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Styria, Austria

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Issue 1

English as a Foreign Language, Secondary Level
Teaching Literature & Intercultural Competence

The Reading-Glass

A Student Teacher Project

YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN EFL

Dear Reader,

This newsletter is the result of a project instigated in the course *Teaching Literature and Intercultural Competence* at the University College of Teacher Education in Styria, Austria. It is a class for student teachers of English as a Foreign Language for the secondary level, i.e. 10- to 18-year-old pupils.

Instead of merely handing in reviews as proof of students' work, the participants were encouraged to share their experiences of studying young adult literature (YAL). Thus, the readers of this newsletter are provided with the students' individual selections. This range of books may assist teachers (-to-be) in choosing literature for projects, intensive and extensive reading.

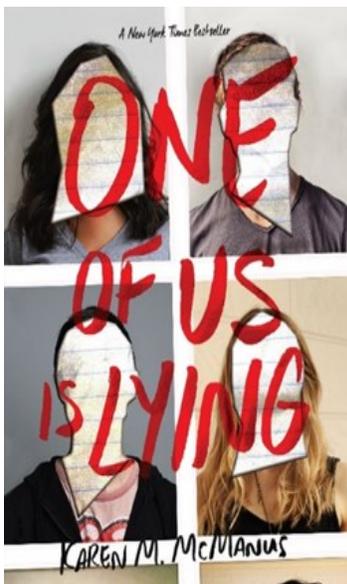
For this newsletter, the students almost always picked more recently published novels to familiarize themselves with the broad range of young adult literature that is currently available .

Despite the broad range of texts, the reviewers considered most of the books suitable for a readership 14+ in terms of both language and content.

Enjoy the diverse selection of contemporary young adult novels,

Karin da Rocha





ONE OF US IS LYING (2017). BY KAREN M. MCMANUS

Five students go into detention, but only four make it out alive. *One of Us is Lying* follows the lives of four teenagers after one of their fellow students dies during detention. It seems that Simon’s death was planned, and there are four suspects who were in the same room when it happened. Bronwyn, Nate, Cooper and Addy all had motives to kill Simon since he knew secrets about every single one of them, and he had planned to share them on his gossip app.

This murder mystery is written from the perspectives of the four protagonists. At first this seems confusing, but after the reader gets to know each character it

allows the reader to get detailed insight into each of their lives. McManus addresses many positive aspects of growing up or young adult life, like love, family struggles and belonging to a clique. However, she also raises darker issues such as online bullying and death. Therefore, the book is not recommendable for young adults under the age of fourteen. Finding out about the characters’ secrets and following clues to find the murderer makes this book a page-turner.

Reviewed by Sarah Goesweiner



THE RULE OF ONE (2018). BY ASHLEY & LESLIE SAUNDERS

The near-future United States, afflicted by climate change, has established a one-child policy in order to adapt to the lack of world resources. In this world, having two children is a crime – but what if you give birth to twins? For eighteen years, identical twin sisters Ava and Mira Goodwin have lived as one person, switching places every day: one stays in the hidden bedroom, the other one goes to school. One day, however, their sham is exposed. Their father, who is the head of the Texas Family Planning Department is arrested and the twins have to flee in order to survive...

The Rule of One manages very well to depict the possible outcome of climate change and its consequences for the population while portraying a futuristic world. Reading the book, similarities to other futuristic novels such as *1984*, *The Hunger Games*, and the series “Black Mirror” can be found, as all of them deal with a dark foreshadowing of the future and technology (constant surveillance is a major theme in the book).

The authors Ashley and Leslie Saunders are twins themselves. They had their debut as authors with the book *The Rule of One*, and they are also directors.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book, and I would definitely recommend it. As the language can be challenging at times, I would suggest a reading age from 15 years onwards, depending on the learner’s level.

Reviewed by Kathrin Schuster

LITERALLY (2017). BY LUCY KEATING

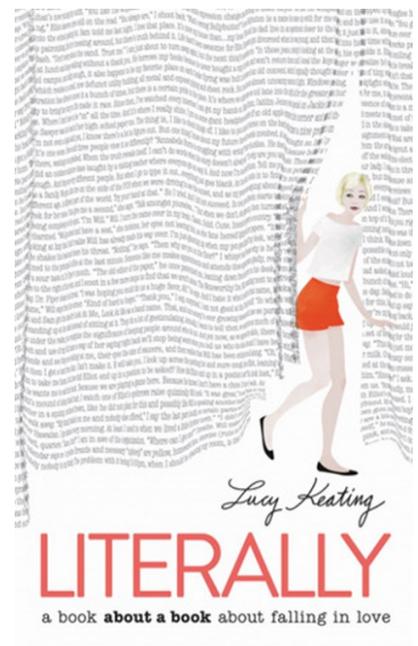
A girl realizes that her life has been written for her. Will she find a way to write her own story?

Annabelle's life has always been perfect, until she finds out that her parents are getting divorced and that Lucy Keating's new novel resembles Annabelle's life. It turns out Annabelle is a character created by bestselling author Lucy Keating, who is writing her entire life. When Will, an almost perfect guy, enters the story and expresses his interest for Annabelle, she begins to question her own judgement and the genuine motives of the people around her. To make things even more complicated Annabelle finds herself in a love triangle with her long-time friend Elliot and the practically perfect Will. As the entire situation worsens, Annabelle arrives at the ultimate solution: confronting Lucy Keating and demanding her life back.

Keating tells a classic love story filled with common stereotypes, clichés and tropes. However, she manages to give the novel a slight twist by blurring the lines between reality and fiction and creating just enough space for the characters' actions against a plot already written for them. The characters fight against their creator, thus highlighting the characters' frustrations and the author's insecurities. Despite being inventions of the author, the characters take a lead on their own lives.

A charming love story with a little twist.

Reviewed by Sarah Kurz



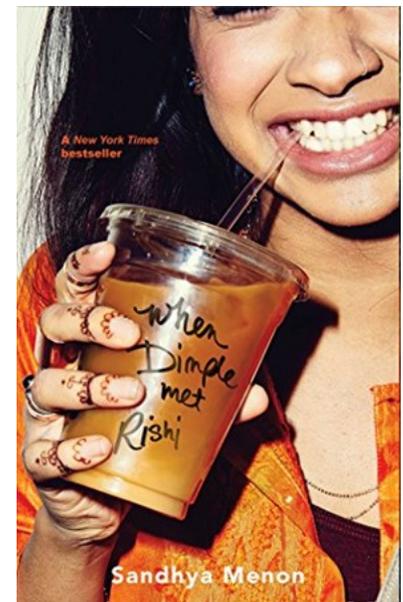
WHEN DIMPLE MET RISHI(2017). BY SANDHYA MENON

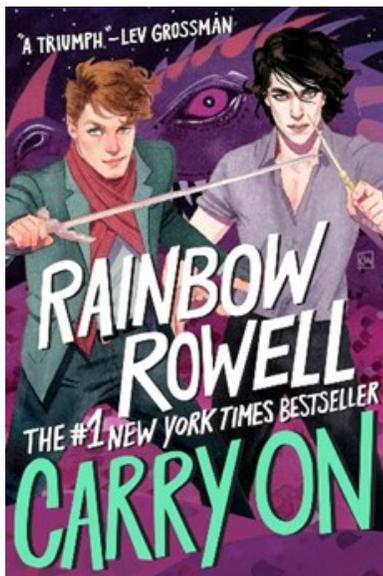
Dimple is a free spirit and a devoted web coder who wants to meet her idol at summer camp. Rishi, who is very traditional on the other hand, is going to summer camp to meet his future wife, Dimple. Dimple is not amused by their parents' arranged date, but they have to jointly create an app, so they will spend a lot of time together.

This romantic narration is about two teenagers of Indian descent who meet each other at summer camp web coding and eventually fall in love with each other. The chapters are divided between the two main characters, Dimple and Rishi, and tell the story from both perspectives. Even though mainly

a love story, many other topics are included such as arranged marriages, Indian traditions (and Hindi words), web coding, friendship, family bonds, fate and the struggle between following your dreams (heart) and doing something reasonable and practical (brain). Moreover, the book is rather longer in comparison to the content (mainly love story) - at 380 pages, it may be better for higher classes as a book to choose among others.

Reviewed by Sandra Lang





CARRY ON (2017). BY RAINBOW ROWELL

Simon Snow is chosen to save the world from the Humdrum, a creature that destroys magic.

The catch is that Simon is the worst Chosen One to have ever been chosen; his magic comes and goes as it pleases and when it works, it tends to be explosive. As if this wasn't enough to deal with, his roommate Baz, his sworn enemy, did not come back for the final school year, which can only mean one thing: Baz wants to end their feud by plotting to kill Simon once and for all.

Rainbow Rowell again delivers a beautifully written young adult novel where teenagers speak and think like actual teenagers.

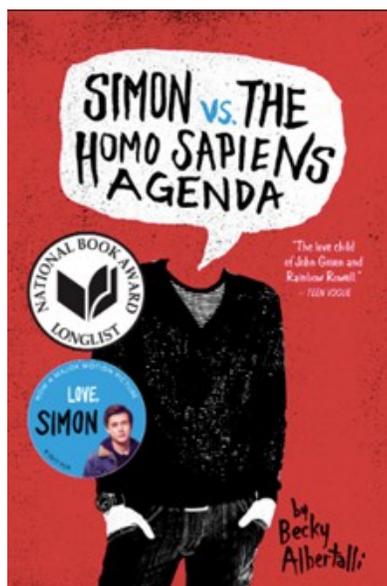
Connoisseurs of Harry Potter will recognize the trope of The Chosen

One and the school for magical children; however, this is where the similarities end.

Rowell takes these concepts and puts her own humorous spin on them, making this book a fun and captivating read. The characters are well developed, and even the side characters are unique and diverse: sexuality, ethnicity and classism are some of the themes that are explored.

If you yearn for a sort-of-Harry Potter with smartphones, vampires and a love story that leaves you squealing, search no more, this is the book for you.

Reviewed by Elisabeth Pöttler



SIMON VS. THE HOMO SAPIENS AGENDA (2016). BY BECKY ALBERTALLI

When his secret is discovered by a fellow classmate, Simon has to protect himself and the boy he cares about the most.

Simon Spier is an ordinary student at Creekwood High School with a big secret: He is gay, but neither his friends nor his family know about it. The only person who knows about Simon's sexual orientation is Blue, an anonymous gay classmate of Simon with whom he has been corresponding via email. When Simon forgets to log himself out of Gmail at the school library, a fellow student called Martin reads Simon's emails and threatens to out him if Simon refuses to help him with a girl that he likes. Simon is conflicted: Should he give in to Martin and risk being threatened by him for the rest of the school year, or should he decline Martin's offer, knowing that his and Blue's sexual identity will be revealed to the whole school?

Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda is a great coming-of-age story, and one of the first that deals with homosexuality and coming out. Even though the book's primary focus is finding out who Blue is, the backstories of Simon's friends and family are told as well. By telling this story, the author shows the reader the true meaning of friendship and that it is fine to be different.

In her book, debut novelist Becky Albertalli deals with the problems of growing up, friendship and finding out who you really are. She portrays her characters in a realistic and heartwarming way, which adds perfectly to the awkward and hilarious story that she has invented.

Review by Jessica Mund

UNDER ROSE-TAINTED SKIES (2017). BY LOUISE GORNOLL

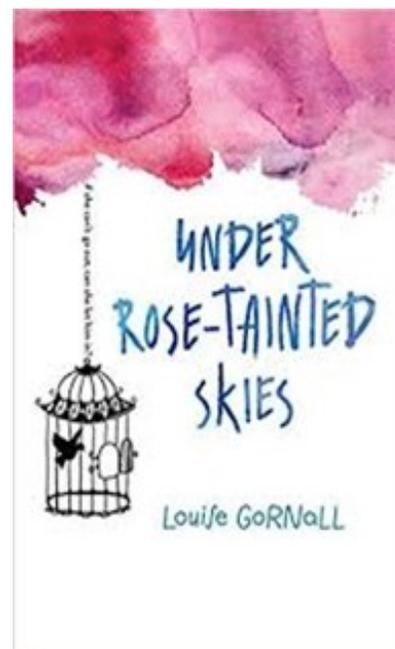
A fourteen-year-old girl struggling to do simple everyday tasks due to her mental illness breaks free from her comfort zone when she meets her new neighbor.

After a severe panic attack in school four years ago, Norah has been housebound because of her fear of being outside and something bad happening. Her anxiety keeps her from living a teenager's life, and she compares herself to a bird trapped in a cage. When her mother leaves town for a business trip and the grocery deliverer leaves her groceries on her front porch, Norah must face her fear of going outside. While doing so she meets her new neighbor Luke, and despite being housebound, Norah and Luke start a friendship. This new change in her life prompts Norah to think about other things she might be able to do and through ups and downs, she discovers she can do things she never thought she would be able to do.

The book talks about mental health issues in a realistic but not overwhelming way. It is a story about going beyond your comfort zone and facing your fears. The focus of the story is not about the romance between Norah and Luke but more about Norah's journey to bravery. The author Louise Gornoll has dealt with mental illnesses herself and provides real-life examples of her struggles, which makes it more relatable.

Trigger warning: mention of self-harm

Reviewed by Lisa Paul



THE HATE U GIVE (2017). BY ANGIE THOMAS

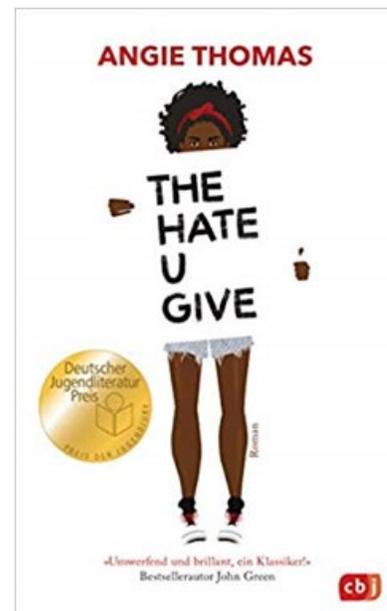
The life of Starr, a 16-year-old black girl, is shattered when she witnesses the shooting of her childhood friend Khalil by a white police officer.

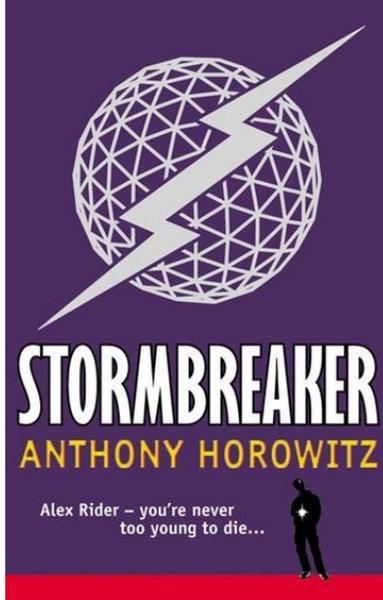
Starr lives a life between two worlds that could not be more different: the poor black neighborhood, Garden Heights, where she lives with her family, and the mostly white suburban high school, Williamson Prep, she attends. These two worlds start colliding after the shooting of the unarmed Khalil, at which Starr is present. The shooting becomes a national matter, and rumours that Khalil was a drug dealer and gangbanger start spreading. While some believe that Khalil's death

is justified, others start protesting for Khalil's justice. As Starr is the only witness, she now has to decide whether she wants to remain silent or use her voice to speak up for the justice of Khalil. But her decision could have dangerous consequences for her and her family.

The story is narrated from Starr's point of view using natural, authentic language, which gives the reader a deep insight into her thoughts and feelings and allows us to feel empathic for Starr, her family and friends.

Reviewed by Marlene Gierometta



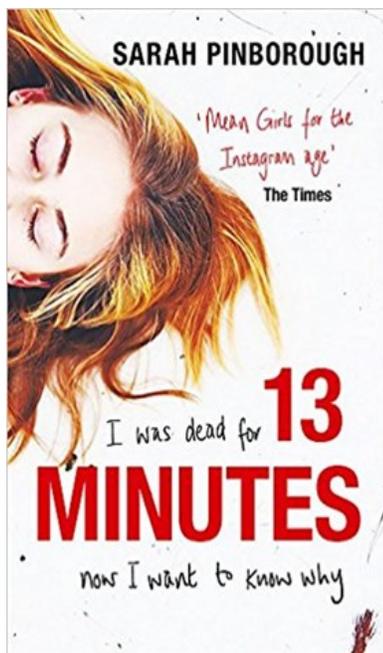


The book is about Alex Rider, who is a 14-year-old teenager. He lives a pretty normal life with his uncle who is a bank manager. Until one day when the police knock on his door and tells him that his uncle has died in a car crash because he was not wearing the seatbelt. As his uncle was very careful about always wearing a seatbelt, Alex could not believe the police. At the funeral, Alex saw many men wearing black suits and one man, who looked like the boss of the “bank”, who had a gun. Alex was sure that his uncle did not die because he was not wearing a seatbelt, and he therefore starts to investigate the death of his uncle. After some sleuthing, he finds out that his uncle worked for MI6 and Alex

himself will soon be the youngest spy of the MI6 finishing his uncle’s last case.

The book is a spy thriller. The author uses satirical names for the characters (such as Mr. Grin, who is named after his scars, and also uses appealing language for young readers as, “It was a so gray night with a half-moon forming a perfect D in the sky. D for what, Alex wondered. Danger? Discovery? Or disaster?”. Moreover, the author introduces the reader to some creative and funny spy gadgets. At times the language is rather explicit in terms of violence and sexuality, which is why it may be considered suitable for an audience 14+.

Reviewed by Lorenz Koller



13 MINUTES (2017). BY SARAH PINBOROUGH

Sixteen year-old Natasha does not remember how she ended up in a river in the middle of the night that almost led to her death. Suffering from memory loss after her near drowning, she only knows this much: It was not an accident. With the help of her (ex-best) friend Becca, Natasha tries to figure out whether her two best friends have turned into enemies. Since she is the school queen, Tasha’s colleagues are desperate for her attention – no matter the cost. Betrayals, manipulations and ploys amongst frenemies are simply part of the fight for popularity, and the death of yet another student won’t change that.

13 Minutes by British author Sarah Pinborough is a thrilling high-school murder-mystery dealing with middle-class teenagers who regard treating others badly as a necessity for school-survival. The book is not suitable for younger readers because it includes themes such as sex, drugs, toxic relationships, insecurities and (more than one) murder. The 400 page-long novel is filled with numerous twists and turns that leave the reader stunned. The girls’ search for belonging leads to a series of events that perfectly illustrate the importance of social roles in teenage years and the burdens that go along with them. At the end, nothing turns out the way it seemed to in the beginning, and dozens of unanswered questions leave the reader unsatisfied.

Written in prose, the young adult novel gives insight into the thoughts and feelings of Becca and Natasha by switching between their stories. Text messages between frenemies, newspaper articles, police reports or excerpts of consultation sessions in-between ensure that this stunning read never gets boring and stays realistic.

Reviewed by Stephanie Brence

Vee has never been one of the famous actors in the school play, and she has never even been in front of the curtain. She has been the make-up artist and a helping hand for her best friend, the protagonist and star of the play, and the other actors. This is why it seems really appealing to her to join the online game everybody in school is talking about. She wants to be the center of attention instead of being in the shadow of her best friend for once in her life. The rules of the game are that you have to fulfill real life dares, record it on video and send it in. If you get enough attention from watchers, you can continue to the next round. Her first dare seems manageable, and Vee's wet, transparent shirt also gets her the needed attention from the audience to be promoted to the next round. The next few tasks become increasingly difficult. However, Vee cannot resist her new, handsome partner Ian, as well as the gifts the game promises her, and she continues to play. This is why she ends up on the street dressed like a prostitute and has to fight all her friends. Will Vee join Ian for the last level which means risking her life? Can she even drop out of the game at that stage?

The book not only depicts the addictive nature of computer games, it also presents the difficulty of separating the fictional world from your own life. Would you be willing to risk yours?

Reviewed by Lore Kaltner



FOLLOW ME BACK (2016). BY NICCI CLOKE

Lizzy, the protagonist of the story, has gone missing. Did she get kidnapped? Did she meet a stranger from the Internet? Is she even still alive? Nobody quite knows...

Aiden is shocked when the police knock on his door. They are looking for Lizzy, the girl who disappeared, and come to this sporty and clever class mate of hers because they saw on her laptop that the two of them were texting... flirting.

The plot is primarily about people puzzling as to whether Lizzy was taken or whether she went away on her own account—perhaps to meet a stranger she might have texted with on Facebook (which she did a lot...).

The narrator of the story is, for the most part, Aiden, who tells the story from his perspective. However, he might seem hard to relate to, as he turns out to be not quite reliable. Other narrators also appear throughout the book,

although the benefit of this feature to the story is rather hard to grasp.

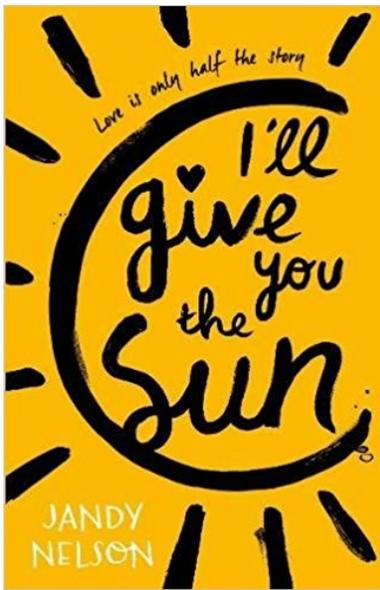
What makes the book special are certainly the numerous plot twists and the fascination that one can never be sure who to trust completely. The clues that lead towards the resolution are subtly placed throughout the book without being too obvious.

The story of Lizzy is mysterious and educational. It teaches young people to be careful and aware of the dangers of the internet without being too instructive. The book is written in present tense, which is a nice change in contrast to most novels.

While the plot feels rather slow at times, the next twist is always just around the corner, which makes *Follow me Back* an ideal book for social media-loving teenagers, irrespective of gender.

Reviewed by Lisa Wilding



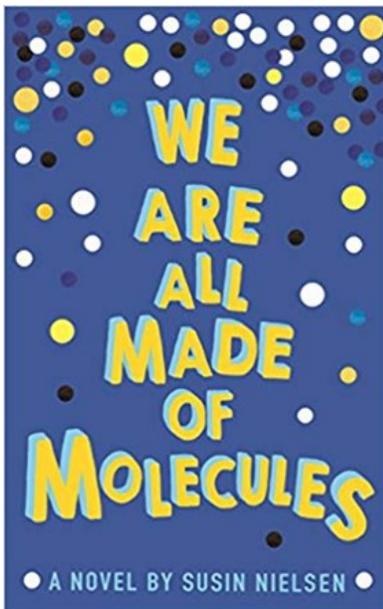


I'LL GIVE YOU THE SUN (2015). BY JANDY NELSON

Jude and her brother Noah are twins and were incredibly close when they were thirteen years old. Three years later, they are hardly speaking to each other. The early years are narrated by Noah as he struggles with an enormous secret that affects his life. He is kind of shy, very artistic and madly in love with the boy next door. Meanwhile, his sister is a real daredevil who is always going on new adventures and jumping off of cliffs. The later years are told from Jude's perspective where everything changes when she meets an arrogant and broken, yet beautiful boy while attending the university her brother should be at. Quickly it becomes very clear that some-

thing has happened between that time to tear them and their family apart. The pieces of the story come together one at a time, and in the end the reader ends up with the whole finished jigsaw puzzle and both stories get combined. Jandy Nelson utilizes vivid imagery to describe her characters, their actions and their emotions. Family secrets, betrayal and all-encompassing love for art serve as the catalyst in *I'll give you the Sun*. In an electric style evoking the highly visual imaginations of the young narrators, Jandy Nelson captures the fraught, antagonistic, yet deeply loving relationship that Jude and Noah share.

Reviewed by Verena Liebhard



WE ARE ALL MADE OF MOLECULES (2016). BY SUSIN NIELSEN

Thirteen-year-old Stewart is academically brilliant, but socially clueless. Fourteen-year-old Ashley is the undisputed "It" girl in school, but her grades stink.

The world of those polar-opposite teenagers collides when Stewart's dad and Ashley's mom decide to live together as a patchwork family—including conflicts, fights, discussions, love stories, bullying, true friendship and all the problems someone might expect to occur. But things don't really escalate until both teenagers raise the awareness of Jared, the best (and particularly best looking) but aggressive and homophobic basketball player of their High School...

Nielsen humorously displays the difficulties Stewart and Ashley must deal with, but she is not afraid of putting depth into her story. Even though topics as bullying, sexual harassment and homophobia are treated in a slightly comical way, she never neglects their seriousness. Alternating between both teenagers being the first-person narrator of their story, the perspective constantly switches between Stewart's analytical and Ashley's sarcastic narration. The reader can easily rely on both (though dissimilar) characters, which makes the story rich in perspectives.

Reviewed by Sophie Lorber

Imagine your mind is constantly telling you to panic about bacteria and getting an infection on your finger. Aza Holmes lives with these intrusive thoughts on a daily basis. Often not being able to mentally be present in conversations, she and her best friend Daisy suddenly find themselves with \$100,000 while on a quest to finding a missing billionaire. As if this is not enough, Aza meets Davis Pickett, a boy from her past and the son of the missing billionaire. Will they be able to find the man? Will Aza be able to fall in love with Davis, particularly when all she can think about is his microbiome becoming part of hers when kissing him?

The book focuses primarily not on the missing Russell Pickett, but on Aza's struggles with her mental illness and how it affects her friendships, love life and relationship to her mother. Her struggles are depicted rather precisely, as the book is written from her perspective. Thus, the reader can understand how her illness torments her life and consequently sympathize with her.

It is a typical John Green love story meets powerful tale about anxiety.

Reviewed by Christina Rottenmanner

One book—two perspectives:

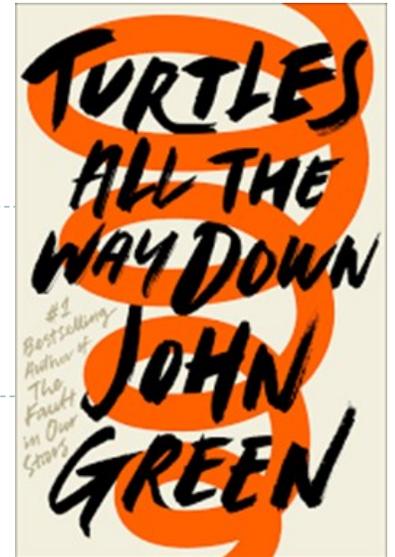
Turtles All The Way Down (2017). By John Green

Aza's life seems to be on the verge of changing significantly when local billionaire Russell Pickett goes missing. Anybody who is able to find him is sure to receive a \$100,000 reward, which Aza's best friend Daisy is eager to get. One of the leads is Russell's son Davis, who was once Aza's childhood friend and may become more during the length of their investigation. All the while Aza has to struggle with several anxiety disorders, which may be her biggest issue in solving the case.

Although John Green tries to pack mental illness into a young adult novel by means of a detective story, it only works partially. Aza's internal struggles are well portrayed and often make the passages about self-hatred and isolation very insightful. How-

ever, the book could easily have omitted the detective storyline and focused more on her life with mental disorders and its ramifications. Thus, the characters and story could have been better developed and not left the reader feeling like something was missing. Despite some flaws, I very much appreciate the representation of mental illnesses in young adults' lives and not ending the story with a miraculous recovery, but the message that it is okay at times to not be okay.

*Reviewed by
Alicia Valdés-Rodriguez*





GEM & DIXIE (2017). BY SARA ZARR

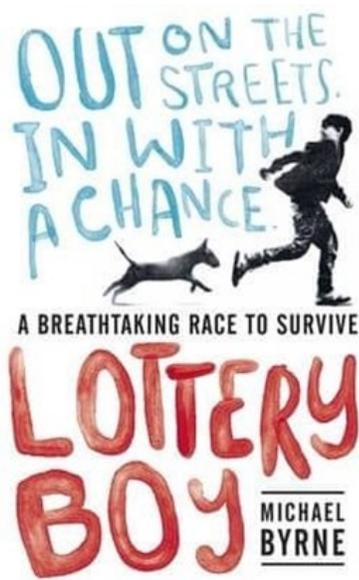
Gem has never known what it is like to feel safe.

She is four years older than her sister Dixie, and has the task to be the responsible figure in a complicated household. Gem and Dixie's father is often absent from their lives, and usually when he returns, it is never for good reasons. Their mother can barely keep food on the table and is not willing to take on any responsibility. Gem has always tried to help and protect her younger sister, but as they have grown older, their relationship has become more distant. Dixie wants to hold on to memories they share while Gem is ready for something new, something better. To save herself, she may have to sever the bond with her sister she has tried so

hard to keep.

Sara Zarr, again, delivers a gorgeously written young adult novel which is emotional and tragic, but also beautiful and poignant. *Gem & Dixie* is a contemporary story about the complex and moving relationship between two sisters from a broken home, and illustrates how a dysfunctional family can affect children. The characters are well developed; themes that are explored in this book are sisterhood, childhood (while actually not having a real childhood), neglectful but not physically abusive homes, resilience and underdogs.

Reviewed by Alexandra Mori



LOTTERY BOY (2015). BY MICHAEL BYRNE

Bully is a 12-year-old boy who lives on the streets of London together with his dog Jack. He is trying to find his way back into society after he loses his mother, and he wants his old life back. One day he finds a lottery ticket he bought for his mother as a birthday present, tucked inside the last birthday card she ever gave to him. It's a big winner. Bully's opportunities open up and he finds hope again. Unfortunately, Bully is too young to obtain his lottery prize. Trying to claim his prize money on time, ruthless gangsters try to get a piece of Bully's new fortune. Can he trust anybody around him? And even if he receives all the money in the end, is it the fortune he was truly looking for?

Lottery Boy is Michael Byrne's debut novel which includes remarkable characters and a thrill-packed plot. The character descriptions are exceptional, including attitudes, hopes and dreams. The main character is likeable from the first few pages onward without being perfect in every way. His longing for his mother and her help in difficult situations are ongoing themes throughout the entire young adult novel. The story describes the gripping journey as Bully desperately attempts to claim his prize.

This moving story about the daily struggles of living on the streets in London keeps you on the edge of your seat.

Reviewed by Hannah Pichler

WARCROSS (2017). BY MARIE LU

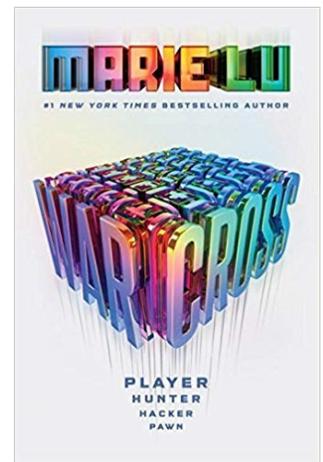
Emika's life is about to change in a way she could have never imagined.

Normally, Emika is just a poor young girl who tries to make some cash while being a bounty hunter. But she isn't a regular bounty hunter. She is a hacker who tries to find people who illegally bet on the biggest and most popular virtual reality game in the world: Warcross. It's a tough business, but when she tries to hack into the Warcross world championship, her life changes. She gets in touch with the creator of the game, Hideo Tanaka, a Japanese billionaire. He thrusts her into fame and wants her to do a very dangerous job. Can she do it? Will it pay off for her? Or is Hideo up to something?

Marie Lu's book starts out very fast and gets into the action quickly. By the third chapter, Emika gets to fly to Tokyo and from there on out, the story just keeps rushing forward. The amazingly vivid Warcross game scenes capture the reader while presenting diverse characters who play the game and come from all walks of life. Emika's story about her family struggles and how she became famous so quickly can make young readers relate to her in a very realistic way.

The first part of an amazing series that will leave the reader yearning for the next book.

Reviewed by Dominik Szecsi



AN EMBER IN THE ASHES (2015). BY SABAA TAHIR

An Ember in the Ashes is the first part of the book series with the same name. It takes place in a fantasy world based on Antique Rome; the relation is perhaps comparable to that of *Game of Thrones'* Westeros and Medieval Britain. This fantasy world contains two main races: the Martials who are in power, and the Scholars who are oppressed. The plot revolves around the two first-person point-of-view characters: Elias and Laia.

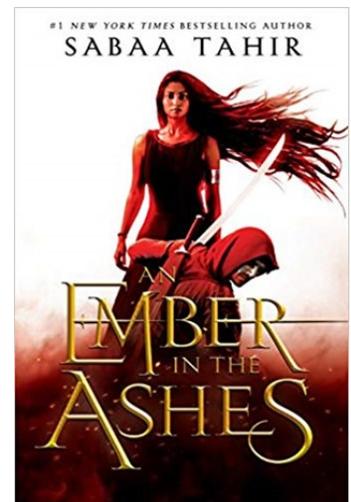
Laia is a Scholar whose brother gets imprisoned for being part of the Resistance – Scholars rebelling against the Martials' oppressive society and tyrannical regime. She arranges a deal with the Resistance: she is to become a slave to the commandant of the military school and in return, the Resistance will try to rescue her brother.

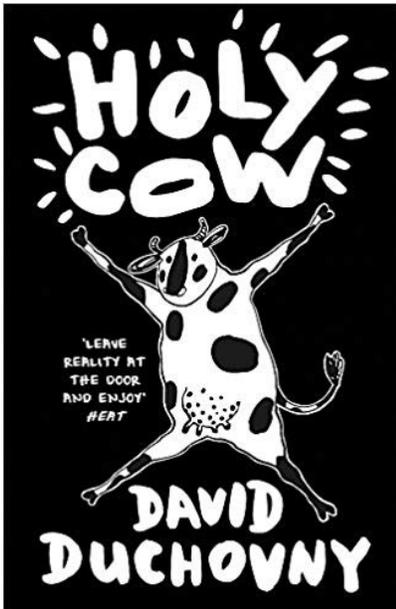
Elias is the biological son of the commandant and one of four candidates to potentially succeed to the throne, which will be determined in a series of trials. Despite this, Elias is kind-hearted, disapproves of the Empire's oppressive structure and sympathises with the Scholars.

Predictably, Elias and Laia meet and, over time, develop romantic feelings for each other, which leads to complications, especially when Elias' mother catches on about it.

Next to being easy to read and having a thrilling, action-packed plot, what is outstanding about this novel is how it combines fantasy and historical realism. Tahir paints a picture of a brutal world, before there was any notion of unimpeachable human rights. Life is tough for oppressed people and even tougher for slaves - who can be engraved, used for sexual pleasure or mistreated in any other way. Although one shudders at the thought that this used to be a reality for many people, *An Ember in the Ashes* also serves as a reminder of how lucky most people who live in the 21st century are.

Reviewed by Anton Neurauter





HOLY COW (2015). BY DAVID DUCHOVNY

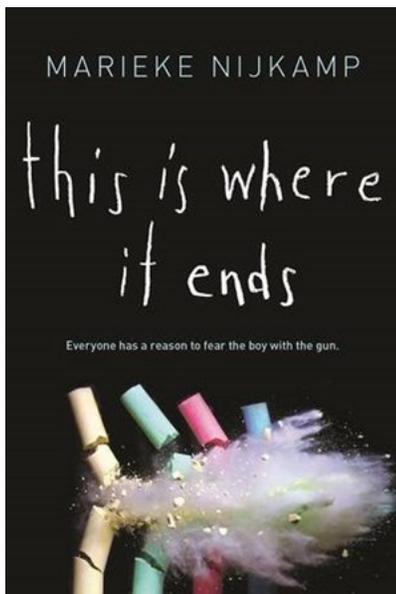
When milk cow Elsie stumbles across a horrifying realization, she sets out on an incredible journey of self-discovery.

Elsie was a happy cow. She lived on a nice farm, had some interesting friends and was just reaching the age where bulls become interesting to her. But one night, after she and her friend Mallory snuck out to meet the bulls, she observes the humans watching a 'Box God' and realizes where her life would inevitably lead if she stayed at the farm. Thus, a decision is made. Elsie will go to India, where cows are revered as god-like beings and where she has nothing to fear. On her journey she is joined by Jerry...sorry, by Shalom, a converted Jewish pig, and Tom, a

turkey with an affinity for technology. On their travels they encounter prejudice, cruelty and war until they finally reach the holy land of India. But is the place really so wonderful? Or is home closer to home after all?

Holy Cow, for all its rather strange twists and turns, is a captivating Coming-Of-Age-Story. Told in first person by Elsie herself, the reader is confronted with the shortcomings and mistakes of humanity in a way so deliberately over-the-top that one can't help but actually contemplate what is being told.

Reviewed by Tamara Schönet



THIS IS WHERE IT ENDS (2016). BY MARIEKE NIJKAMP

10:00 A.M., Monday morning:

The new semester at Opportunity High School starts off with an opening speech by the principal. Three minutes later the students and teachers are about to leave the auditorium, but the doors are locked.

10:05 A.M.:

The people in and around Opportunity High School hear the first gun shot. "[E]veryone [of them] has a reason to fear the boy with the gun".

Marieke Nijkamp tells the story of a shooting spree in an ordinary high school from the perspective of four students, named Claire, Tomás, Autumn and Sylv. Over a span of 54 minutes and 26 chapters, each one covering two to five minutes, the reader is introduced to the social construct of Opportunity High School and to all the harrowing details that have led to the shooting of 39 people and the injury of another 25. Nijkamp manages to portray the horror, anger, hatred and even guilt of those closely connected to Tyler, the shooter, in a way that presents him as a vulnerable and misunderstood character rather than just a monster. This book is a very intense and gripping story and will leave everyone above the age of 14 on the verge of tears.

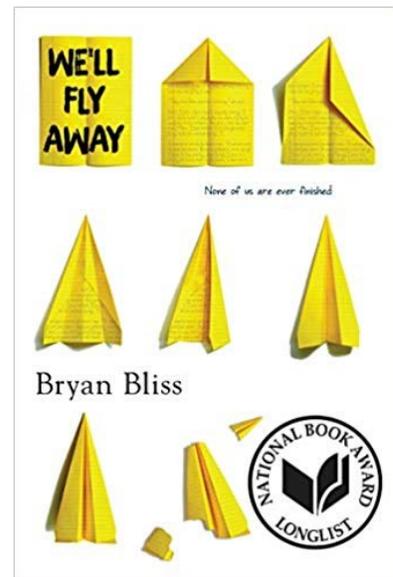
Reviewed by Barbara Schweighofer

WE'LL FLY AWAY (2018). BY BRIAN BLISS

The two protagonists Luke and Toby have always been best friends and have always dreamt of leaving their hometown to escape their abusive families. In their final year of high school, when their plans finally seem within their reach, Luke makes a fatal decision which leads to him being put on death row. The story of *We'll Fly Away* alternates between Luke's letters from prison and the story of Luke's and Toby's high school senior year told in the third person narrative. Only at the very end of the story do the readers find out what led to Luke's conviction and his motives.

Even though Bliss' novel is at times tough to read because of the raw depiction of violence, it draws the reader in from the very beginning and explores topics such as abuse, loyalty, life-altering choices and friendship. Moreover, the book's characters are well-elaborated and not as shallow as in some other young adult novels, which makes it an even more enjoyable read.

Reviewed by Melanie Wiener



THE BOY WHO FELL FROM THE SKY (2015). BY JULE OWEN

London, 2055. Mathew Erlang, a 16-year-old boy, is confined to stay in his house after the city has been devastated by another flood due to terrible environmental conditions. His only companions are his cat, a robot and the holographic dragons he created. Moreover, the First Space War between China and the U.S. has just begun and while the world is falling apart, Mathew embarks on an incredible adventure.

He starts to investigate his neighbour, Mr. Lestrangle, who behaves very bizarrely. At first, Mathew's research is restricted to the legal virtual world, the Nexus. But as he cannot find any information about the man there, he turns to the illegal Blackweb and finally finds himself breaking into Mr. Lestrangle's house. Trapped in his

neighbour's house, Mathew enters the Darkroom and falls some hundreds of years into the future. There he discovers a completely different world and unintentionally, he starts to destabilize the course of human history.

The Boy Who Fell from the Sky by Jule Owen is an easy read for teenagers as well as adults, which takes a critical look at some substantial subjects such as the future, government control, technology's impact on privacy and the devastating impacts of climate change. It is the first book in "The House Next Door" trilogy, a young adult dystopian science fiction action adventure.

The Kindle edition is available for free on Amazon.

Reviewed by Anna Kische

