can do the last part with simple blackout or create art!
- Prepare some prompts: How would you describe...?
- Six words is all the students can use
- <https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/>



RESEARCH ENHANCEMENTS: POTATO OLYMPICS

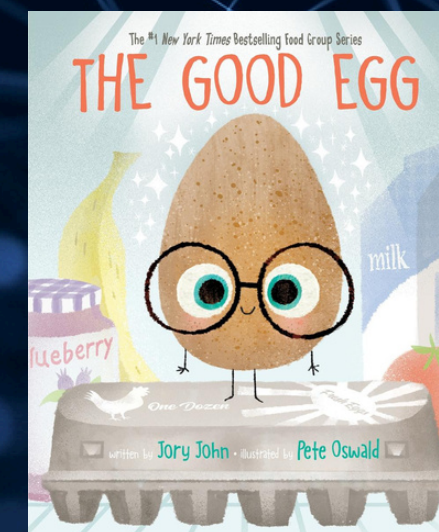
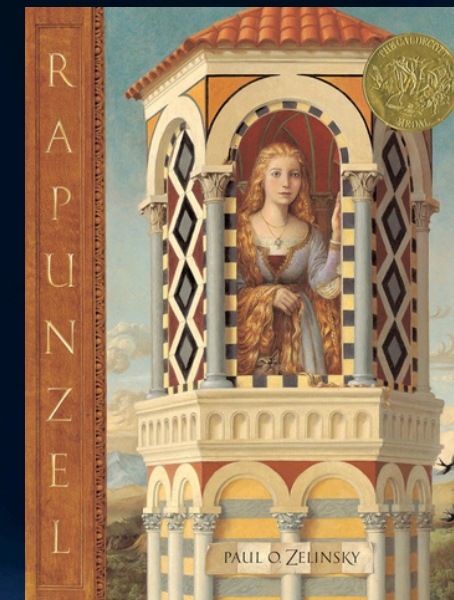


- Students pick a country
- Research the country's flags, population, overview facts (general encyclopedia practice)
- Weigh and measure the potato
- Create: An athlete, motto and skill set
- **COMPETE:** bowling, luge, weightlifting, long jump

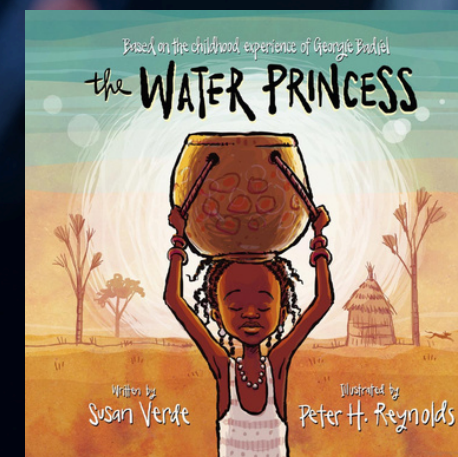
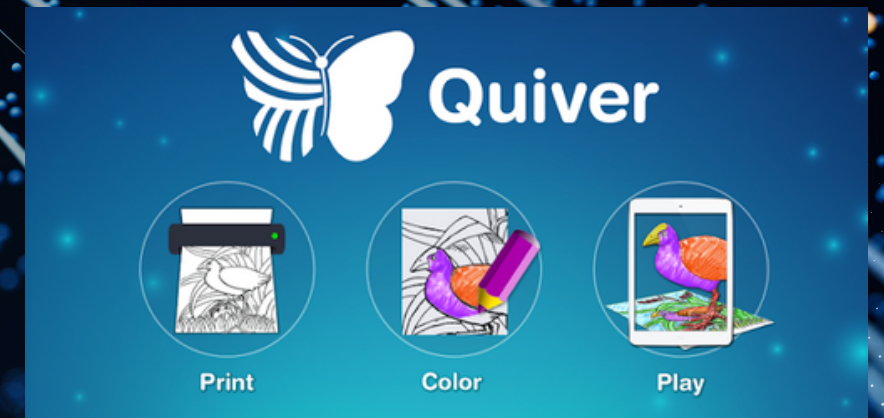
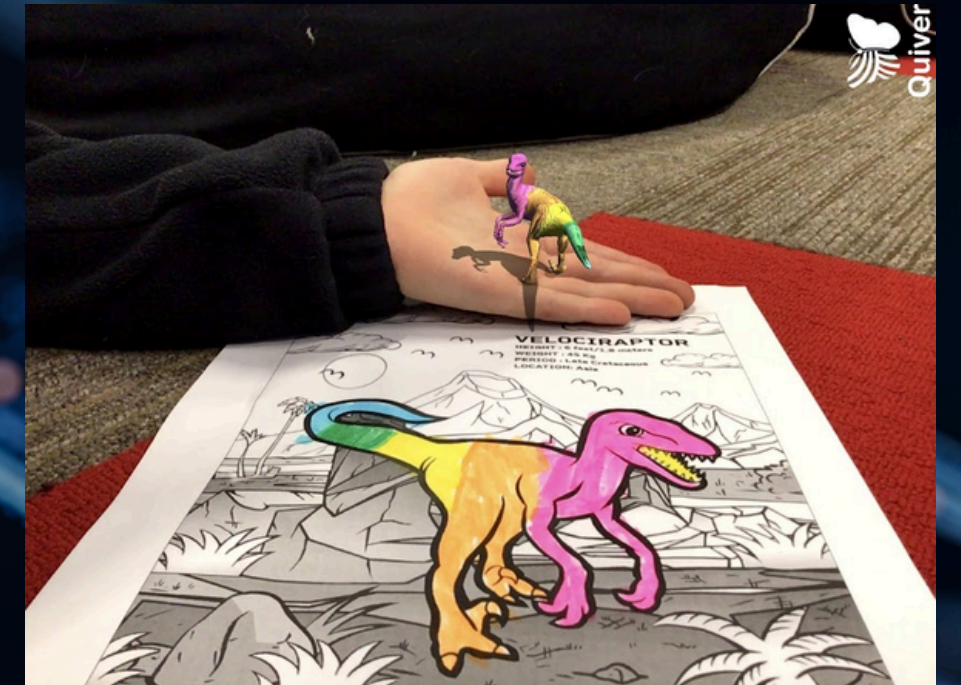


STEM ENHANCEMENTS: FAIRYTALE & EGG DROP CHALLENGES

- Gather crafting supplies, Lego, or Keva planks
- Three Little Pigs - build the strongest house. Try to blow it down with a hair dryer!
- Rapunzel - create a mechanism to bring Rapunzel down
- Cinderella - create the fastest boat to get Cinderella back home before Midnight
- Gather crafting supplies, Lego, or Keva planks
- Build a protection for your egg so that it doesn't break when dropped! (option to hard boil)



TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENTS



ON SOCIAL MEDIA



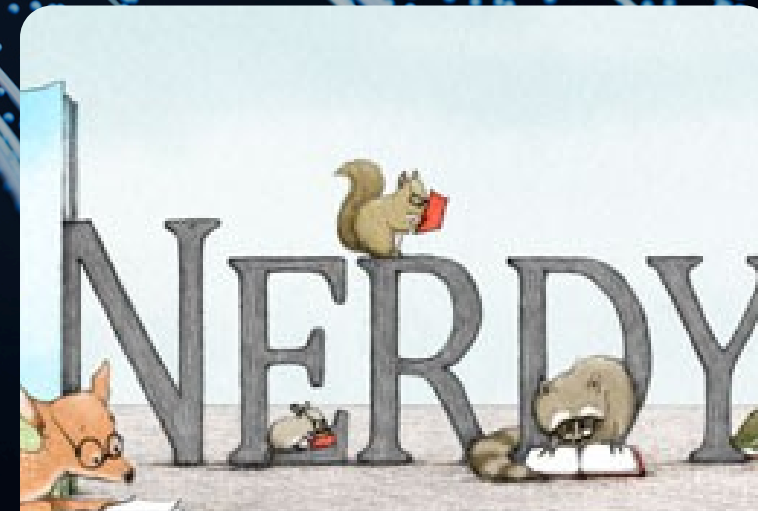
Colby Sharp

- mrcolbysharp.com
- YouTube: @colbysharp
- Insta: colbysharp



Book Wrangler: Mike Rawls

- TPT store: The Book Wrangler
- Insta: thebookwrangler



Nerdy Book Club

- Website: nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/
- X: Nerdybookclub
- FB: Nerdy Book Club



The Book Mommy - Melissa LaSalle

- Website: whattoreadtoyourkids.com
- Insta: thebookmommy
- Linktree: linktr.ee/the.book.mommy

“...children’s literature can be a form of distillation: of what it means to hope, to fear, to yearn, distilled down and down into a piece of concentrated meaning.”

-Katherine Rundell, *London Review of Books*

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