

## Teen Book Club

Books Requested and Ordered for Teen Book Club

Book Club meets each Wednesday from 4-6:00

August 2009: Book of the month—**SOLD**: by Patricia McCormick

### **Publishers Weekly:**

"This hard-hitting novel told in spare free verse poems exposes the plight of a 13-year-old Nepali girl sold into sexual slavery. Through Lakshmi's innocent first-person narrative, McCormick (Cut) reveals her gradual awakening to the harshness of the world around her. Even in their poverty-stricken rural home, Lakshmi finds pleasure in the beauty of the Himalayan mountains, the sight of Krishna, her betrothed, and the cucumbers she lovingly tends, then sells at market. After a monsoon wipes out their crops, her profligate stepfather sells Lakshmi to an "auntie" bound for the city. During her journey, the girl acquires a visual and verbal vocabulary of things she has never seen before: electric lights, a TV. Soon a hard-won sense of irony invades her narrative, too. Early on, a poem entitled "Everything I Need to Know" marks her step into womanhood (after her first menstrual cycle); later, "Everything I Need to Know Now" lists her rules as an initiated prostitute. In her village, Lakshmi had rebelliously purchased her first Coca-Cola for her mother, after her stepfather sold her; later, in Calcutta, she overhears two johns talking and realizes, "the price of a bottle of Coca-Cola at Bajai Sita's store./ That is what he paid for [a turn with] me." The author beautifully balances the harshness of brothel life with the poignant relationships among its residents; especially well-drawn characters include the son of one of the prostitutes, who teaches Lakshmi to read and speak some English and Hindi, and clever Monica, who earns her freedom but gets sent back by her shamed family. Readers will admire Lakshmi's grit and intelligence, and be grateful for a ray of hope for this memorable heroine at book's end. Ages 12-up. (Sept.) Copyright 2006 Reed Business Information. "

September 2009: Book of the mth—*Breathing Underwater* by Alex Flinn

### **Children's Literature**

This finely crafted first novel is a realistic and poignant portrayal of a young man seemingly destined to perpetuate the cycle of domestic violence. To the outside world, Nick Andreas is a sixteen-year-old rich kid. An athlete as well as honor student, Nick is one of the coolest guys in school. And he has a one-in-million girlfriend in Caitlin. One would never think that he is a victim of his father's violent attacks. When Nick's controlling behavior causes him to slap Caitlin, Nick finds himself ostracized by his fellow students, and he has a restraining order against him. As part of his sentence, Nick is required to attend counseling and to keep a personal journal. Between the counseling sessions, the reflective journal entries and the narrative, Ms. Finn comes as close to getting inside her character's head as novelists of greater experience can hope to achieve. She pulls no punches here; the ugliness and brutality of domestic violence, as well as the sheer mountainous task of breaking the cycle, are depicted with unusual candor. In the end, Nick's self-examination provides some reason for hope, but refreshingly, there is no sugarcoated happy ending. 2001, HarperCollins, \$15.95 and \$15.89. Ages 13 up. Reviewer: Christopher Moning

## School Library Journal

Gr 9 Up-Nick, an upper-income, popular, straight-A high school student, not only copes with his father's verbal and physical abuse, but his own abusive behavior toward his girlfriend, Caitlin, in this novel by Alex Flinn (HarperCollins, 2001). After a court appearance, he must regularly attend group therapy sessions with members across the social strata, and keep a daily journal in order to stay out of jail. Through these experiences, his barriers and prejudices break down and he is able to begin his road to recovery on many levels. Narrator Jon Cryer brings Nick to life with his restrained anger, pain, and confusion. Listeners begin to understand the insidious logic Nick uses to justify the "slap" Caitlin "deserves," and how easily it can spiral out of control. Cryer's subtle vocal inflections with sarcasm and sense of timing, especially pauses, are superb; he allows us to hear the cruelty in a simple statement by virtue of its tone. Trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and one of the Hughes Brat Pack (*Pretty in Pink*), his acting skills span a wide range of roles. The voices of other characters, while integral to the story, are not memorable. This may have to do more with the story itself than the narrator's abilities to perform this task. The story never lets up; anger permeates it from beginning to end. Suitable for high school students, this could be a powerful tool when integrated with the curriculum.-Tina Hudak, St. Bernard's School, Riverdale, MD Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information.

October 2009: Book of the month—*Glass* by Ellen Hopkins

## Publishers Weekly

Hopkins's hard-hitting free-verse novel, a sequel, picks up where *Crank* left off. Kristina now lives in her mother's Reno home with her baby, but constantly dreams of "getting/ high. Strung. Getting/ out of this deep well/ of monotony I'm/ slowly drowning in." When her former connection turns her on to "glass": "Mexican meth, as/ good as it comes. maybe 90 percent pure," Kristina quickly loses control again. She gets kicked out of her house after her baby gets hurt on her watch, starts dealing for the Mexican Mafia ("No problem. I'll play straight/ with them. Cash and carry") and eventually even robs her mother's house with her equally addicted boyfriend. The author expertly relays both plot points and drug facts through verse, painting Kristina's self-narrated self-destruction through clean verses ("My face is hollow-/cheeked, spiced with sores"). She again experiments with form, sometimes writing two parallel poems that can be read together or separately (sometimes these experiments seem a bit cloying, as in "Santa Is Coming," a concrete poem in the shape of a Christmas tree). But in the end, readers will be amazed at how quickly they work their way through this thick book-and by how much they learn about crystal meth and the toll it takes, both on addicts and their families. Ages 14-up. (Aug.)

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## VOYA

Whether it is called crank, glass, ice, or crystal, crystal methamphetamine is a highly addictive and readily available drug. Kristina Georgia Snow calls it the monster and has a perilous love-hate relationship with the substance. Readers first met Kristina in *Crank* (Simon & Schuster, 2004/VOYA February 2005), which told the story of her introduction to the drug by her addict father, her adoption of her wild and sexy alter-ego Bree, her descent into the monster's clutches, and the brutal date-rape that resulted in pregnancy. At seventeen, with baby Hunter to care for and a convenience-store job, Kristina at last considers herself strong and in charge of her life. She will decide when she indulges, using only enough to help her get through each day. Now with a tiny, helpless person who can give her the unconditional love that she craves, she can control the monster that has held her in its grip-or can she? Visiting her estranged father reintroduces her to the drug, and meeting Trey, seemingly the boy of her dreams, ensnares her still more deeply in the monster's clutches. Abandoning Hunter, her family, and her efforts to

straighten out her life, Kristina becomes Bree again, falling into a destructive cycle of drugs, sex, and crime. Told in spare and intense free verse, incorporating dialogues, concrete poems, and monologues, Kristina's compelling and devastating story is a more honest and better-written *Go Ask Alice* (Prentice-Hall, 1971) for the millennium. Older teens will be enthralled by this highly-recommended cautionary tale.

November 2009: Book of the month—*Inexcusable* by Chris Lynch

### **Publishers Weekly**

High school senior Keir Sarafian may remind Lynch fans of Earl Pryor, the narrator of *Who the Man*. Though more intelligent than Earl, Keir is also an unreliable narrator, whose reporting belies to readers the unintended results of his ungainly strength and impulsive actions. As the novel opens, something horrible has happened: "The way it looks is not the way it is. Gigi Boudakian is screaming at me so fearsomely." Intervening chapters in flashback trace how Keir and Gigi, who were childhood friends, arrived at this moment, which readers soon gather is a date rape from Gigi's perspective, and a natural progression of shared intimacy from Keir's viewpoint. Lynch plunges readers into Keir's psyche in a way that makes him almost sympathetic, if frightening. On the football field earlier in the school year, Keir tackled a receiver and crippled him, but in his mind, he was only doing what he was trained to do (the opponents "were getting too comfortable. Too lazy, spoiled, entitled.... It is inexcusable"). Later in the novel, when he learns that his older sisters (he "talks about [them]... like [they were] angels") simply boycotted his graduation (not absent due to exams, as they had said), his world crumbles. With his portrait of Keir, Lynch makes it nearly impossible for readers to see the world in black-and-white terms. This book is guaranteed to prompt heated discussion. Ages 13-up. (Nov.) Copyright 2005 Reed Business Information.

### **School Library Journal**

Gr 9 Up-Keir is a senior who fancies himself a "lovable rogue." So do his widowed father, his older sisters, and his classmates. He likes being liked; he just doesn't do well with involvement. Keir would never do anything to hurt anyone intentionally-or would he? When he tackles and cripples a member of an opposing football team, it's determined to be an "accident"-one that earns him the good-humored nickname, "Killer." When he and his buddies destroy a town statue, they consider it a high-spirited, funny prank. When he gets drunk, the alcohol abuse is dismissed as "silly, harmless drinks," and drugs at parties are "strictly recreational." And when he date rapes the girl he thinks he loves, at first he convinces himself that "the way it looks is not the way it is." Keir's first-person narrative chillingly exposes the rationalization process that the troubled teen goes through to persuade himself and those around him of his innocence. Characters are clearly developed through immediately post-rape chapters that alternate with flashbacks of Keir's experiences and perceptions leading up to that point. As compelling as Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (Farrar, 1999), though with a different point of view, this finely crafted and thought-provoking page-turner carefully conveys that it is simply inexcusable to whitewash wrongs, and that those responsible should (and hopefully will) pay the price.-Diane P. Tuccillo, City of Mesa Library, AZ Copyright 2005 Reed Business Information.

**December 2009:** Book of the month—*Identical* by Ellen Hopkins

### **Publishers Weekly**

Using free verse as her vehicle, Hopkins (*Crank, Glass*) takes readers on a harrowing ride into the psyches of 16-year-old identical twins Kaeleigh and Raeanne, both of whom are racing toward self-destruction. The girls' family appears picture-perfect. Their father is a prominent judge, their mother is running for Congress, and both girls do well in school. But ever since an accident, "Mom doesn't love anyone./ She is marble. Beautiful./ Frigid. Easily stained/ by her family. What's left/ of us, anyway. We are corpses." Raeanne seeks escape in sex and drugs; Kaeleigh binges and cuts herself. Brief, gutsy confessions reveal a history of sexual abuse and emotional neglect, and it's not clear that both girls will survive it. Hopkins's verse is not only lean and sinuous, it also demonstrates a mastery of technique. Strategically placed concrete verse includes a poem about revenge shaped like a double-edged sword; in another, about jealousy, the lines form one heart reflecting another, until a rupture breaks the symmetry at the bottom. Often, the twins' entries mirror each other, on facing pages: although used differently in the two poems, the same key words are set off in corresponding stanzas ("think./ How/ different/ life./ could be" reads one set of key words). Those for whom *Uncle Vampire* means something will anticipate the still-breathless climax; all others, including most of the target audience, will be shocked. Ages 14-up. (Aug.)

### **School Library Journal**

#### **Gr 9 Up**

Identical teen twins Kaeleigh and Raeanne share a picture-perfect California life that is rank with dark, dangerous secrets under its surface. Their mother, who is running for Congress, leaves them at home with their father, a district court judge who is addicted to liquor and OxyContin. Daddy regularly molests Kaeleigh, using her as a stand-in for his absentee wife, and controls every aspect of her life. Raeanne sees every detail and reacts to her father's favoritism by acting out sexually and getting high on pot whenever possible. Written in free verse from alternating viewpoints, *Identical* tells the twins' story in intimate and often-graphic detail. Hopkins packs in multiple issues including eating disorders, drug abuse, date rape, alcoholism, sexual abuse, and self-mutilation as she examines a family that "puts the dys in dysfunction." The tension builds slowly and subtly, erupting in a shattering climax of psychological disintegration and breakthrough that reveals the truth about the twins and their father's own childhood secrets. Gritty and compelling, this is not a comfortable read, but its keen insights make it hard to put down.—Joyce Adams Burner, *Hillcrest Library, Prairie Village, KS*

**January 2010:** Book of the month—*Ghost World* by Daniel Clowes

### **School Library Journal**

YA--Eight interconnected stories about two teens. Enid and Rebecca have been friends for so long that it's difficult for either of them to let the other grow or change. Now Enid will probably leave their working-class neighborhood and go away to college and Rebecca cannot accept this change in their relationship. Enid is the more radical and dramatic of the two, the one who talks a male friend into escorting her into an X-rated "adult" store. Rebecca is not so much a follower as simply more circumspect. She's the one who reasons that Josh, a friend they're both guilty of provoking sexually, really deserves to sleep with one of them after all the teasing he's weathered. While the vocabulary here is raunchy, it is accurate for the characters. These realistic 18-year-olds don't always talk nice and don't always act nice but they do have moral fiber underneath their tough-girl exteriors. It's just that they're at a point in life and a place in society where exteriors are a lot more important than nice. This is a book with distinct appeal to urban

high school students, but it's certainly not for their younger brothers and sisters. Depending on where your comics are shelved, add this one where the age-appropriate audience is most likely to find it. The artwork is evocative and tasteful and the book can serve as a bridge to more literary stories of friendships.--Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA

**February 2010:** Book of the month—***Thirteen Reasons Why*** by Jay Asher

### **School Library Journal**

Gr 7 Up High school senior Clay Jensen receives seven audiotapes in the mail. They contain the story of why Hannah Baker, a girl he adored, committed suicide. Each side is devoted to a person in her life and a reason for her death. Clay also has a map of places featured on the recordings. He spends a torturous night listening and wandering, unearthing the depth and causes of Hannah's unhappiness. His torment is private-how did he hurt a girl he treasured from afar-and empathic-her hurts and betrayals tear him apart. Clay's pain is palpable and exquisitely drawn in gripping, casually poetic prose. The complex and soulful characters expose astoundingly rich and singularly teenage inner lives, with emotions as raw as cut wrists. The mood is more serious than somber, and Clay's thoughtful synthesis of Hannah's increasingly explosive narrative saves the novel from melodrama. In fact, Hannah's and Clay's narratives are woven together so seamlessly that the characters appear to converse naturally from opposite sides of mortality. Compounded, the tapes build the plot in increasingly tense increments-Hannah's story is a freight train of despair and suspense that picks up speed as it moves to her final undoing. Like the protagonist in John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (Dutton, 2005), Hannah is an animate ghost; Clay's bereaved voice bears witness to her tragedy. The episodic structure is nicely suited to reluctant readers, but the breakneck pace and dizzying emotion are the true source of this novel's irresistible readability at all levels.-Johanna Lewis, *New York Public Library*

**March 2010:** Book of the month—***Pretty Dead*** by Francesca Lia Block

This book is available for pre-order September 22<sup>nd</sup>

### **Product Details**

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Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers

Pub. Date: September 22, 2009

Sales Rank: 142,414

**Age Range: 12 and up**

**Pretty Dead is pretty amazing.**

★★★★★ Reader Rating See Detailed Ratings

Posted June 1, 2009, 1:21 PM EST: I was lucky enough to get an advance copy of this book and it was well worth the read. The artful writing of Ms. Block was a joy to experience and the story a real page turner. Watching Char experience what it was like to be a vampire going through the ages was like looking at a painting. You could feel her emotions-grief, rage, love radiating through the pages. Her anger at her maker, the grief of losing her beloved brother at such a young age. Her love for Emily and Jared and finally the betrayal that changed everything. Read this book. It is a keeper.

**April 2010:** Book of the month—***Burned*** by Ellen Hopkins

**School Library Journal**

Gr 9 Up—Once again the author of *Crank* (S & S, 2004) has masterfully used verse to re-create the yearnings and emotions of a teenage girl trapped in tragic circumstances. Poems in varied formats captivate readers as they describe a teen's immobilizing fear of her abusive father, disgust with a church hierarchy that looks the other way, hope that new relationships can counteract despair, joy in the awakening of romance, and sorrow when demons ultimately prevail. Pattyn Von Stratten is the eldest of eight sisters in a stern Mormon household where women are relegated to servitude and silence. She has a glimpse of normal teenage life when Derek takes an interest in her, but her father stalks them in the desert and frightens him away. Unable to stifle her rage, Pattyn acts out as never before and is suspended from school. Sent to live with an aunt on a remote Nevada ranch, she meets Ethan and discovers "forever love." Woven into the story of a teen's struggle to find her destiny is the story of her aunt's barrenness following government mismanagement of atomic testing and protests over nuclear waste disposal. Readers will become immersed in Pattyn's innermost thoughts as long-held secrets are revealed, her father's beatings take a toll on her mother and sister, and Pattyn surrenders to Ethan's love with predictable and disturbing consequences. Writing for mature teens, Hopkins creates compelling characters in horrific situations.—Kathy Lehman, Thomas Dale High School Library, Chester, VA Copyright 2006 Reed Business Information.

**Kirkus Reviews**

In cutting free-verse, 16-year-old Pattyn offers first-person narration of religious oppression and physical violence. Her Mormon church dictates that women grow up powerless. An entrancing sexual dream and a non-Mormon boyfriend make Pattyn feel giddy but guilty. Will she burn in hell? Exiled (for punishment) to a desert ranch, Pattyn blossoms under the respectful care of Aunt J and finds storybook love with neighbor Ethan. But at summer's end, she returns home to a situation even worse than before. Alcoholic Dad now beats the children (rather than just Mom); Pattyn, badly whipped, tries to hang on until she can leave home. But a heart-sinking pregnancy (Ethan's condom broke once) prompts an escape attempt that goes horribly wrong. Bereaved and desperate with nowhere to turn, Pattyn plans a brutal revenge. Hopkins's incisive verses sometimes read in several directions as they paint the beautiful Nevada desert and the consequences of both nuclear testing at Yucca Mountain and Pattyn's tragic family history. Sharp and heartbreaking. (Fiction. YA)

**May 2010:** Book of the month—***Things Change*** by Patrick Jones

**Matthew Weaver - VOYA**

Talk about a love story for the ages: Johanna is an insecure high school junior who opens the book with an uncharacteristic act of romantic pursuit. The object of her desire, Paul, is a class clown with a fear of abandonment and a tendency toward violence, making him total bad news wrapped up in an appealing package—a dangerous mix. In no time at all, Paul and Johanna have become each other's entire worlds, to the chagrin of her parents. Their story is a very tough one to read, primarily because the reader gets so frustrated with the choices Johanna makes to remain with Paul as long as she does. Fortunately Johanna ultimately realizes what she has gotten herself into. The question is, how will she get out? As aggravating and as stupid as Johanna appears here, there are young women—and adult women—in exactly the same situation. If just one of them reads this book and recognizes that she has hooked herself to a louse—albeit one with apparent redeeming traits such as a sense of humor or a tormented soul—and gets out of that relationship, then the book has done what the author obviously set out to do. VOYA Codes 4Q 3P J S (Better than most, marred only by occasional lapses; Will appeal with pushing; Junior

High, defined as grades 7 to 9; Senior High, defined as grades 10 to 12). 2004, Walker, 224p., Ages 12 to 18.

### **School Library Journal**

Gr 8 Up-Johanna, 16, is a straight-A student with near perfect SATs. She adores Paul, a handsome senior, from a shy, self-conscious distance. When he begins to return her affections, she's dumbfounded and ecstatic. Then he hits her. Scared, she leaves him. He promises to change. Her heart and fragile ego win over her brain and self-respect and she takes him back. All the while he drinks and writes maudlin, self-pitying letters to his dead dad. As Janet Tashjian did in *Fault Line* (Holt, 2003), Jones adds an abusive father to give his teenage abuser pathos. The great difference between the two stories is in the deftness with which Tashjian created a truly charming abuser. Jones states over and over that Paul is funny, but often fails to show this in his interactions with Johanna. His quips are so smarmy and ingratiating that readers doubt her intelligence just because she laughs. The characters often speak without contractions, so the dialogue can be more stiffly editorial than believably teenage. Images are repeated as motifs, but most are more tiresome than meaningful. The constant references to Bruce Springsteen, which may confuse or annoy a 2004 teen, fail to move the plot or establish mood; the music serves only as a cheap symbol of Paul's anger. Johanna's struggle, pain, and final liberation are more convincingly written, and the novel shines in her scenes with Kara, a popular girl who suspects Paul's abuse. An earnest though clumsily told story.-Johanna Lewis, New York Public Library Copyright 2004 Reed Business Information.