Book Title: The Tale of Despereaux by Kate DiCamillo

From School Library Journal

Grade 3 Up- A charming story of unlikely heroes whose destinies entwine to bring about a joyful resolution. Foremost is Despereaux, a diminutive mouse who, as depicted in Ering's pencil drawings, is one of the most endearing of his ilk ever to appear in children's books. His mother, who is French, declares him to be "such the disappointment" at his birth and the rest of his family seems to agree that he is very odd: his ears are too big and his eyes open far too soon and they all expect him to die quickly. Of course, he doesn't. Then there is the human Princess Pea, with whom Despereaux falls deeply (one might say desperately) in love. She appreciates him despite her father's prejudice against rodents. Next is Roscuro, a rat with an uncharacteristic love of light and soup. Both these predilections get him into trouble. And finally, there is Miggery Sow, a peasant girl so dim that she believes she can become a princess. With a masterful hand, DiCamillo weaves four story lines together in a witty, suspenseful narrative that begs to be read aloud. In her authorial asides, she hearkens back to literary traditions as old as those used by Henry Fielding. In her observations of the political machinations and follies of rodent and human societies, she reminds adult readers of George Orwell. But the unpredictable twists of plot, the fanciful characterizations, and the sweetness of tone are DiCamillo's own. This expanded fairy tale is entertaining, heartening, and, above all, great fun.
*Miriam Lang Budin, Chappaqua Public Library, NY*

Book Title: Three Times Lucky by Sheila Turnage

##### Kirkus Reviews

What do you get when you combine Because of Winn-Dixie's heart with the mystery and action of Holes? You get an engaging, spirit-lifting and unforgettable debut for young readers. Turnage introduces readers to the homey yet exotic world of Tupelo Landing, N.C., well-populated with one-of-a-kind characters. A stranger with justice on his mind has just arrived in town, and Hurricane Amy is on its way. Rising sixth-grader Mo LoBeau leads the cast through a series of clues as the whole town tries to figure out who among them might be a murderer. The novel's opening lines reveal the unflappable Mo LoBeau as a latter-day Philip Marlowe: "Trouble cruised into Tupelo Landing at exactly seven minutes past noon on Wednesday, the third of June, flashing a gold badge and driving a Chevy Impala the color of dirt." This is the first of many genius turns of phrases. Pairing the heartbreaking sadness of children who don't get their fair share from parents with the hilarity of small-town life, Turnage achieves a wickedly awesome tale of an 11-year-old girl with more spirit and gumption than folks twice her age. Mo LoBeau is destined to become a standout character in children's fiction. Readers may find they never want to leave Tupelo Landing.

Book Title: Splendors and Glooms by Laura Amy Schlitz

From School Library Journal

Gr 4-8-Victorian London could be a magical place: horse-drawn carriages, puppet shows, elaborate upper-class houses. Of course it could also be miserable: fog, filthy streets, shabby hovels where too many people live in too few rooms. Schlitz conjures both the magic and the mundane here. For Clara's 12th birthday, her parents hire a street performer to give a puppet show in their home. The puppeteer, Grisini, is so talented that he appears to be magical. His two orphaned assistants, Lizzie Rose and Parsefall, are envious of Clara's home and all its comforts. Clara vanishes the night of the puppet show, and Grisini and his assistants are the prime suspects. Then Grisini disappears, and Lizzie Rose and Parsefall must seek out the missing girl, with the sinister and mysterious help of a wealthy old witch. Schlitz uses such evocative language that readers will practically smell dirty London and then be relieved by the crisp, cold air in the countryside around the witch's crumbling mansion. The characters are recognizable tropes: the witch is rotting from the inside out; the orphans may be dirty and ill-bred, but they have spirit and pluck; the little rich girl is actually sad and lonely; the skinny puppeteer and the overly dramatic landlady are recognizably Dickensian. Yet, they are so well drawn that they are never caricatures, but people whom readers will cheer for, be terrified of, or grow to like. The plot is rich with supernatural and incredibly suspenseful elements. Fans of mystery, magic, and historical fiction will all relish this novel.-Geri Diorio, Ridgefield Library, CT

Book Title: I Funny by James Patterson

From School Library Journal

Gr 4-7-Jamie Grimm is a funny guy, obsessed with creating and collecting joke material. He studies all of the top comedians and tries out his jokes on everyone, be it his classmates or the customers at his Uncle Frankie's diner. He hopes to enter the Planet's Funniest Kid Comic Contest even though just the thought of it makes him a nervous wreck. Readers learn that humor for Jamie is a means of survival-things aren't easy for him. He doesn't like to talk about why it all happened, but he had to move to a new city, to live with "the Smileys," his very unfunny aunt and uncle. At Long Beach Middle School, he is treated horribly by the resident bully. Steve Kosgrov is not only a notorious meany, but is also Jamie's new adoptive brother. Steve gets his kicks by locking him out in the cold and leaving him stuck in a sand dune unable to move. Jamie isn't able to move because he uses a wheelchair-he can't walk at all. The grimness of his situation is relieved by two good buddies, his encouraging Uncle Frankie, and his ever-present ability to see humor in every situation. Patterson's tale includes twists and turns that make for an engrossing read. Readers will be on Jamie's side all the way, cheering him on in the comedy contest, and also to win the girl of his dreams. Line drawings are sprinkled throughout, adding more humorous details.

-Diane McCabe, John Muir Elementary, Santa Monica, CA

 Book Title: Bomb by Steve Sheinkin

From School Library Journal

Gr 5 Up-"Harry Gold was right: This is a big story." So begins this depiction of the "creation-and theft-of the deadliest weapon ever invented." As he did in The Notorious Benedict Arnold (Roaring Brook, 2010), Sheinkin has again brought his superior talent for storytelling to bear in what is truly a gripping account of discovery, espionage, and revolutionary changes in both physics and the modern world. This fascinating tale, packed with a wide cast of characters, focuses mainly on three individuals: spy for the Soviets Harry Gold, leader of the Manhattan Project J. Robert Oppenheimer, and Knut Haukelid, who sabotaged German bomb efforts while working for the Norwegian resistance. Sheinkin skillfully combines lucid, conversational snapshots of the science behind the atomic bomb with a fast-paced narrative of the remarkable people who made it possible and attempted to steal it. Handsomely designed and loaded with archival photos and primary-source documents, the accessible volume lays out how the bomb was envisioned and brought to fruition. While the historical information and hard facts presented here will likely be new to the intended audience, they in no way overwhelm readers or detract from the thoroughly researched, well-documented account. It reads like an international spy thriller, and that's the beauty of it.-Brian Odom, Pelham Public Library, AL

Book Title: Divergent by Veronica Roth

##### Publishers Weekly

In this edgy debut (definitely not for the fainthearted), first in a trilogy, promising author Roth tells the riveting and complex story of a teenage girl forced to choose, at age 16, between her routinized, selfless family and the adventurous, unrestrained future she longs for. Beatrice "Tris" Prior lives in crumbling dystopian Chicago, where citizens are divided into five factions—Candor, Abnegation, Dauntless, Amity, and Erudite—depending on their beliefs, passions, and loyalties. When Tris forsakes her Abnegation family to become one of the wild, fearless Dauntless, she must confront her deepest fears, learn to trust her fellow initiates, and guard the ominous secret that she is actually a Divergent, with the strengths of multiple factions, and is therefore a target of dangerously controlling leaders. Roth's descriptions of Tris's initiation process are as spellbinding as they are violent, while the tremulous romance between Tris and her protective and demanding instructor, Four, unfurls with heart-stopping tenderness. For those who loved The Hunger Games and are willing to brave the sometimes sadistic tests of strength and courage Tris must endure, the reward is a memorable, unpredictable journey from which it is nearly impossible to turn away.

Book Title: Prisoner B-3087 by Alan Gratz

From School Library Journal

Gr 6-10-"If I had known what the next six years of my life were going to be like, I would have eaten more. I wouldn't have complained about brushing my teeth, or taking a bath, or going to bed at eight o'clock every night." Yanek Gruener was 10 years old when the German army invaded Poland in 1939 and trapped his family inside the walls of the Jewish ghetto in Krakow. Over the course of World War II, he saw his parents deported by the Nazis and survived 10 different concentration camps. Through Gratz's spare, persistent prose, the story of the boy's early life unfolds with the urgency and directness necessary for survivor stories. While some liberties have been taken, with the permission of Gruener and his wife, Ruth, also a survivor, the experiences and images come directly from the Grueners' collective memories of the war. An author's note provides further biographical information. A powerful story, well told.

-Sara Saxton, Tuzzy Consortium Library, Barrow, AKα(c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC

Book Title: The Thief Lord by Cornelia Funke

From Publishers Weekly

Wacky characters bring energy to this translation of an entertaining German novel about thieving children, a disguise-obsessed detective and a magical merry-go-round. After their mother dies, 12-year-old Prosper and his brother, Bo, five, flee from Hamburg to Venice (an awful aunt plans to adopt only Bo). They live in an abandoned movie theater with several other street children under the care of the Thief Lord, a cocky youth who claims to rob "the city's most elegant houses." A mysterious man hires the Thief Lord to steal a wooden wing, which the kids later learn has broken off a long-lost merry-go-round said to make "adults out of children and children out of adults," but the plan alters when Victor, the detective Aunt Esther hired to track the brothers, discovers their camp and reveals that the Thief Lord is actually from a wealthy family. There are a lot of story lines to follow, and the pacing is sometimes off (readers may feel that Funke spends too little time on what happens when the children find the carousel, and too much on the ruse they pull on Prosper's aunt). But between kindhearted Victor and his collection of fake beards, the Thief Lord in his mask and high-heeled boots, and a rascally street kid who loves to steal, Prosper's new world abounds with colorful characters. The Venetian setting is ripe for mystery and the city's alleys and canals ratchet up the suspense in the chase scenes. Ages 9-12.

Book Title: Counting by 7’s By Holly Goldberg Sloan

From School Library Journal

Gr 5-8–Twelve-year-old Willow Chase lived with her adoptive parents in Bakersfield, California. There in the midst of the high desert, she grew a garden in her backyard, her sanctuary. She was excited about starting a new school, hoping this time she might fit in, might find a friend. Willow had been identified in preschool as highly gifted, most of the time causing confusion and feelings of ineptness in her teachers. Now at her new school she is accused of cheating because no one has ever finished the state proficiency test in just 17 minutes, let alone gotten a perfect score. Her reward is behavioral counseling with Dell Duke, an ineffectual counselor with organizational and social issues of his own. She does make a friend when Mai Nguyen brings her brother, Quang-ha, to his appointment, and their lives begin to intertwine when Willow's parents are killed in an auto accident. For the second time in her life she is an orphan, forced to find a “new normal.” She is taken in temporarily by Mai's mother, who must stay ahead of Social Services. While Willow sees herself as just an observer, trying to figure out the social norms of regular family life, she is actually a catalyst for change, bringing together unsuspecting people and changing their lives forever. The narration cleverly shifts among characters as the story evolves. Willow's philosophical and intellectual observations contrast with Quang-ha's typical teenage boy obsessions and the struggles of a Vietnamese family fighting to live above the poverty level. Willow's story is one of renewal, and her journey of rebuilding the ties that unite people as a family will stay in readers' hearts long after the last page.