

Elementary Battle of the Books: Summaries without Spoilers! 2017

Fish in a Tree by Linda Mullaly Hunt

The author of the beloved *One for the Murphys* gives readers an emotionally-charged, uplifting novel that will speak to anyone who's ever thought there was something wrong with them because they didn't fit in.

"Everybody is smart in different ways. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its life believing it is stupid."

Ally has been smart enough to fool a lot of smart people. Every time she lands in a new school, she is able to hide her inability to read by creating clever yet disruptive distractions. She is afraid to ask for help; after all, how can you cure dumb? However, her newest teacher Mr. Daniels sees the bright, creative kid underneath the trouble maker. With his help, Ally learns not to be so hard on herself and that dyslexia is nothing to be ashamed of. As her confidence grows, Ally feels free to be herself and the world starts opening up with possibilities. She discovers that there's a lot more to her—and to everyone—than a label, and that great minds don't always think alike.

The Smoking Mirror by David Bowles

Carol and Johnny Garza are 12-year-old twins whose lives in a small Texas town are forever changed by their mother's unexplained disappearance. Shipped off to relatives in Mexico by their grieving father, the twins soon learn that their mother is a *nagual*, a shapeshifter, and that they have inherited her powers. In order to rescue her, they will have to descend into the Aztec underworld and face the dangers that await them.

I Survived the Eruption of Mount St. Helens By Lauren Tarshis

Eleven-year-old Jessie Marlowe has grown up with the beautiful Mount St. Helens always in the background. She's hiked its winding trails, dived into its cold lakes, and fished for trout in its streams. Just looking at Mount St. Helens out her window made Jess feel calm, like it was watching over her somehow. Of course, she knew the mountain was a volcano...but not the active kind, not a volcano that could destroy and kill!

Then Mount St. Helens explodes with unimaginable fury. Jess suddenly finds herself in the middle of the deadliest and most destructive volcanic event in U.S. history. Ash and rock are spewing everywhere. Can Jess escape in time?

The newest book in the I Survived series will take readers into one of the most environmentally devastating events in recent U.S. history.

I am Drums By Mike Grasso

Sam knows she wants to be a drummer. But she doesn't know how to afford a drum kit, or why budget cuts end her school's music program, or why her parents argue so much, or even how to explain her dream to other people. But drums sound all the time in Sam's head, and she'd do just about anything to play them out loud—even lie to her family if she has to. Will the cost of chasing her dream be too high? An exciting new voice in contemporary middle grade, Grasso creates a determined heroine readers will identify with and cheer for.

The Thing About Leftovers By C. C. Payne

C. C. Payne intertwines heartache with humor and hope in a novel about navigating divorce and blended families, following your passion, and celebrating who you are.

Fizzy is a good Southern girl who just wants to be perfect. And win the *Southern Living* cook-off. The being perfect part is hard though, since her parents' divorced and everything in her life has changed. Wary of her too-perfect stepmom and her mom's neat-freak, dismissive boyfriend, she's often angry or upset and feels like a guest in both homes. She tells herself to face facts: She's a "leftover" kid from a marriage that her parents want to forget. But she has to keep all of that to herself, because a good Southern girl never yells, or throws fits, or says anything that might hurt other people's feelings—instead she throws her shoulders back, says yes ma'am, and tries to do better. So Fizzy tries her best, but it's hard to stay quiet when her family keeps getting more complicated. Fortunately, the *Southern Living* cook-off gives her a welcome distraction, as do her new friends Miyoko and Zach, who have parent issues of their own.

With the poignancy and humor of Joan Bauer and Lynda Mullaly Hunt, this poignant story reminds us that we have a right to a voice, that it is okay to say how we feel, and that some leftovers are absolutely delicious!

Adventures with Waffles By Maria Parr

Hardly a day passes without Trille and Lena inventing some kind of adventure that often ends in trouble. Whether it's coaxing a cow onto a boat or sledding down the steepest and iciest hill with a chicken, there is always a thrill—and sometimes an injury—to be had. Trille loves to share everything with Lena, even Auntie Granny's waffles. But when Lena has to move away and Auntie Granny leaves the world, it sometimes seems like nothing will ever be right again. The warmth of friendship and the support of family suffuse this lightly illustrated novel, proving that when times are tough, a little taste of sweetness can make all the difference.

Mars Evacuees By Sophia McDougall

From bestselling UK author comes one fresh and funny adventure-filled tween debut about kids evacuated to Mars! This laugh-out-loud series is packed with nonstop fun! When Earth comes under attack by aliens, hilarious heroine Alice Dare and a select group of kids are sent to Mars. But things get *very* strange when the adults disappear into thin air, the kids face down an alien named Thsaaa, and Alice and her friends must save the galaxy!

For when plucky twelve-year-old Alice Dare learns she's being taken out of the Muckling Abbott School for Girls and sent to another planet, no one knows what to expect. This is one wild ride that will have kids chuckling the whole way through

Lost in the Sun Lisa Graff

Everyone says that middle school is awful, but Trent knows nothing could be worse than the year he had in fifth grade, when a freak accident on Cedar Lake left one kid dead, and Trent with a brain full of terrible thoughts he can't get rid of. Trent's pretty positive the entire disaster was his fault, so for him middle school feels like a fresh start, a chance to prove to everyone that he's not the horrible screw-up they seem to think he is. If only Trent could make that fresh start *happen*.

It isn't until Trent gets caught up in the whirlwind that is Fallon Little—the girl with the mysterious scar across her face—that things begin to change. Because fresh starts aren't always easy. Even in baseball, when a fly ball gets lost in the sun, you have to remember to shift your position to find it.

Stella by Starlight by Sharon Draper

When the Ku Klux Klan's unwelcome reappearance rattles Stella's segregated southern town, bravery battles prejudice. Stella lives in the segregated South—in Bumblebee, North Carolina, to be exact about it. Some stores she can go into. Some stores she can't. Some folks are right pleasant. Others are a lot less so. To Stella, it sort of evens out, and heck, the Klan hasn't bothered them for years. But one late night, later than she should ever be up, much less wandering around outside, Stella and her little brother see something they're never supposed to see, something that is the first flicker of change to come, unwelcome change by any stretch of the imagination. As Stella's community—her world—is upended, she decides to fight fire with fire. And she learns that ashes don't necessarily signify an end.

Roller Girl by Victoria Jameson

For most of her twelve years, Astrid has done everything with her best friend Nicole. But after Astrid falls in love with roller derby and signs up for derby camp, Nicole decides to go to dance camp instead. And so begins the most difficult summer of Astrid's life as she struggles to keep up with the older girls at camp, hang on to the friend she feels slipping away, and cautiously embark on a new friendship. As the end of summer nears and her first roller derby bout (and junior high!) draws closer, Astrid realizes that maybe she *is* strong enough to handle the bout, a lost friendship, and middle school... in short, strong enough to be a roller girl. In this graphic novel debut that earned a Newbery Honor and five starred reviews, real-life derby girl Victoria Jamieson has created an inspiring coming-of-age story about friendship, perseverance, and girl power!

Echo by Pam Munoz Ryan

Lost and alone in a forbidden forest, Otto meets three mysterious sisters and suddenly finds himself entwined in a puzzling quest involving a prophecy, a promise, and a harmonica. Decades later, Friedrich in Germany, Mike in Pennsylvania, and Ivy in California each, in turn, become interwoven when the very same harmonica lands in their lives. All the children face daunting challenges: rescuing a father, protecting a brother, holding a family together. And ultimately, pulled by the invisible thread of destiny, their suspenseful solo stories converge in an orchestral crescendo.

Richly imagined and masterfully crafted, *Echo* pushes the boundaries of genre, form, and storytelling innovation to create a wholly original novel that will resound in your heart long after the last note has been struck.

Each Little Bird that Sings By Deborah Wiles

Ten-year-old Comfort Snowberger has attended 247 funerals. But that's not surprising, considering that her family runs the town funeral home. And even though Great-uncle Edisto keeled over with a heart attack and Great-great-aunt Florentine dropped dead--just like that--six months later, Comfort knows how to deal with loss, or so she thinks. She's more concerned with avoiding her crazy cousin Peach and trying to figure out why her best friend, Declaration, suddenly won't talk to her. Life is full of surprises. And the biggest one of all is learning what it takes to handle them.

Deborah Wiles has created a unique, funny, and utterly real cast of characters in this heartfelt, and quintessentially Southern coming-of-age novel. Comfort will charm young readers with her wit, her warmth, and her struggles as she learns about life, loss, and ultimately, triumph.

The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick

Orphan, clock keeper, and thief, Hugo lives in the walls of a busy Paris train station, where his survival depends on secrets and anonymity. But when his world suddenly interlocks with an eccentric, bookish girl and a bitter old man who runs a toy booth in the station, Hugo's undercover life, and his most precious secret, are put in jeopardy. A cryptic drawing, a treasured notebook, a stolen key, a mechanical man, and a hidden message from Hugo's dead father form the backbone of this intricate, tender, and spellbinding mystery.

Worth by A. Lafaye

Before the accident Nathaniel's life seemed pretty good. His help around the farm made his father proud. But now, with a busted leg, Nathaniel can't do farmwork anymore, so his father adopts another son through the Orphan Train. Feeling replaced and useless, Nathaniel attends school for the first time. Meanwhile, sturdy and strong John is able to do the work that earns Pa's attention.

But the truth is, John Worth has his own set of troubles. He is treated more like a servant than a son. Kept awake at night by nightmares of his family's death, he remembers having a pa who took pride in him. But now he has no one, until a community battle and a special book reveal a potential friend -- and a chance for understanding.

Ida B: . . . and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World by Katherine Hannigan

Ida B. Applewood believes there is never enough time for fun.

That's why she's so happy to be homeschooled and to spend every free second outside with the trees and the brook.

Then some not-so-great things happen in her world. Ida B has to go back to that Place of Slow but Sure Body-Cramping, Mind-Numbing, Fun-Killing Torture—school. She feels her heart getting smaller and smaller and hardening into a sharp, black stone.

How can things go from righter than right to a million miles beyond wrong? Can Ida B put together a plan to get things back to just-about perfect again?

Zorgamazoo by Robert P. Weston

Are You a Believer in Fanciful Things? In Pirates and Dragons and Creatures and Kings? Then sit yourself down in a comfortable seat, with maybe some cocoa and something to eat, and I'll spin you the tale of Katrina Katrell, a girl full of courage (and daring, as well!), who down in the subway, under the ground, saw something fantastical roaming around . . . What was it she saw? I'd rather not say. (Who's ever heard of a Zorgle, anyway?)

But if you are curious, clever and brave, if intrepid adventure is something you crave, then open this book and I'll leave it to you to uncover the secret of ZORGAMAZOO! Join Morty the Zorgle and Katrina on a fantastically illustrated, *you'll-wanna-read-every-word-aloud*, sophisticated rhyming adventure for kids of all ages!

Ralph S. Mouse by Beverly Cleary

In this third and final Mouse novel from Newbery Medal-winning author Beverly Cleary, Ralph heads to school to see what humans do all day . . . and to discover what the S in Ralph S. Mouse stands for!

With his rowdy cousins constantly wearing out his motorcycle and the Mountain View Inn manager threatening to take care of the mouse infestation once and for all, Ralph decides it's time to get away for a while. He convinces his human friend Ryan to take him along to school, where Ralph instantly becomes the center of attention. But when Ryan's class decides to see how smart Ralph is by making him run a maze, the usually confident mouse starts to fret. What if he's not as clever as he thought?

Sarah, Plain and Tall By Patricia MacLachlan

This Newbery Medal-winning book and children's literature classic is perfect for fans of Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House on the Prairie books, historical fiction, and timeless stories using rich and beautiful language. *Sarah, Plain and Tall* gently explores themes of abandonment, loss, and love. The 30th Anniversary edition includes author Patricia MacLachlan's Newbery speech, a discussion guide, and a reading list.

Set in the late nineteenth century and told from young Anna's point of view, *Sarah, Plain and Tall* tells the story of how Sarah Elisabeth Wheaton comes from Maine to the prairie to answer Papa's advertisement for a wife and mother. Before Sarah arrives, Anna and her younger brother, Caleb, wait and wonder. Will Sarah be nice? Will she sing? Will she stay?

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin

In the valley of Fruitless mountain, a young girl named Minli lives in a ramshackle hut with her parents. In the evenings, her father regales her with old folktales of the Jade Dragon and the Old Man on the Moon, who knows the answers to all of life's questions. Inspired by these stories, Minli sets off on an extraordinary journey to find the Old Man on the Moon to ask him how she can change her family's fortune. She encounters an assorted cast of characters and magical creatures along the way, including a dragon who accompanies her on her quest for the ultimate answer.

A wondrous story of adventure, faith, and friendship, fantasy crossed with Chinese folklore with beautiful illustrations, printed in full-color, accompanying the text throughout.