

Cuddle up and Read Together

By Janell Mattheus

It seems easy to read bedtime stories to our infants and toddlers, and yet we often neglect reading aloud to our children who are old enough to read by themselves. A shared book can be the vehicle to bring about meaningful conversation and keep us connected with our older kids. Children can also listen to and understand stories that are written on a much higher level than they could read on their own. Here are a few choices of great books to read to your older children:

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis (grades 3 – 6) is a perfect winter read. This classic tale is about the evil White Witch who is keeping the magical land of Narnia in continual winter but without Christmas. This is the first book published in the Narnia series but is now considered book #2. I would argue that it should still be the first book you read, as it really brings Narnia to life.

The Little House in the Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder (grades K-4) is another wintry story. Cuddle your kids close as you read

about the little house where Pa plays his fiddle by the fireside, while the family celebrates a Christmas with homemade gifts. Your kids may even come to appreciate the beauty and joy of a simpler life.

Wolf Brother by Michelle Paver (grades 4 – 9) is the epic journey of a Neolithic Scandinavian boy who is left to fend for himself when his father is killed by a demon bear. He and his wolf-cub companion journey together through deep snowy forests, across giant glaciers and into dangers they never imagined. This is the first title in the *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* series.

Stone Fox by J. R. Gardiner, (grades 3 – 6) is a beautiful story of faith and courage with a powerful, emotional ending that will help your child begin to understand that not every story has a happy ending. Little Willy's grandfather is sick and it is up to Willy to save their farm from the tax collectors. Their only hope is for Willy to win the prize money from the National Dogsled Race.

The Golden Compass by Philip Pullman (grades 5 and up) takes place in the frozen Far North. This first book of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy begins the adventures of Lyra Belacqua and draws us into an imaginary world filled with daemons, gyptians, witches, armored bears and more.

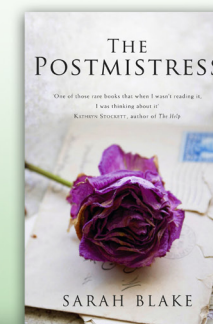
1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis (grades 2 and up) takes place in Flint, Michigan in winter where it is so cold that big brother Byron gets his lips stuck to the family car. This is a warm-hearted story of the Watson family's car trip to Alabama in 1963.



WINTER 2011

Making Characters Come Alive: A conversation with Sarah Blake, author of *The Postmistress*

By Ruby Cheesman



Ruby: I love the WWII setting. What made you choose that time period, and setting in Massachusetts?

Sarah: Years ago, my husband and son and I were living in Provincetown, at the end of Cape Cod, where I was working on my first novel, *Grange House*. Every morning I watched the woman who delivered the town mail walking up the street past our house and wondered what secrets she knew about all of us and whether she was keeping them. That was the seed that grew to be the character of Iris James, and as her character grew more clear in my mind, the town of Franklin grew around her. When I realized that the center of the novel was going to be a letter that she wouldn't deliver, I decided to set the novel during the Second World War, a time when news often only traveled by mail. I wanted to set Iris at the center of a small town, and one on the edge of the Atlantic, with nothing between it and the war but the sea.

Ruby: How did you develop the main characters of Frankie (the reporter) and Iris (the postmistress)? Were either based on real people or acquaintances?

Sarah: Each character very much grew out of their own actions. Iris came first, and came quickly. Once I had the image of a woman in a post office looking down at a letter in her hand and then quickly slipping it into her pocket, a raft of questions needed to be answered to understand who she was. I knew she was at the center of a small town, but it was only when I started to write a scene or two with her in it, and then followed her onto a bus and into a doctor's office in Boston in search of a certificate for her virginity, that she really came alive. That was such a surprise to me, and so idiosyncratic and weird and wonderful that from that moment on, Iris James was very firm in my mind. The same sort of thing happened for Frankie. I imagined the kind of broadcast she would give, and through that voice was able to develop her more and more. I did do quite a bit of research on post offices in the 30s and

interviewed a Postmaster of a small town in Maine, as well as doing much research on radio broadcasting. Frankie isn't based on any one reporter in particular, though I was very inspired by the work of Martha Gellhorn, the great war reporter; and too, I discovered after I had begun writing Frankie that there was a woman, Mary Marvin Breckinridge who did broadcast for Edward R. Murrow for six months in the early stages of the war.

Ruby: What is your favorite character in the book and why?

Sarah: I have to say I don't have a favorite character. I love Frankie's courage and her despair. I love Emma's peculiar bravery, and I've always loved Iris's upright faith in order. It was great fun to write the busybody, Mrs. Cripps, as well. I would like to have met Harry Vale, because he, like Frankie knew that something was coming and stood up to say so, to the mild amusement of his town. That kind of bravery I always admire.

Ruby: Are you working on another novel? If so, what will it be about and when might it be published?

Sarah: I'm working on a novel set in a house on the coast of Maine, during the summers of 1959 and 2009, involving three generations of an old money family

that has run out of its money and its sense of relevance. The novel moves back and forth in parallel time, through the same rooms and touching the same objects. There are secrets that are revealed in 1959 that those in 2009 never find out, and similarly, outcomes in 2009 that those in 1959 will never know--much as happens for all of us in our own families. The plots collide and intersect for the reader but never for the characters inside them. I am very interested in the pathos of patterns of family history repeating and echoing. It's too early to say when it might be published. But I can say that I fervently hope it won't take as long to wrest into being as *The Postmistress*, which was eight years in the making!

"I watched the woman who delivered the town mail and wondered what secrets she knew about all of us."

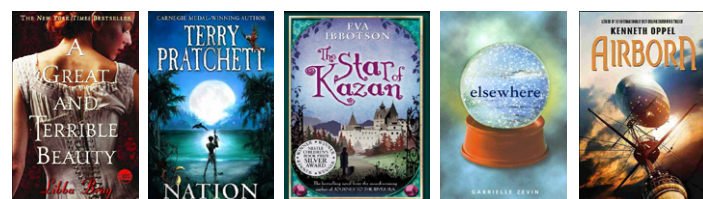
Teen Books to Take You Away

Audiobook Picks By Bobbie Pyron

Sometimes, we all wish we could escape winter. If you can't hop on an airplane and fly to Florida or the Virgin Islands, it's nice to have stories that can transport you to another place. Some of the most engaging and evocative writing can be found in teen fiction. Here are some titles sure to take you away.

A Great and Terrible Beauty, by Libba Bray. Bray's trilogy is an absorbing mix of historical fiction and fantasy, with a dash of romance. Set in turn-of-the-century India and then England, the *Gemma Doyle* series follows the nail-biting adventures of Gemma as she discovers dark family secrets and her own strange powers.

Nation, by Terry Pratchett. "Somewhere in the South Palegic Ocean" a tidal wave destroys the boy, Mau's, village and he thinks he is the sole survivor. But soon he will meet Daphne, shipwrecked on the island by the same catastrophe. Despite the worlds that separate them, they join forces to rebuild their own world. And then the world turns upside down...again.



The Star of Kazan, by Eva Ibbotson. Twelve-year-old Annika lives in Vienna with a cook, a maid and three eccentric professors. Her life has been warm and comfortable until the mother who abandoned her at birth, shows up and whisks her away to the family's remote northern castle.

Elsewhere, by Gabrielle Zevin. Welcome to Elsewhere, a place with amazing beaches, perfect weather, first-class museums and everything you could ever want. It is a place so like Earth, but completely different - and it's the place fifteen-year-old Liz ends up when she dies. But despite its perfection, it is not the place Liz wants to be.

Airborn, by Kenneth Oppel. Matt Cruse is a cabin boy on the huge airship, Aurora, ferrying wealthy passengers from city to city hundreds of feet above the ocean. It's the life he's always wanted until he hears about beautiful, drifting creatures from a dying balloonist--beings never before dreamed of by the humans who sail the skies.

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How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Craft The Ways

By Anna Zanarini



Just in time for Valentine's Day, check out these interesting craft and cooking books that can be used to express your love. To make it even more fun, we've paired our crafty books with novels to provide inspiration.

With sentiments from sweet to snarky, there are more than 25 projects from card-making mavens Eunice and Sabina Moyle in *Handmade Hello*. Templates, tips and step-by-step instructions make it a snap to create boutique-worthy greeting cards for those you love. Pair this with a novel written in letters such as *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer or *The Letters* by LuAnn Rice.

A handmade treasure to celebrate shared memories also makes an excellent gift for someone you love. In *Making Memory Boxes*, Anna Corba presents 35 projects to celebrate and capture cherished memories for you and your loved ones.

Outstanding Mini Albums by Jessica Acs, presents 50 ideas for creating unique and meaningful mini scrapbooks. If your Valentine

is more into bling than remembering, check out *Hip Handmade Memory Jewelry* by Cathy Jakicic.

To feed your loved one's sweet tooth, try *Bite-Size Desserts*, by Carole Bloom for recipes to make beautiful and delicious treats. Or check out *Hello, Cupcake* or *What's New Cupcake?* by Karen Tack or *Who You Callin' Cupcake?* by Michelle Garcia for some ingenious cupcake designs. While you are waiting for your treats to bake, read *Eat Cake* by Jeanne Ray or *The Icing on the Cupcake* by Jennifer Ross.

Last, but not least, nothing says "I care" like flowers, and *Simply Elegant Flowers with Michael George* by New York's premier florist Michael George has some fabulous arrangements. And, *Garden Bouquets and Beyond* by Suzanne Bales has ideas that are beautiful, and deceptively simple. *Garden Spells* by Sarah Allen and *Mum's the Word* by Kate Collins are novel pairings for floral inspirations.

There are many ways to say "I Love You" -- this year, pick up a book and find a way to cook or craft your feelings. While you are at it, get some novel inspiration to celebrate your feelings of love.

Movies

Ring in the New Year with these 5 picks

By Holly Whistler



In the movies, New Year's Eve is often a turning point in relationships. In *When Harry Met Sally* (rated R), Harry (Billy Crystal) and Sally (Meg Ryan) meet when she gives him a ride to New York City. After parting ways, they run into each other a few years later and become friends. They begin to wonder, however, whether their feelings for each other are only platonic.



In *An Affair to Remember* (unrated), although they are both engaged to other people, Nicky Ferrante (Cary Grant) and Terry McKay (Deborah Kerr) fall in love on New Year's Eve and agree to rendezvous six months later at the top of the Empire State Building. A terrible accident, however, keeps them apart.



Johnny Case (also played by Cary Grant) finds his soul mate on New Year's Eve in *Holiday* (unrated). Katherine Hepburn plays Linda Seton, the eccentric sister of a wealthy socialite, Julia (Doris Nolan), who is engaged to the nonconformist Johnny. After their wedding, Johnny makes unconventional plans to go on an extended holiday with his new wife, but she has other ideas.



On New Year's Eve, Jane Goodal (Ashley Judd) reevaluates her feelings about love in *Someone Like You* (rated PG13). After being dumped by her boyfriend, she begins writing an opinion column about men, inspired by the womanizing habits of her coworker, Eddie (Hugh Jackman). Her column is an overnight success, but Jane's opinions begin to change about Eddie.



New Years day can offer a fresh start. In *Bridget Jones's Diary* (rated R), a retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*, Bridget (Renee Zellweger) decides to turn over a new leaf on New Years and begins a journal. The year does not unfold quite as she anticipates however, when after being snubbed by Mark Darcy (Colin Firth), she takes up with her rakish boss, Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant).

SOUND BYTES

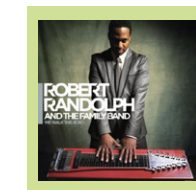
By Dan Berube



Age is no barrier when it comes to making music or enjoying music. Artists like Jerry Lee Lewis and Leon Russell are still creating music with depth and vitality well into their later years. Sometimes all an artist needs to shine is a fresh pair of ears.

Mean Old Man, Jerry Lee Lewis.

Jerry Lee Lewis is still alive and well and in full force at age 74. Here the Killer lets loose in vintage style with backup from Mick Jagger, Sheryl Crow, Kid Rock and other luminaries.

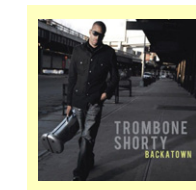


We Walk This Road, Robert Randolph.

With the help of T Bone Burnett, steel guitar whiz Robert Randolph continues to perfect his gospelized, blues-infused roots rock. This set focuses on older blues songs and spirituals as well as fresh takes on tunes by Prince and John Lennon.

American Slang, The Gaslight Anthem.

When you think of New Jersey and music, Sinatra, Springsteen and Bon Jovi come to mind. It's time to add another name to the list. The Gaslight Anthem plays tough-minded rock and roll that also has a sentimental streak and an eye on the road.

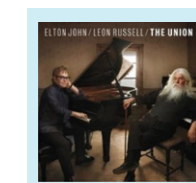


Backatown, Trombone Shorty.

In New Orleans, every night is a good night for music and a party. Keeping that tradition alive, native son Trombone Shorty lays down a high energy and highly entertaining brand of jazz that mixes in touches of funk, rock and hip-hop.

Preservation, Preservation Hall Jazz Band.

Founded in 1961, Preservation Hall in New Orleans is a stronghold of traditional jazz. On Preservation, fellow music voyagers like Andrew Bird, Tom Waits and Ani DiFranco add their unique flavors to the group's boisterous, joyful sound.



The Union, Elton John and Leon Russell.

Elton John conceived of this album as a chance to shine a light on the overlooked genius of Leon Russell. The resulting collaboration between the two piano men is both a tribute to Russell and a celebration of his unique blend of gospel, soul, and honky tonk rock.

WHAT IF...Reads

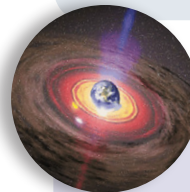
By Dan and Laura Burube



If you wish that Jon Stewart had been your high school science teacher: read *Earth (The Book)*, by Jon Stewart. Jon Stewart and the writers from "The Daily Show" attempt to explain the human race and life on earth to potential alien visitors.



If living on a space shuttle sounds intriguing to you: read *Packing for Mars*, by Mary Roach. The author of *Stiff* and *Bonk* explores the ins and outs of space travel in her typically humorous and informative style.



If it's the end of the world as we know it and you feel fine: read *Super Sad True Love Story*, by Gary Shteyngart. Near future New York City is much the same as now only worse, much worse and things are not working out well for Lenny and Eunice.



If you wonder what it would be like to have more than one wife: read *The Lonely Polygamist*, by Brady Udall. Golden Richards has four wives and 28 children but something still seems to be missing from his life.



If you think that drivers in Utah are bad: read *Country Driving*, by Peter Hessler. Hessler examines the massive economic growth in China by exploring the changing landscape of China's roads and highways.



If romantic vampires that sparkle aren't your style: read *The Passage*, by Justin Cronin. In the future the world is overrun with vampires, the result of a military experiment gone wrong. No sparkling here.



If you enjoy digging up and solving mysteries of the past: read *Distant Hours*, by Kate Morton. Edie finds herself at Milderhurst Castle, where her mother stayed 50 years before during World War II.



If you're looking for a book you won't be able to put down: read *Never Look Away*, by Linwood Barclay. When his wife disappears from an amusement park, small-town reporter David Harwood begins his own investigation.