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## A Closer Look: Children's and Young Adult Literature

Elena .

*Elena Reads and Reviews*

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# A Closer Look: Children's and Young Adult Literature

by Elena

*We are pleased to introduce our readers to a very special guest columnist this issue, Elena, of Elena Reads and Reviews ([www.elenareads.com](http://www.elenareads.com)). Elena is a Michigan student who has been blogging about books and authors for the last two years. In this column, we share an interview with Elena about her work and then share several of the reviews she has published on her blog.*



Elena

**MRJ Editors: Your blog is impressive! Can tell us a little about how you got started and why you are so passionate about sharing your book love?**

**Elena:** I've always loved reading, even as a little kid. I started reading my first books at around age two or three and read my first chapter books at four. It was actually author and teacher Lisa Rose's idea for me to start a book blog once she saw how much I loved reading. I love reading and want to show others that reading is awesome, and there is a book for everyone.

**MRJ Editors: There are so many good and not-so-good books out there. How do you choose which books to review?**

**Elena:** I rarely give up on books. Even if they're not the best, I try to read the whole thing. I choose the books I review mostly based on whether they look diverse, because my blog is mostly for diverse books. If I find a book that catches my eye (it might be a cool cover, interesting title, or author I know), I will read the back or inside where the summary of the story is. If it seems good, I will read it and review it.

**MRJ Editors: You've had the opportunity to interview some great authors. What was that like?**

**Elena:** I get super excited to interview some authors because it's like talking to a celebrity. It's cool because they're doing something that is my dream—to publish a book. Learning more about them helps me gain more confidence about writing a book and it's also just awesome to be able to talk to authors.

**MRJ Editors: A lot of teachers read this journal. What would you want to tell them about your blog?**

**Elena:** I have a big selection of reviews for almost every age. I mostly review books with diverse topics and strong girl characters. Also stories that include people of different races, religions, and abilities can be found on my blog. I specifically point out what books are good for classrooms, but really they all are.

**MRJ Editors: What advice do you have for other students that might want to read and review books?**

**Elena:** Read it. Tell people what you liked about the book and what it was about. Express your love to read and write by not only writing reviews but having fun with it because reading is fun. Enjoy blogging and make it a priority so that it is constantly updated.

**MRJ Editors: Is there anything else you would like us to tell our readers?**

**Elena:** Read. Read. Read some more. And follow Elena Reads on social media so you can learn about diverse books from a kid's point of view.

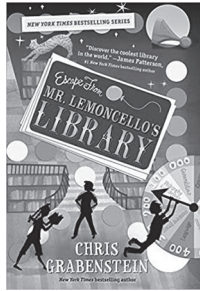
Instagram: @elenareads\_, Twitter: @elena\_reads, Facebook: @elenareads.co

*What follows are a selection of some of Elena's favorite book reviews. Elena has written far more reviews than we can share in this format, and we encourage readers to check out her blog for more, as well as to read some great interviews with authors.*

## Must Read Texts

### *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*

by Chris Grabenstein  
Random House Books for Young Readers  
2013 ISBN13: 9780375870897  
304 pages, Grade 3-7



You're locked in a library for 24 hours. You need to find your way out using only resources from the library. Fire exits and windows are not permitted. What do you do? In *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library* by Chris Grabenstein, you may find the answer.

This book is a Willy-Wonka-meets-the-Tercos-Society kind of story. If you like mysteries and nail-biting books, check this one out.

The book's main character 12-year-old Kyle Keeley, has lived his whole life without a library. So when world-famous game maker Mr. Lemoncello decides to open a library, he invites a dozen kids to come check it out, including Kyle.

But when the so-called library lock-in turns into an escape game, Kyle must use his cleverness and wits to find an escape route before anyone else to win a big prize. But in the end, Kyle discovers the importance of working together as a team.

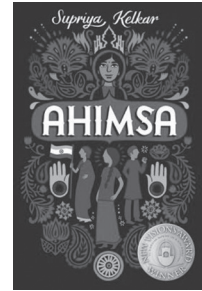
This book was enjoyable because it had me anticipating the next scene. For example, during Kyle's Extreme Challenge, I stayed up all night, jittery about what was going to happen. Also, Mr. Lemoncello is a really charming character. He has good taste in books and a very vivid imagination. I wouldn't mind spending a whole week with him! Some of the clues for escaping the library had to do with reading, so you learned a little bit of trivia from some books.

If you like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Secret Series*, and/or *The Magic Misfits*, you will like this book. Also, readers ages eight to 12 will enjoy this.

This book was great! I rate it four out of four roses!

### *Abimsa*

by Supriya Kelkar  
Tu Books  
2017 ISBN-10: 1620143569  
304 pages, Grade 4-6



*Abimsa*, by Supriya Kelkar, is a book about a 10-year-old girl named Anjali living in the 1940s in India, when the British were ruling the country. A freedom fighter named Gandhi wants a member from each family to help fight against the British, using ahimsa, or nonviolence.

Anjali hopes her father does not join because she knows how dangerous it could be. But it turns out her mother will be helping Gandhi, not Anjali's dad. While Anjali's mother is helping to stop the British, Anjali has to learn how to be brave during hard times, especially when her mother goes to jail.

I really enjoyed this book because I liked Anjali's character. She is outgoing, kind, and empathetic. I also liked the messages in the book: Never be afraid to stand up for what you believe in, always be brave, and that you can fight for something without violence.

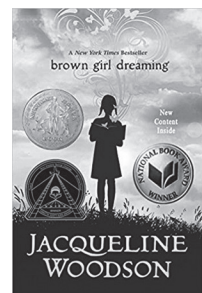
I also learned a few things about India's movement against the British, and about the Hindu and Muslim war that followed.

This book is for people who like stories about strong girl characters like Anjali and her mother. Also, I recommend this book to readers who like a story with a good message.

It gets four out of four roses!

### *Brown Girl Dreaming*

by Jacqueline Woodson  
Puffin Books  
2016 ISBN-10: 9780147515827  
368 pages, Grade 5-6



It's the last day of National Poetry Month, so I wanted to make sure I reviewed this book.

It's called *Brown Girl Dreaming*, by Jacqueline Woodson. It is an autobiography about, of course, Jacqueline Woodson. The book is all free verse poetry. I never knew you could make a story out of a whole bunch of poems.

*Brown Girl Dreaming* is about the author's life—how her dad left the family and how she loves poetry. It also is about the hardships she faces in her childhood, including being one of the only students growing up as a Jehovah's Witness. Her classmates didn't understand why she couldn't go to birthday parties, say the Pledge of Allegiance, or do some of the other things they did.

In this book, Jacqueline Woodson is growing up during the Civil Rights Movement. She learns about Black people who aren't afraid to die for what they believed in, heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Angela Davis. There is a poem called *Power to the People* that explains it.

I liked how the author expressed herself in poetry. I could actually visualize the story really vividly, like I was there. In the book, she writes a lot about writing. I could imagine everything she says in *First Book* because it is a poem about how she wrote and stapled together her first book. I guess a lot of people who want to be authors do stuff like that. I remember writing books and stapling them together when I was younger. *Brown Girl Dreaming* has dozens of poems in it. My favorites are *What I Believe* and *Each World*.

When my friend Christian let me borrow it, I guessed *Brown Girl Dreaming* would be a good book because it won so many awards, but I was wrong. It was a great book! That's why I am giving it four out of four roses.

I would recommend this book to people who like Jacqueline Woodson's other poetry books. If you like diversity books like me, you should definitely read this. It won many awards, including the Newbery Honor Medal, Coretta Scott King Award, and it also is a National Book Award Winner.

I think this book inspires mostly writers, but also

anyone who wants to reach their goal. I know it says "brown girl" on the cover, but this is a book for every girl or boy (or adult) who would like to read this book! (My mom is reading this book right now).

Jacqueline Woodson has also written *After Tupac and D Foster*, *Feathers*, *Locomotion*, and many, many others.

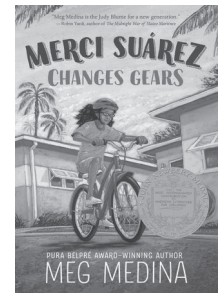
### *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*

by Meg Medina

Candlewick

2018 ISBN-10: 076369049X

368 pages, Grade 4-7



Through a young and witty 11-year-old, *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*, by Meg Medina, is a book that shows how we can accept change even when things are really hard. And, this is a good book for Hispanic Heritage Month because the main character is from a Cuban American family. I won the audiobook through a contest by the author and I listen to it almost every night, memorizing sections and imagining the backstories of each character.

I can relate to a lot of what Merci was feeling because a lot of change was coming at her. Going into sixth grade, she has lockers and switches classes. But at home, it's worse. Her grandfather Lolo is acting differently. Things like falling off his bike and forgetting Merci's name are getting her worried. But her family won't tell her what's going on! Then a major catastrophe sends her family into a panic, and Merci must learn to adjust to change and fight through tough times with bravery.

Author Meg Medina is awesome at portraying protagonists. Because of her, I found many characters loveable. She is also great at forming emotions. When Merci was sad, I felt like crying. When Merci was about to do something very risky, it felt like my stomach had bats flying around in it. I think this book should become a movie. If so, I'll gladly play the character of Lena!

I recommend this book to readers who like books that have a lot of ups and downs. Merci accomplished many things, but along the way discouraging events also

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occurred. This book is perfect for book lovers ages 9+, and it is a great read aloud for classrooms!

It is now on my favorite books list. Even adults liked it: they gave the book a Newberry Medal! It gets four out of four roses!!!!!!!

### *The Magic of Melwick Orchard*

by Rebecca Caprara

Carolrhoda Books

2018 ISBN-10: 1512466875

376 pages, Grade 4-8



I usually read books on paperback or hardcover, but Rebecca Caprara, the author of *The Magic of Melwick Orchard* sent me a digital copy of her book, which is going to be released next month.

She said the book has “strong female characters” and it “explores socio-economic diversity” because the main character’s family struggles with money problems because of medical bills. I promised Rebecca Caprara an honest review. This is it:

*The Magic of Melwick Orchard* is about a girl named Isabel who finds a magical tree in her backyard. The tree helps her learn life lessons, like not to be greedy, and to take care of all living things. This book is also about Isabel’s relationship with her sister named Junie. Isabel and Junie love each other so much and, in the book, Isabel once skipped school and instead went to the hospital to see her sister, who has been diagnosed with cancer. It made me wonder what it would be like to have a sister.

I loved this book because it was very descriptive. The author described the scenery so well, I could believe I was there if I had my eyes closed. I also liked the book because of all of the morals and meaningful messages. The author did a good job making up morals to the story and making them in a creative kind of way. When I found out the secret of the tree, I started reading this book slower because I wanted to savor it, and for it never to end.

I recommend this book to readers who like fantasy and adventure. This book is basically all that. It is also good for readers who like a book that will take them off into a new world, a magical one. I am taken into a different world lots of times reading books.

You really have to get this book. It is really good!

I give *The Magic of Melwick Orchard* four out of four roses!

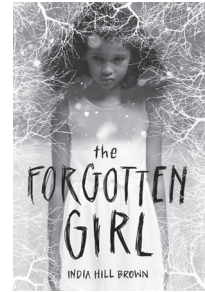
### *The Forgotten Girl*

by India Hill Brown

Scholastic Press

2019 ISBN-10: 1338317245

256 pages, Grade 3-7



It’s almost Halloween, and if you like scary stories this is a story for you. A few days ago I was running down the stairs scared that a ghost was following me, because after reading *The Forgotten Girl* by India Hill Brown, I’ve gotten spooked about ghosts.

In this story, two friends sneak out to play in the snow. But when Iris mistakenly makes a snow angel on a grave, she might have summoned a ghost of a Black girl who had integrated a school, yet isn’t recognized for it. Now, she wants Iris to be her friend... *forever*.

I enjoyed this book because of the detail the author put in this book. I could truly see what the ghost looked like, and how the snow felt. Also, the characters were very understandable. Almost everyone knows what it’s like to be left out, and so does the ghost. Not only was it scary, but it explored diversity. I learned that there used to be such thing as a segregated graveyard. The people that made the graves even gave White people the better care.

If you like ghost stories, you will like this book. Also, if you like the Goosebumps series, this is a good story to read. This book is for readers ages 9 and up.

I rate this book three out of four roses! This was a great treat for Halloween!

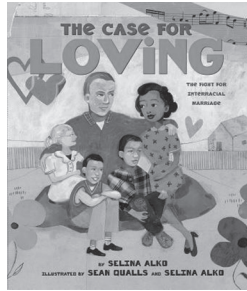
***The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage***

by Selina Alko

Arthur A. Levine Books

2015 ISBN-10: 0545478537

40 pages, Grade PK-3



I read *The Case For Loving: The Fight For Interracial Marriage*, by Selina Alko. It is about the right to marry someone from a different race.

A long time ago, people weren't allowed to marry people who were a different race than them. But thanks to a Supreme Court case, anyone can now marry anyone they want!

In the book, Richard and Mildred were not allowed to marry each other in Virginia where they lived because he was white and she was Black, so they married in Washington, D.C. Even when they were married, they were sent to jail for living together in Virginia. So they moved to Washington, D.C. and had a family. But they did not like it in their new home, and they didn't think it was fair that they couldn't be together in the place they wanted. So the couple made a court case that people should be able to marry whomever they wanted, no matter the race.

Today is the anniversary of the court decision. People recognize this day as Loving Day. I thought it was because of "love" but it is actually because the couple's last name was Loving. I thought they chose their last name, but no. The man was born with the name.

I am glad their case won because, if it didn't, I would either not be born or have a different dad or look differently than I do. I am biracial. That means I have more than one race in my family. A couple years ago my family attended a Loving Day celebration with a lot of people who were married to someone of a different race. This book made me think that the law allowing interracial marriage helped there to be more diversity in families.

I liked this book because it makes me happy that now

anyone can marry anyone. I also liked it because it proves that people can fight for change.

The author, Selina Alko, also is one of the illustrators of the book. The other is Sean Qualls, who illustrated *Emmanuel's Dream*, that I recently reviewed. The illustrators are married and also interracial, just like the Loving family. I think they wrote and illustrated this book because they believe what the Lovings believed: People should be able to marry anyone they choose.

I give this book four out of four roses.

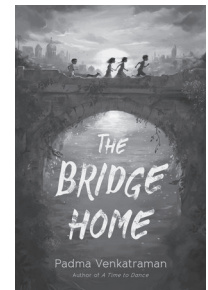
***The Bridge Home***

by Padma Venkatraman

Nancy Paulsen Books

2019 ISBN-10: 1524738115

208 pages, Grade 5-6



Viji and her older sister Rukku run away from their abusive father and have to make it on their own in the streets of India, where they meet new friends and enemies. As they progress through their journey of finding their true home, they learn about companionship and what it really means to be fortunate.

On the start of the girls' journey, there were only two of them, but at the end of the story they had "brothers", a dog, and even a kind adult as their friends. There are a lot of diverse themes in the book, like strong girl characters, homelessness, the caste system, people with special needs, and different religions.

I liked *The Bridge Home* by Padma Venkatraman because of the plot twists and turns. The plot had a lot of these (which were mostly sad but made the book interesting). I also loved the name of the book. It literally means a bridge home, because they lived under a bridge, but it could also be like their journey in finding the metaphorical "bridge" to their true home.

The author did a great job describing the characters and their personalities so that we could fall in love with them. My favorite character was Kutti the dog,

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because he was so energetic and gave the girls hope and happiness.

I recommend this book to readers who like touching stories. The book had a lot of important lessons and a bittersweet ending.

This book is super good! It gets four out of four roses!

## Author Biography

**Elena** is a sixth-grade Michigan student who has taken her passion for reading and turned it into a fantastic blog. You can find her at [elenareads.com](http://elenareads.com), [@elenareads](https://www.instagram.com/elenareads) on Instagram, [@elena\\_reads](https://twitter.com/elena_reads) on Twitter, and [elenareads.co](https://www.facebook.com/elenareads.co) on Facebook, where she shares book reviews, author interviews, and her love of diverse books.

