



Booktalks

2009-2010 Peach Award Nominees

Bad Monkeys by Matt Ruff

Jane Charlotte has just landed in the “nut wing” of the Las Vegas County Jail after being apprehended on murder charges. A psychiatrist is interviewing her because of some strange statements she has made. Jane Charlotte claims to be working for a top-secret organization in The Department for the Final Disposition of Irredeemable Persons, AKA Bad Monkeys. It is Jane Charlotte’s job to hunt down society’s worst offenders and to do them in with her NC gun, which makes everyone think they’ve died of Natural Causes. But as Jane Charlotte’s tale unravels, we wonder if any of it is real at all. Maybe she’s in the psych ward for a reason. Or maybe not.... With more conspiracy theories than the Zapruder film and more twists than Lombard Street, this book will be a hit with fans of spy novels and so-called “Huh? TV” (Lost, X-Files, Alias, etc.), and it will leave you saying, “Wha...?”

Blood Brothers by S.A. Harazin

17 year-old Clay Gardner had a long tough day at work as a med tech in the local hospital. Before his shift he got into a fight with his best friend Joey over a girl. Working with a lot on your mind is not an easy task but Clay is responsible and conscientious always going above and beyond his duties. He has dreams, big dreams of becoming a doctor one day. A recent graduate, Clay is thinking his future is bleak since he doesn’t have the grades or the money to go to a big name school like Duke where his friend Joey is going in the fall. Right before he is to get off work, a young girl is rushed into the ER and later dies from her injuries. Seeing the girl die, makes Clay realize that he has to make things right with Joey. Unfortunately that won’t be happening anytime too soon. When he finds Joey, Joey is crazed, hopped up on something which forces Clay to not only call 911 but defend himself, fight off bodily harm. What did Joey take? This couldn’t be just extreme drunkenness, could it? No, we learn, it is not. Joey has taken the deadly drug PCP. How in the world could this have happened everyone wants to know. Sometimes though answers are hard to find – especially when few are talking. Joey is no help as he is fighting for his life in the hospital and eventually lapses into a coma. And this is where the mystery begins. Suspicion drops a net over everyone, Clay included since he was the last one to see Joey, technically. Understandably Clay is distraught, after all his best friend, a guy who is close as blood is on death’s door and not only can he not make it right with him but he has no idea what happened. The more you delve into the book the more insight you gain into Clay’s psyche. Clay is so likable (if only more teenage boys were like him) so I found myself aching for Clay – hoping things would eventually turn out okay but here is the thing: life doesn’t always have happy endings and it is not sunny and rosy for everybody. There are times that you just have to roll with the punches.

City of Bones by Cassandra Clare

When fifteen-year-old Clary Fray heads out to the Pandemonium Club in New York City, she hardly expects to witness a murder—much less a murder committed by three teenagers covered with strange tattoos and brandishing bizarre weapons. Clary knows she should call the police, but it’s hard to explain a murder when the body disappears into thin air and the murderers are invisible to everyone but Clary. Equally startled by her ability to see them, the murderers explain themselves as Shadowhunters: a secret tribe of

warriors dedicated to ridding the earth of demons. Within twenty-four hours, Clary's mother disappears and Clary herself is almost killed by a grotesque demon. But why would demons be interested in ordinary mundanes like Clary and her mother? And how did Clary suddenly get the Sight? The Shadowhunters would like to know...

Created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author. Visit her website to find hundreds of guides to children's and YA lit. From: <http://www.cassandraclare.com/cms/teachers-librarians/discussion-guide>

Deadline by Chris Crutcher

During a routine sports physical just before his senior year, Ben Wolf finds out he has one year to live. He swears the doctor to secrecy, refuses treatment, doesn't tell anyone about his diagnosis, and decides to do everything he always wanted to do including playing football, pursuing his long-time crush, and petitioning to have the main street in his small town named after Malcolm X, all the while conversing through dreams with a spiritual guide known as "Hey-Soos." ([Florida Teen Read, 2009](#))

What would you do if you knew you only had one year to live? Different people would have very different answers to that question. Ben is a high school senior when he finds out he has an incurable form of leukemia. He decides that rather than waiting to die, he wants to live life to the hilt! He makes the decision to keep his illness a secret from family and friends, and skips traditional medical treatments that could have debilitating side effects. Ben can do that because he's over the legal age of 18. The plan is to live out his senior year as "normally" as possible. He wants to go all out and cram a whole lifetime into one year, and he does! Ben tries out for football, despite the fact that he weighs less than a hundred and thirty pounds; he befriends the town drunk; and he finally gets up the courage to ask out the girl of his dreams. This is a quick read with a blend of football action, love scenes and true-life drama. ([Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Awards Program, 2009-2010](#))

The Booktalks are from Nancy Keane's *Booktalks—Quick and Simple* website, http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/crutcher_deadline.htm

Generation Dead by Daniel Waters

Phoebe is just your typical goth girl with a crush. He's strong and silent...and dead.

All over the country, a strange phenomenon is happening. Some teenagers who die aren't staying dead. They are coming back to life, but they are no longer the same—they stutter, and their reactions to everything are slower. Termed "living impaired" or "differently biotic," they are doing their best to fit into a society that doesn't want them.

Fitting in is hard enough when you don't have the look or attitude, but when almost everyone else is alive and *you're not*, it's close to impossible. The kids at Oakvale High don't want to take classes or eat in the cafeteria next to someone who isn't breathing. And there are no laws that exist to protect the differently biotic from the people who want them to disappear—for good.

With her pale skin and Goth wardrobe, Phoebe has never run with the popular crowd. But no one can believe it when she falls for Tommy Williams, the leader of the dead kids. Not her best friend, Margi, whose fear of the differently biotic is deeply rooted in guilt over the past. And especially not her neighbor, Adam, the star of the football team. Adam has just realized his feelings for Phoebe run much deeper than just friendship. He would do anything for her, but what if protecting Tommy is the one thing that would make her happy?

From <http://www.amazon.com/Generation-Dead-Daniel-Waters/dp/142310921X>

Getting the Girl by Susan Juby

Sunglasses. "Check."

Binoculars. "Check."

Notepad. "Check."

Mom's pink bike. "Check. Check?"

Meet Sherman Mack. Short. Nerdy. Amateur P.I. and prepared to do anything for Dini Trioli.

Nobody knows who began it or when it became a tradition, but every girl at Harewood Tech fears being D-listed, a ritual that wipes her off the social map forever. When Sherman believes Dini is in danger of being D-listed, he snatches up his surveillance gear and launches a full-scale investigation to uncover who is responsible.

Could it be the captain of the lacrosse team? The hottest girls in school, the Trophy Wives? Or maybe their boyfriends?

One thing is for sure: Sherman Mack is on the case. And he's not giving up.

Part comedy, part mystery, and with all of Juby's trademark tongue-in-cheek humor, "Getting the Girl" takes on one of the cruelest aspects of high school: how easy it is for an entire school to turn on someone, and how hard it can be to be the only one willing to fight back.

From the HarperCollins website, http://harpercollins.com/books/9780060765255/Getting_the_Girl/index.aspx

Graceling by Kristin Cashore

Those who are Graced in the Seven Kingdoms have eyes of two different colors and a talent so extreme that none can best them. Katsa, niece to King Randa, revealed at the age of eight her special skill in killing, and she has been forced to administer justice and fear in her uncle's name all the years since. Her disgust at the violence and wrongs in the land lead her to start a secret council to do good. In the course of releasing a kidnapped man, she comes across Po, youngest prince of one of the Seven Kingdoms, and a Graced fighter, who can come closer to besting her than any other man. When the two head out to learn the truth of who is behind the kidnapping, Katsa learns more about both their Graces and allows Po within the defenses of her heart.

Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

The Hunger Games-ritual, punishment, death. Only one can survive.

It's the day of the Reaping, an annual ritual, an annual punishment, an annual reminder that rebelling against the Capitol is futile. This afternoon all the residents of Panem will gather in the town square of each of its twelve districts to watch the drawing. The names of all the children in every district between the ages of 12 and 18 have been put into large bowls filled with slips of paper. One boy's name will be drawn, and one girl's. They will represent their district in the Hunger Games. All twenty-four will be trained for a week, then herded into an arena, where they will be forced to fight to the death, as the entire population watches on live television. The winner is the last person left alive.

Katness is from District 12, the smallest and the most distant from the Capitol. She's 16, and the sole support of her mother and younger sister. She hunts for food to feed them, and to barter at the market for soap, or salt, or clothing. That afternoon, she doesn't hear her own name called, but her little sister's! Prim is only 12, this is her first Hunger Games, and as gentle and fragile as she is, she won't live long. She wouldn't fight even if she knew how. Kitness immediately fights her way through the crowd, and volunteers to take Prim's place. She would be a part of this year's Hunger Games.

The boy's name is drawn, and Peeta, the baker's son, walks toward the stage, his face emotionless, stunned. He doesn't look like he's ever missed a meal, muscular and strong. Everyone in the town likes him, even Kitness. He helped her once, long ago, when she was alone and desperate. She's never forgotten, and from the looks he's giving her, he hasn't forgotten either.

In another world, they might have been friends, or more. But in this world, they have to be enemies, prepared to kill each other. In the Hunger Games, there is only one winner.

This booktalk was written by university professor, librarian, and booktalking expert Joni Richards Bodart.
www.scholastic.com

Impossible by Nancy Werlin

Lucy Scarborough is seventeen when she discovers that the women of her family have been cursed through the generations, forced to attempt three seemingly impossible tasks or fall into madness upon their child's birth. Unless she can complete these tasks, Lucy will go mad, just like her mother and all the Scarborough women before her. But Lucy is the first girl who won't be alone as she tackles the list. She has her fiercely protective foster parents and her childhood friend Zach beside her. As they struggle to make sense of the puzzle in the ballad and play by the dangerously important rules, time is slipping away and Lucy's fate hangs in the balance. Inspired by the ballad "Scarborough Fair," this riveting novel combines suspense, fantasy, and romance.

Taken from the *Impossible Book Discussion Guide* at <http://www.nancywerlin.com/guides.htm> by the author and Dr. Joni Bodart

Lessons from a Dead Girl by Jo Knowles

In an author's note, debut novelist Jo Knowles writes that she was prompted to write *LESSONS FROM A DEAD GIRL* after reading an article about children who abuse other children. "I began to wonder what makes childhood friendships so complex, so painful at times, and yet so binding," she writes. In her first novel, Knowles does a credible job of exploring friendships, particularly those of girls, in all their complexity and depth. In particular, she uncovers the secrecies, painful betrayals and confusing contradictions that mark so many intense childhood friendships.

This exploration of a dysfunctional friendship is the most compelling aspect of *LESSONS FROM A DEAD GIRL*. Elements of suspense — such as delaying the revelations of abuse that most readers will already have figured out long before — are not integrated as successfully. The narrative also loses focus somewhat during Laine's high school years, as she pursues partying and complex new relationships in equal measure. But even these sections help underscore Knowles's overall lesson — that the relationships we develop in childhood, for good or for ill, shape how we relate to others, potentially for the rest of our lives. — *Reviewed by Norah Piehl*

Little Brother by Corey Doctorow

It was just supposed to be a harmless afternoon of skipping school. Techno-geek Marcus bypasses the school security to escape with his friends to spend the afternoon playing games. But they certainly couldn't have known that a terrorist attack on San Francisco would change their lives forever. Picked up by the Department of Homeland Security, Marcus is held in an undisclosed location for 6 days and faces intense interrogation. When he is finally released, he is warned not to tell anyone where he has been. San Francisco is now little more than a police state and the DHS is controlling everything. Just how much of their privacy will the population give up to feel secure? Is there anyway that a group of teens can bring down the government? Should they even try?

From Nancy Keane's *Booktalks – Quick and Simple*, and are available from http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/doctorow_little.htm

My Most Excellent Year by Steve Kluger

Dear Anthony:

I appreciate your recent interest, but I'm not accepting applications at this time. Your letter will be kept in our files and someone will get back to you if there is an opening. Thank you for thinking of me.

Respectfully,
Alejandra Perez

P.S. It's not "Allie." It's "Ale."

Meet T.C., who is valiantly attempting to get Alejandra to fall in love with him; Alejandra, who is playing hard to get and is busy trying to sashay out from under the responsibilities of being a diplomat's daughter; and T.C.'s brother Augie, who is gay and in love and everyone knows it but him.

From the Penguin.com website

http://us.penguin.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780803732278,00.html?My_Most_Excellent_Year_Steve_Kluger

Oh.My.Gods. by Tera Lynn Childs

Perfectly happy in California with her friends, looking forward to attending USC on a track scholarship the following year, Phoebe Castro does not react well to her newly-married mother's news that they will be moving to Greece. After arriving on the secret island of Serfopoula, Phoebe's stepfather Damian explains to her that the inhabitants are all descendants of Greek gods and goddesses. Believing both Damian and her mother to be delusional at first, Phoebe comes to realize that they are telling her the truth. Having to contend with disdain from many of the other students due to her lack of super-powers or abilities, Phoebe takes refuge in running, as she always has. While seeking to find a way to at least find her new home tolerable, Phoebe makes some new friends and learns a lot about herself in the process.

Ophelia by Lisa Klein

This book blew me away. It is the re-imagining of the story of Ophelia, from Shakespeare's play [Hamlet \(Folger Shakespeare Library\)](#). In the play, Ophelia is in love with Hamlet and ends up committing suicide because of his treatment of her and because he killed her father. Her character is a woman who is ruled by the thoughts and deeds of men. It is their deeds and rules that affect her and bring about her demise. In this story, Ophelia is a very strong character and we see the story of Hamlet through her eyes. She is the daughter of Polonius, a foolish man who courts favor of those in power. She is motherless and her only other family is her brother, Laertes. Her childhood, though, is very happy because she is a tomboy and is free to learn beside her brother. She has a lot of freedom, which is rarely given to girls at this time. Her father is given a job in the court of the King of Denmark, and she has to leave this idyllic time and enter into a drafty, gloomy place. In fact, it is described as a prison and a place of intrigue and sadness. Within a few years she is brought to the attention of Queen Gertrude and is made into a lady of the court. She also attracts the attention of Prince Hamlet. She and the Prince fall in love and are secretly married. The King's ghost appears on the night of their marriage, and Hamlet is obsessed with revenge. Ophelia has to sail through court politics to secure her place and her sanity.

From TeensReadToo.com via www.amazon.com

Spud by John Van de Ruit

It's 1990 in South Africa, and a pivotal year for both the nation and John "Spud" Milton. Nelson Mandela is to be freed, and (at the age of 13) Spud is starting his first year as a scholarship student at an elite boarding school in Durban. From the outset, Van de Ruit is determined to make both histories equally momentous. Throughout this year Spud will have to learn about love and loyalty, nurture a social conscience, and deal with death. It's the well-trodden route of many "rites-of-passage" stories. Spud, however, has to do all of this and share a dormitory with the "Crazy Eight". Rambo, Gecko, Rainman, Mad Dog et al are a frighteningly unhinged bunch to have to live with. Perhaps fortunately for Spud, he's come from a home-life and parents no less bizarre. It's one of the wonders of Van de Ruit's writing that no matter how outlandish these characters, we still believe in them, root for them, and fall for them.

From *The Guardian*, Saturday 31 May 2008

Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay Asher

His first love records her last words. What if the girl that you loved committed suicide? What if you found out that you were one of the reasons why? In this realistic fiction novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher, Clay Jensen, a high school senior, arrives home from school to find a strange box sitting on his porch. He thinks that it is only a package, but soon finds out that inside are tapes recorded by Hannah Baker, a girl he loved who committed suicide only two weeks earlier. When he puts the first tape in the old stereo and hits play, he hears Hannah's voice, "I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the reasons why". As Clay listens to all thirteen sides of seven tapes, he feels like he is

getting to know her more than he ever did when she was alive. After the first four tapes, he starts to wonder when his name is going to pop up in the tapes. His thoughts are running through his mind about why he was one of the reasons Hannah is dead. When you read *Thirteen Reasons Why* you will find out that love is not always what it seems. (Rachel S., student)

From Nancy Keane's *Booktalks Quick and Simple*, <http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/>

Three Little Words by Ashley Rhodes-Courter

Ashley was only three years old when she was taken from her mother – too young to understand why she couldn't stay with the mother she adored and she could not possibly have realized that she was going to spend the next nine years bouncing from one foster family to another. As a small child she could not stand up for herself when the people that were charged with her care failed her. At twenty years old, her mother Lorraine was also too young to take responsibility for her two children or negotiate the legal system that tore apart her family. *Three Little Words* is Ashley's story, told in her voice, about the time she spent without Lorraine, and her search for someone to mother her. It contains all the passion and detail that can only come from someone who has experienced the foster care system from the inside.

From <http://www.simonandschuster.net/content/book.cfm?tab=4&pid=586334&agid=10>

Unwind by Neal Shusterman

In the not-too-distant future, teens Connor, Risa, and Lev are on the run for their lives. Following the Second Civil War, between pro-choice and pro-life forces, the United States now allows parents to *unwind* their unwanted and difficult kids between the ages of thirteen and eighteen: their bodies are surgically taken apart and all the organs and tissue are used in other people. According to the law, the kids aren't considered dead, they're "living in a divided state." But Connor, Risa and Lev, and thousands of other teens slated for "unwinding," don't see it that way. They choose instead to "kick AWOL," or run away. *Unwind* follows these three across the future United States as they travel together, split up, and meet again when their destinies cross in a "Harvest Camp" where they are slated to be unwound.

From Neal Shusterman's website, <http://www.storyman.com/books/unwind.html?animate=1>

Wake by Lisa McMann

Janie hasn't been to a sleepover in years. She makes excuses to leave the classroom when a fellow student falls asleep. Whenever possible, she avoids public transportation and libraries. Why? Because when people fall asleep and dream, Janie is uncontrollably sucked into their dreams. Normally, it's just the typical falling dream or standing-naked-in-front-of-a-crowd dream. Then, one day Janie is sucked into a violent nightmare and she's no longer just an observer—she's an active participant.

Wicked Lovely by Melissa Marr

All her life Aislinn has hidden her ability to see faeries, because faeries can be cruel to mortals that have the Sight. She lives in the steel safety of the city, knowing that only the strongest faeries can withstand iron. But now she is being stalked by two faeries, pretending to be students at her high school. One is Keenan, the Summer King, who has been looking for his Queen for centuries and is determined that Aislinn will belong to him. Not realizing her gift, he is frustrated when she rebuffs his courting. Aislinn, confused by his attention and realizing that iron's protection does not work against Keenan, is afraid of losing her best friend, her freedom, and her life. And both are in danger from Keenan's mother, the Winter Queen. She will lose her power if Keenan wins Aislinn's love, and will do everything in her power to stop Keenan from finding his mate.

From Mackin Booktalks, <http://www.mackinbooktalk.com/viewBook.aspx?bookId=390>