

CHAPTER 6 Adventure, Sports, Mysteries, and the Supernatural

TABLE 6.1 Suggestions for Evaluating Adventure Stories

A good adventure story has most of the positive qualities generally associated with good fiction. In addition it usually has:

A likable protagonist with whom young readers identify

An adventure that readers can imagine happening to themselves

Efficient characterization

An interesting setting that enhances the story without being in the way of the plot

Action that draws readers into the plot within the first page or so of the story

A poor adventure story may have the negative qualities generally associated with poor fiction. It is particularly prone to have:

A protagonist who is too exaggerated or too stereotyped to be believable

Nothing really exciting about the adventure

Only stereotyped characters

A long drawn-out conclusion after the climax has been reached



Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (1997)

Gary Paulsen, **Adventurer and More**

Among Paulsen's two hundred plus-or-minus books, the ones honored by the Margaret A. Edwards Award are *Hatchet*, *Woodson*, *The Winter Room*, *The Crossing*, *Canyons*, and *Dancing Cart*. We would add to the list of his very best *Harris and Me*, *Brian's Winter*, *Soldier's Heart: A Novel of the Civil War*, *The River*, *The Beet Fields*, and *Guts*.

Gary Paulsen is most famous for the survival story that he tells in *Hatchet*, about thirteen-year-old Brian, who is flying to visit his father in the Canadian wilderness. The pilot has a fatal heart attack and the plane goes down. Brian's only survival tool is a hatchet that was a gift from his mother. While that wasn't much, it allowed him to survive.

Hatchet seems likely to become a classic adventure and survival story, probably for boys but it would work for most readers. Paulsen received a number of letters from readers who liked the book but questioned if Paulsen had taken the easy way out by having Brian rescued at the end of summer. They asked, what if Brian had not been rescued? Could he have survived a winter? Paulsen answered by writing another book, *Brian's Winter*, in which Brian is not rescued and has to face a bleak winter.

If that wasn't enough, Paulsen wrote other books about Brian, the most impressive being the nonfiction *Guts: The True Story behind Hatchet and the Brian Books*. Maybe a reader questioned Paulsen on the accuracy of *Hatchet* or the likelihood that Brian would survive, given the odds against him. In *Guts*, Paulsen writes about his own adventures that parallel Brian's problems. In successive chapters, Paulsen recalls his own near plane crashes, his tangles with a moose, his run-in with mosquitoes, and his ability to handle a gun—or a bow—when it was necessary. His education learning to eat in the wilderness is announced by the title of Chapter Five, "Eating Eyeballs and Guts or Starving."

Young people love Paulsen and his books. Some of that adulation comes from a simple fact, that Paulsen has lived

a rugged life and has done most of the things that appear in his book. He has lived in the Canadian wilderness and in mountains and in canyons. He has sailed around Cape Horn. He has owned a motorcycle. He rides horses. He has played professional poker. He loves dogs and has raced them in the Alaskan Iditarod, and one dog, Cookie, saved his life. He has worked in a beet field, and he has worked for a carnival.

Paulsen is a master writer of adventure books, all essentially rite-of-passage. But he has written other kinds of books as well. *Harris and Me* is an autobiographical story of his early youth when he was dumped off on some relatives because his own folks were drunks. He learns to love his relations, particularly his cousin, Harris, who has a wild scheme for every occasion. Both boys learn the questionable fun of peeing on an electric fence or wrestling three hundred-pound pigs. *The Beet Fields* is as likely to be read and enjoyed by adults as young people, it's the story of Paulsen's sixteenth year, when he goes to work in the beet fields and learns that migrants can go up and down the rows much faster than he, and he will never get rich at weeding beets. It's the story of his working for a carnival and meeting Ruby. It's a gritty autobiography, and as Paulsen says this is "as real as I can write it, and as real as I can remember it happening."

Gary Paulsen writes for young adults, and they recognize honesty and goodness in his words. In *The Winter Room*, he tells the reader, "If books could have more, give more, be more, show more, they would still need readers, who bring to them sound and smell and light and all the rest that can't be in books. The book needs you."

The book always needs the reader, and Paulsen provides books that find the reader over and over. ●

Adventurous Girls

In Avi's Newbery Medal-winning *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, a young girl is forced to overcome circumstances before they overcome her. Charlotte is raised in an upper-class family with a strong father. Even though she is warned not to board the brig *Seahawk*, bound from Liverpool, England, to Providence, Rhode Island, her father has told her to take the ship, and so she goes on board, the only female on a ship commanded by evil and cruel Captain Jagers. Trapped by the captain, she evades his plan to kill her and watches as the ship tips and plunges in a storm and the captain goes overboard. The crew makes her the ship's new captain—mostly because Charlotte is the daughter of an officer of the ship's company—but also because she has shown courage in facing down the captain and aiding the crew.

While most readers enjoyed Charlotte's adventures, at least one reviewer had qualms. Anne Scott MacLeod said, "It's a fine and vicarious adventure story. It is also preposterous."⁴ Avi took exception to the exception and in the Summer 1999 *Signal*, wrote, "It is a legitimate task . . . of fiction to re-invent the past, if you will, so as to better define the future . . . Historical fiction—among other things—is about today's possibilities."⁵ Perhaps both MacLeod's and Avi's statements illustrate the truth of critic Henry Seidel Canby's words, which are more than seventy years old, "Historical fiction, like history, is more likely to register an exact truth about the writer's present than the exact truth of the past."⁶

Another girl at sea is the heroine of L. A. Meyer's books about Bloody Jacky who starts her adventures as a ship's boy. The first book begins with Mary Faber's childhood in late eighteenth-century London, where her family has died from the plague. After cutting off her hair, and being a member of Rooster Charlie's gang, she spots a way out of London and her dreary world. She sees a ship, *The Dolphin*, and she tells a member of the crew that she can read (her father taught her). She becomes the ship's cabin boy, and off she sails, facing the wind and all the problems destined to come her way. She receives the inevitable rough treatment from the crew, she has no idea what life at sea is like, and she has no notion of the duties of a ship's boy, and—most of all—she puts off the inevitable discovery of her sex almost longer than readers can believe. She has adventures aplenty, all of them well handled by Meyer. Her later adventures are told in three books—*Curse of the Blue Tattoo: Being an Account of the Misadventures of Jacky Faber, Midshipman and Fine Lady*; *Under the Jolly Roger: Being an Account of the Further Nautical Adventures of Jacky Faber*; and *In the Belly of the Bloodhound, Being an Account of the Particularly Peculiar Adventure in the Life of Jacky Faber*.

In 2002, Nancy Farmer proved in *The House of the Scorpion* that she could write an exciting survival story, but since this was a science fiction dystopian novel, readers had other things to focus on besides the adventure. But in her 1997 *A Girl Named Disaster*, survival—physical as well as emotional—is the main focus. The realistic story takes place in the early 1980s in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, when there was considerable hostility among white people, the Shona,

and the Matebele, and crossing borders was dangerous because of land mines. The protagonist is an eleven-year-old orphan, Nhamo, who lives with her deceased mother's relatives, but with the encouragement of her grandmother flees when the village decides that to ward off the evil spirits that have brought a plague to their area, Nhamo must marry a villainous older man with three older wives who everyone knows will resent Nhamo.

Nhamo follows her grandmother's instructions on how to escape in a fishing boat, but she misses the place where two rivers come together just before emptying into the huge Lake Cabora Bassa, which was formed when dams were built. When the rivers joined, Nhamo was supposed to paddle against the current, but instead she ends up lost in the lake. She lives for almost a year on a small island where she has to find her own food and deal with baboons and also a leopard. Finally, with the kind of strength that would have made her grandmother proud, Nhamo builds herself a new boat and sets out to find the river she had missed before.

Ship Ahoy! The Excitement of Pirate Stories

Johnny Depp has starred in three pirate films—*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003); *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (2000); and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (2007)—that have made multimillions of dollars along with millions of happy fans. Pirates are big business in film. They are equally entertaining to read about in books, as long as their cruelty and their bloodshed is confined to the printed page.

Howard Pyle's *Book of Pirates: Fiction, Fact, and Fancy Concerning the Buccaneers and Marooners of the Spanish Main*, first published in 1891, is one of the earliest books on pirates for young people, and in his preface he made the life of the pirate ambivalently distasteful and attractive:

What a life of adventure is his, to be sure! A life of constant alertness, constant danger, constant escape! An ocean Ishmaelite, he wanders forever aimlessly, homelessly; now unheard of for months, now careening, his boat on some lonely uninhabited shore, now appearing suddenly to swoop down on some merchant vessel with rattle of musketry, shouting, yells, and a hell of unbridled passion, let loose to rend and tear.

YA writers have not ignored the attraction of pirates to young people. Tanith Lee's *Piratica: Being a Daring Tale of a Singular Girl's Adventure Upon the High Seas* is the tale of sixteen-year-old Artemesia Fitz-Willoughby's dream of taking on her dead mother's pirate lifestyle. A blow to the head brings back memories of sea storms and sword fights, all fantasy but all real to the eager girl. *Piratica II: Return to Parrot Island* is a delightful sequel. In Celia Rees's *Pirates*, Nancy Kington runs off from an arranged marriage to an evil man to join a pirate crew. When pirates begin raiding Savage Island in Lenore Hunt's *The Treasure of Savage Island*, fifteen-year-old Molly warns the settlers, saves her father, and finds a long-lost treasure. And in William Gilkerson's *Pirate's Passage*, when Captain Johnson of the good ship *Merry Adventure* washes up in Nova Scotia, a boy and

his mother welcome him, but while the captain's extensive knowledge of pirates and pirates' ways excites the boy, it also makes him suspicious.

In Iain Lawrence's *The Wreckers*, a young man who longs for the sea but is denied it by his businessman father becomes involved in the dangerous business of looting wrecked ships. His adventures continue in *The Smugglers* and *The Buccaneers*. Lawrence's *The Convicts* begins with Tom, a fourteen-year-old boy charged with murder and sentenced to the *Lachesis*, a prison ship for boys. In the sequel, *The Cannibals*, the boys' lives are even more brutal as they plot to escape from a convict ship taking them to Australia.

Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Pirate's Son*, set in the 1800s and packed with derring-do, opens with the death of Nathan Gull's father. Nathan must leave school since he has no money, but luckily for him, Tamo White, son of a pirate, decides to leave school, too, and take Nathan with him. The first half of McCaughrean's *The Kite Rider* is even more action packed. The setting is thirteenth-century China, after the Mongols have conquered it, and hatred and distrust between Chinese and Mongols permeate the land. When twelve-year-old Haoyou's father takes his son to see his ship, the boy is thrilled until the first mate takes offense when the father insults the Khan's wife. The mate kicks Haoyou off the ship and, worse yet, attaches the father to a kite hoisted over the ship to determine whether the winds augur a profitable voyage for the ship and the crew. Horrifying as this is, Haoyou is unprepared when his father catches the wind and is lifted high aloft, only to be as suddenly plummeted to his death. It is now up to Haoyou to carry on the duties of the family and the honor of his father. He manages admirably, and a bonus for readers is that they get to meet Mipeng, a girl cousin, who is clever, funny, and wise in ways that save Haoyou from himself.

Pirates were so popular that even the American Library Association jumped on board by using a pirate theme for its 2007 Banned Books Week celebration. The children's poster, which read "Discover Buried Treasure," featured an open pirate's chest of gold surrounding four frequently censored books: Alvin Schwartz's *In a Dark, Dark Room*, Harry Allard's *The Stupids Step Out*, Dav Pilkey's *Captain Underpants and the Preposterous Plight of the Purple Potty People*, and Robie Harris's *It's Perfectly Normal*. The next page features another young adult poster reprinted by permission of the American Library Association.

Nonfiction Adventures

Nonfiction adventures in which people set out to challenge nature (see Focus Box 6.1, Real People Challenging Nature, p. 192) have an extra level of excitement because readers know that human lives are at stake. While young people seldom have what it takes to embark on such purposeful adventures, they can nevertheless read about them. They can also imagine what they would do if they happen to be forced into such an adventure, as were the young people whose story is told in *Alive* (see the discussion in Chapter 9, pp. 283–284).

Climbing mountains is one of the ways that people face off against nature because, as Reinhold Messner reminds us, "In all true adventure, the path between the summit and the grave is a narrow one indeed."⁷ Nowhere is that clearer than in Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount*

ALA's young adult poster, under the banner, "Get Hooked on a Banned Book," featured Judy Blume's *Forever*, Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, and Chris Crutcher's *Whale Talk*, all dressed as pirates. The adult poster used the banner "Set Sail on the Ship O' the Banned" and showed a large ship with sails made from Any Tàn's *The Joy Luck Club*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.



Everest Disaster. In the spring of 1996, fourteen groups of climbers were making their way up Mount Everest. Krakauer reached the summit on May 10, as did five teammates, but five others died, and nineteen others were stranded for a time when a freak storm hit and left them to survive temperatures of 100 degrees below zero. Ultimately, Everest took twelve lives that spring. Krakauer describes the work that went into planning and setting up the camps, the difficulties of the climb, the heroism shown by many of the climbers—and some incidents that exhibited cowardice or selfishness—but he cannot explain fully why anyone should take such risks.

Krakauer had agreed to take part as a climber and writer for *Outside* magazine, but when he delivered his article—on time—he learned how bitter were many of the friends and relatives of those who died. *Into Thin Air* is an attempt to get the story straight and to explain what role Krakauer had in saving a few climbers and in being unable to save others. It is also one more effort to explain why it is that anyone would climb a mountain, specifically Everest.

People who don't climb mountains—the great majority of humankind, that is to say—tend to assume that the sport is a reckless, Dionysian pursuit of ever-escalating thrills. But the notion that climbers are merely adrenaline junkies chasing a righteous fix is a fallacy, at least in the case of Everest. What I was doing up

Real People Challenging Nature



Annupurna: A Woman's Place by Arlene Blum. Sierra Club, Books 1980. Thirteen women climbers tackle one of the world's greatest challenges. Two reached the top. Two died.

Breaking Trail by Arlene Blum. Scribner, 2005. Blum organized and helped lead climbs on Mount McKinley, Annupurna, Everest, and more.

Clouds from Both Sides by Julie Tullis. Sierra Club Books, 1987. Tullis wrote the biography of a woman who, at age forty-seven, conquered K2 and died two days later.

Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Journey by Alfred Lansing. McGraw-Hill, 1959. When his ship was crushed by ice in 1915, Sir Ernest Shackleton and his twenty-seven-member crew camped for five months on Antarctic ice floes and drifted at sea.

Ghosts of Everest: The Search for Mallory and Irvine by Jochen Hemmleb, Larry A. Johnson, and Eric Simonson. The Mountaineers, 1999. The authors set out to find the bodies of two climbers—George Mallory and Andrew Irvine—who died on Everest on June 4, 1924.

The Last Gentleman Adventurer by Edward Beauclerk Maurice. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. In this autobiography, a man joined the Hudson Bay Company in 1930 and was assigned to a remote trading post on Baffin Island. Despite his early tendency to fall into ice holes, he adjusted to his world, living with the Inuit and becoming involved with their culture.

The Long Exile: A Tale of Inuit Betrayal and Survival in the High Arctic by Melanie McGrath. Knopf, 2007. When Inuit

hunters on the Ungava Peninsula in the east Arctic found game increasingly harder to find, the Canadian government decided to move 1,200 of them to Ellesmere Island where there were no permanent residents. This forced relocation to a place the Inuits had no understanding of and led to disaster.

Mountains of the Mind by Robert Macfarlane. Pantheon, 2003. Macfarlane writes about the history of the relationship between humanity and mountains from when mountains were seen as eyesores or obstacles to now, when they are regarded with awe.

No Shortcuts to the Top by Ed Viesturs. Broadway, 2006. Viesturs set out to climb the summits of the world's fourteen highest mountains without using bottled oxygen. He accomplished his quest in 2005.

Off the Map: Tales of Endurance and Exploration by Fergus Fleming. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005. Fleming's book includes forty-five biographical essays covering the history of geographical discovery.

Savage Summit: The True Stories of the First Five Women Who Climbed K2, the World's Most Feared Mountain by Jennifer Jordan. Morrow, 2005. All five who climbed K2 died, three on the descent, two while climbing other mountains.

Scott of the Antarctic by David Crane. Knopf, 2006. Scott's background—middle-class upbringing amid genteel poverty, and the navy he joined which, in peacetime, recruited upper-class officers—made life difficult for him during the expedition to the Antarctic.

there had almost nothing to do with bungee jumping or skydiving or riding a motorcycle at 120 miles per hour. Above the comforts of Base Camp, the expedition in fact became an almost Calvinistic undertaking. The ratio of misery to pleasure was greater by an order of magnitude than any other mountain I'd been on. I quickly came to understand that climbing Everest was primarily about enduring pain. And in subjecting ourselves to week after week of toil, tedium, and suffering, it struck me that most of us were probably seeking, above all, something like a state of grace.⁸

Adventure stories are popular because boredom chafes at our souls and crowds out of our minds such practical concerns as safety and caution; however, the human body reminds us all too quickly of the risks. This may be why we pre-

fer our adventures to come through books or, even better, through movies in which trick photography and special effects can make it easier for viewers to forget that losing is more common than winning.



Sports and the Game of Life

Because we lack the space to say everything that adults working with young people need to know about sports books, we recommend that interested readers find Chris Crowe's *More Than a Game: Sports Literature for Young Adults*. Several of the most popular and most talented YA writers tell sports stories. For example see the Margaret A. Edwards Award pages on Chris Crutcher and on Robert Lipsyte (pp. 195 and 197). As shown by the listing in Focus Box 6.2, *An Armful of YA Sports Fiction*, most sports books, whether fiction or nonfiction, include information about the training that is needed, the expected rewards, tangible or not, and the inevitable disappointments that make the rewards even sweeter. Early sports books in the 1800s and 1900s focused on the character-changing possibilities of sports along with an inning-by-inning or quarter-by-quarter account. The minute-by-minute account was almost never successful. But the excitement and the euphoria that sometimes comes to players has remained. Occasional nonfiction writers have focused almost exclusively on a player's character flaws, an iconoclastic approach that seems to have had its day.

The excitement of sports is what readers want, just as winning is the only acceptable verdict for fans. Way back on June 5, 1974, the *Los Angeles Times* headlined the sports section, "There's Nothing Like the Euphoria of Accomplishment." The *New York Times* for August 11, 1974, headlined its sports section with an article (first published in *Dial* in 1919): "Baseball: A Boys' Game, a Pro Sport and a National Religion." And scholar—and baseball fan—Jacques Barzun had the final say, "Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the game."⁹

To deny or even to question the significant place of sports in many American lives is to misunderstand American life or values. In the 1950s and early 1960s such writers as H. D. Francis and John Carson wrote good novels filled with heroes reeking of sweat. Their heroes often examined the price of fame and the temptation to believe—always doomed—that fame would last. Writers as powerful as John Updike killed that dream much as F. Scott Fitzgerald had killed other dreams of society or business and glory and permanence. The sentimental fiction of the 1950s and 1960s was never real, but it had a charm that we have lost, and with it some readers of more innocent sports books.

Two particularly impressive books about baseball that mature high school students can appreciate are about love and friendship and fatherhood. They are Mark Harris's *Bang the Drum Slowly* and Donald Hall's *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons*. Harris's story of a second- or third-string catcher dying of leukemia is touching, just as it is good baseball. Hall, a major poet, offers a warm and almost sentimental account of his love for sports, particularly baseball. The first two sentences of his introduction tie together the two worlds he loves and needs: writing and baseball: "Half of my poet-friends think I am insane to waste my time



An Armful of YA Sports Fiction

Ball Don't Lie by Matt De La Peña. Delacorte, 2005. A seventeen-year-old white boy, Sticky, lives mostly on the street and, because of his basketball skill, is pretty much accepted by black peers. However, his situation is far more precarious than is that of Maniac McGee in Spinelli's book for younger readers. Still, readers come away feeling optimistic.

Becoming Joe DiMaggio by Maria Testa. Candlewick, 2002. While the father is in prison during World War II, an Italian American family struggles to move on, with DiMaggio and radio always in the background.

The Boxer by Kathleen Karr. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. In New York City of the 1880s, John Aloysius Xavier Woods works in a sweatshop, but daily he goes by a saloon soliciting would-be bare-fisted boxers. Because boxing is illegal in New York, he's tossed in jail. When he comes out, he's now Johnny "The Chopper" Woods.

Crackback by John Coy. Scholastic, 2005. Coaches challenge and taunt players at Miles's school. His best friend tries steroids and Miles's father pushes Miles to play. When Miles is benched, he discovers how much he likes schoolwork and how little he likes football.

Dairy Queen by Catherine Gilbert Murdock. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. D. J. Schwenk takes on her father's dairy work when he is injured, but her heart is set on training Brian, the rival school's quarterback, and even going out for her own school's football team. Her story is continued in *The Off Season* (2007), where life becomes more challenging.

Fighting Ruben Wolfe by Markus Zusak. Scholastic, 2001. This story of two brothers joining an illegal fight circuit to earn money for their family received positive votes from all fifteen members of the Best Books for Young Adults committee of ALA.

Friends Till the End by Todd Strasser. Delacorte, 1981. A soccer star agrees reluctantly to visit Howie, who is dying of leukemia. A wonderful friendship develops.

Gym Candy by Carl Deuker. Houghton Mifflin, 2007. It's ironic that the name of the gym where running back Mick Johnson works out is named Popeye's because this is where he figures out that popping supplements isn't enough. But when he moves to injecting himself with steroids, he gets

more than he bargained for. Readers who like *Gym Candy* will probably also enjoy Deuker's 2003 *High Heat* about a baseball pitcher.

Home of the Braves by David Klass. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. Jo Brickman, captain of the soccer and wrestling teams, faces a Brazilian transfer student who's a whiz at soccer and ready to sweep Jo's would-be girlfriend off her feet.

In Lane Three, Alex Archer by Tessa Duder. Houghton Mifflin, 1987. Swimmer Alex (short for Alexandra) trains for the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome.

Love, Football, and Other Contact Sports by Alden R. Carter. Holiday, 2006. A collection of short stories developed around Argyle West High School's football team. Realistic and ironic and sometimes funny.

The Passing Game by Richard Blessing. Little, Brown, 1982. In one of the best YA novels ever, Craig Warren has potential greatness but his play is erratic.

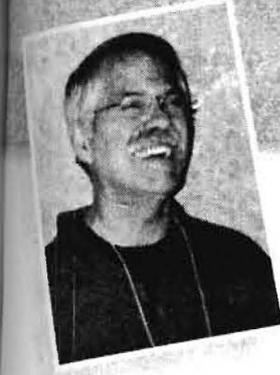
Slam by Nick Hornby. Putnam, 2007. Fifteen-year-old Sam is a skateboarding whiz who hits a bump when his girlfriend gets pregnant. Luckily, Sam has Tony Hawk, the world's greatest skater, to talk to him from the giant poster on Sam's wall.

Three Clams and an Oyster by Randy Powell. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. Flint is captain of a four-man flag-football team faced with a real problem, namely how to get rid of a teammate who is unreliable.

Ultimate Sports: Short Stories by Outstanding Writers for Young Adults, edited by Don Gallo. Delacorte, 1995. Stories by Robert Lipsyte, Chris Crutcher, Tessa Duder, and Norma Fox Mazer are included.

Under the Baseball Moon by John Ritter. Philomel, 2006. Andy Ramon's love life consists of Glory Martinez. He loves music, and Glory loves playing softball. The arrangement works for both of them; Andy plays his trumpet and that inspires Glory's hitting and pitching.

Wrestling Sturbridge by Rich Wallace. Knopf, 1996. Ben and Al are best friends. The only problem is that they are the two best 135-pound wrestlers in the state, and they attend the same high school.



Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (2000)

Chris Crutcher and His Sports- Plus Novels

Margaret A. Edwards Honor books include his *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, *Athletic Shorts: Six Short Stories*, *Chinese Handcuffs*, *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*, *Stotan*, and *Running Loose*. We want to add *Ironman*, *Whale Talk*, and *The Sledding Hill*.

When *Running Loose* was published in 1983, reviewers recognized that an accomplished first novelist had arrived on the YA scene, and it did not take long before teachers found Crutcher and began recommending him to their students. Critics began to call his books "honest" and "intense" and to argue over whether *Running Loose* or later books were his best. *Running Loose* is at least partly autobiographical. Few YA novels have parents so decent and so understanding as does Louis Banks. He also has a warm and believable girlfriend in Becky Sanders, but on the down side he has a vindictive football coach willing to do anything to win games, and that includes taking the opposition's star player out through dirty play. Louie protests the foul, but the coach ignores him, and the coach is supported by the principal. Louie is no longer on the team, and then he faces a far greater problem when Becky is killed in a car crash. Later, at the funeral, Louie is almost comatose until he hears the minister saying a litany of funeral clichés about God's moving in "strange and mysterious ways." Louie yells, "He doesn't move in strange and mysterious ways. He doesn't move at all! He sits up there on His fat butt and lets guys like you earn a living making excuses for all the rotten things that happen." No applause follows.

That scene is almost topped by a brief interlude when Louie learns that the principal plans to erect a plaque in Becky's memory and set it in concrete. Later, as Louie leaves school, he sees the plaque and reads all the stuff on it about Becky's work on cheerleading and student council and Honor Society and more. It's too much for Louie, partly because the principal had signed his name at the bottom of the plaque. He was the one school official that both Louie and Becky disliked and so at night Louie takes a sledgehammer to the school. He hammers the plaque loose from the concrete, puts it in the back of his pickup, and dumps it in the river where Becky died.

One of our college students who picked up *Running Loose* expected to write a negative review because she had always hated sports books. She ended up admitting she was wrong because instead of being about sports, this was a book "about so many things—love, death, loyalty, anger, compassion, and courage. It's about being responsible. It was not about my boy friend. It was about me." She concluded with, "Crutcher asks the right questions that young people need somehow to find answers to. That's what I learned from reading *Running Loose*."

Stotan carries on with Crutcher's tests of endurance, loyalty, and challenge. In it, four young men begin the *Stotan*, a test of physical and emotional strength to develop their swimming team. Each swimmer is also faced with a significant personal problem. In *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, Sarah has been horribly burned and pretends to be catatonic to escape her evil father. In *Ironman*, Bo writes letters to radio talk-show host Larry King at the same time he is constantly angry with his father and his English teacher (an ex-football coach). In *Whale Talk*, a young male—black, white, and Japanese—refuses to be in organized sports but joins a swimming team and talks other outsiders into joining him.

In the third edition of this text (1989), Chris Crutcher wrote, "I think it is incredibly disrespectful and potentially damaging to foster the myths of our society—myths of the unconditional sanctity of the family, myths of the innate good of any particular institutional spirituality, myths of unexamined patriotism, and on and on. In other words, we owe the same thing to young adult readers as we do to adult readers: that is the honest depiction of our observations—the truth as we see it."

In *Deadline*, eighteen-year-old Ben Wolfe is diagnosed with an incurable kind of leukemia. Because he's of legal age, he doesn't have to let his parents know and so he sets out on his own to pack a lifetime of experience into his senior year at his small Idaho high school. When he contemplates playing on the football team and courting Dallas Suzuki—the girl of his dreams—he has to keep reminding himself that some insects live only one day. ●

writing about sports and to loiter in the company of professional athletes. The other half would murder to take my place.” Later, he distinguishes between baseball and football to the detriment of the latter: “Baseball is fathers and sons. Football is brothers beating each other up in the backyard, violent and superficial.”



Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (2001)

Robert Lipsyte, **A Contender
All the Way**

Honored books include *The Contender*, *The Brave*, *The Chief*, and *One Fat Summer*. If the award were given today, we would vote that *Raiders Night* also be on the list. Lipsyte is a professional sports writer and television and radio commentator who, in 1967, was inspired to write *The Contender* when he was in a gymnasium and one of the grand old boxing coaches put a finger to his lips so they could both listen to the way a boy was running up the stairs. As they listened, the coach shared his judgment that this newcomer was going to be "a contender." He could tell from the energy that he put into running up the stairs.

The Contender made Lipsyte a name in YA literature because the story of a would-be fighter wandering into a gym in hopes of becoming a contender is a fresh allegory that fit the role filled by many young men in real life. For earlier editions of this text, Lipsyte wrote that he thinks boys don't read as much as we'd like them to partly because current books do not deal with the real problems and fears of boys. And then as educators we tend to treat boys as a group—which is where males are at their absolute worst. He suggests that boys "have to be led into reading secretly and one at a time." *The Contender*, *The Brave*, and *The Chief* are about individuals who suffer from being in a group. They find hope as soon as someone recognizes them as individuals.

Lipsyte's most recent book, *Raiders Night*, is about being an individual and speaking out when it is needed. The book may seem like yet another football story until a terrifying and crucial event. Matt Rydek is cocaptain of the Near-mont High School Raiders football team. He and the other players are treated royally by fans who love them unconditionally. Matt, however, has two problems. First is his pushy father, who does not know or understand his son, and second is his cocaptain, Ramp, who is mean and more sadistic than anyone suspects. In the locker room, Ramp singles out a new player named Chris for humiliation because he has made Ramp look bad. Ramp marches around during a team initiation waving a small white plastic bat, and when

Chris will not humble himself, Ramp pulls down Chris's shorts and sodomizes him with the white plastic bat. Vomit rises in Matt's throat, but even though he has always disliked and distrusted Ramp, he does nothing except feel guilty.

When the coaches and others learn of Ramp's actions on Raider Pride Night, Matt's first impulse is to keep his mouth shut and pretend that nothing happened. Matt's father tells Matt to keep "it in the locker room." At the book's end, when Matt stands up for Chris and himself, his father calls him an "ungrateful little sonuabitch," and says, "Everything I did was for you, busting my back so you could have everything you ever needed, best equipment, baseball and football camps, money in your account, you know how much safe steroids cost. I'm not going to let you throw it away." Matt says, "It's my call."

Of all the ugly episodes in *Raiders Night*, none is more nauseatingly unctuous than Pastor Jim's homily at the Welcome Home Rally. Long after the sodomy scene, Pastor Jim "asked God to give the Raiders the strength to get back up when they were knocked down, to forgive cheap shots, and to win clean." He added, "You know, if Jesus came back, he'd be a Raider, hitting hard and hitting clean."

When Lipsyte was asked if he was surprised that *Raiders Night* was a subject of censorship, he said that *censorship* is too strong of a word for what he has been experiencing. It has been more insidious as when he is invited to a school by a librarian or an English teacher and then is uninvited by a coach, an athletic director, or a principal. He does not think it is because of the language or the sex or the mention of steroids. Instead it is because the book takes a negative look at jock culture, which is something those guys are really invested in.

Is *Raiders Night* working? Yes it is. It must be to attract the attention of the greatest advocates of American sportsmanship, these holy three—coaches, athletic directors, and principals. ♣



Sports Nonfiction—Real-Life Dreams

Babe Didrikson Zaharias: The Making of a Champion by Russell Freedman. Clarion, 1999. Freedman's biographies are a pleasure to read because of the care he takes with the research and the writing as well as with the design of the book.

Between Boardslides and Burnout: My Notes from the Road by Tony Hawk. HarperCollins, 2002. Full-color photographs add to this realistic journal of a skateboarding champion.

A Biography of Red Smith: The Life and Times of a Great American Writer by Ira Berkow. New York Times Books, 1986. Present-day sports writers learned from this master whose columns are reprinted from the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, and assorted other places.

The Boys of October: How the 1975 Boston Red Sox Embodied Baseball's Ideals—and Restored our Spirits by Doug Hornig. Contemporary Books, 2003. Hornig prepared a hymn to the glories of his favorite team.

The Boys of Summer, rev. ed., by Roger Kahn. HarperCollins, 1998. One of baseball's finest writers tells this story of the great Brooklyn Dodgers. Where have they gone?

Crazy '08: How a Cast of Crooks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History by Cait Murphy. Smithsonian Books, 2007. Fans of the Chicago Cubs have a strange rallying cry: "Remember 1908!" the last time the Cubs won the World Series. A marvelous and wacky book about a marvelous and wacky time.

Game Time: A Baseball Companion by Roger Angell. Harcourt Brace, 2003. Angell again proves that he is one of baseball's greatest writers in this book about spring training, the World Series, and lots of other things.

The Greatest: Muhammad Ali by Walter Dean Myers. Scholastic, 2001. Myers brings his skill as a writer to this biography, along with his knowledge of what Muhammad Ali meant to African Americans.

Indian Summer: The Forgotten Story of Louis Sockalexis, the First Native American in Major League Baseball by Brian McDonald. Rodale, 2003. Sockalexis was recruited by the Cleveland Spiders in 1897 and drank himself out of baseball by 1910. A sad story.

Let Me Play: The Story of Title IX: The Law That Changed the Future of Girls in America by Karen Blumenthal.

S&S/Atheneum, 2005. A law that started as almost an accident has made a profound difference in the lives of America's young women. Blumenthal's take on the matter is shown both through facts and human interest stories.

The Meaning of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football, and Basketball and What They See When They Do by Michael Mandelbaum. Public Affairs, 2004. The meaning of sports as a diversion, as a bonding with their fellows, or as a religious rite.

Race across Alaska: First Woman to Win the Iditarod Tells Her Story by Libby Riddels and Tim Jones. Stackpole Books, 1998. Readers who know Gary Paulsen's *Woodson* (Bradbury, 1990) will enjoy this different perspective on the race.

The Story of Negro League Baseball by William Brashler. Ticknor & Fields, 1994. Brashler takes up the history of Negro baseball and its important players, e.g., Bob Gibson and Smokey Joe Williams. Neil J. Sullivan does something similar in his *The Minors: The Struggles and the Triumphs of Baseball's Poor Relations from 1876 to the Present* (St. Martin's, 1990). An introductory book for younger readers is *The Journal of Bidy Owens: The Negro Leagues, Birmingham, Alabama, 1948*, which is part of the My Name Is America series (Scholastic, 2001).

Triumph and Tragedy in Mudville by Stephen Jay Gould. Norton, 2003. The Harvard scientist takes off on his favorite avocation, baseball, and particular aspects of it that fascinate him, e.g., Joe DiMaggio's fifty-six-game hitting streak.

Wait Till Next Year: A Memoir by Doris Kearns Goodwin. Simon & Schuster, 1997. A historian remembers growing up in Rockville Center, New York, and her passion for the Brooklyn Dodgers. A truly lovely book.

Why Is the Foul Pole Fair? by Vince Staten. Simon and Schuster, 2003. The author takes up an incredible number of questions about the game and its history and answers them all. For example, why is the distance from the pitching rubber to the plate sixty feet and six inches?

Winning Ways: A Photohistory of American Women in Sports by Sue Macy. Holt, 1996. Both in this book and in her *A Whole New Ball Game* (Holt, 1993), Macy presents wonderful photos and intriguing details to show that women have a sports heritage.



A Century of Accessible Adult Mysteries (Listed Chronologically)

The Circular Staircase by Mary Roberts Rinehart. Bobbs-Merrill, 1908. The first of the Had-I-but-Known genre of mystery, this story of a lonely house, a dead body, and blooming love reads far better today than readers have any right to expect.

The Greek Coffin Mystery by Ellery Queen. Stokes, 1932. Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee, writing under the joint pseudonym of Ellery Queen, find Queen investigating a natural death with a missing will. When the coffin is exhumed, a second body is found and the mystery begins.

And Then There Were None by Agatha Christie. Dodd, Mead, 1939. Ten men and women come to an isolated island to spend a weekend. Each person has a dark secret and one by one they die in strange ways.

The Big Sleep by Raymond Chandler. Knopf, 1939. This study in power and corruption is the first Philip Marlowe mystery with Marlowe trying to determine the truth from two quite different women and a missing man.

Buried for Pleasure by Edmund Crispin (pen name of Bruce Montgomery). Harper and Row, 1949. Gervase Fen, Oxford professor, has been talked into standing for Parliament. After encountering a strange group of small-town eccentrics, he also encounters a murder in this very funny mystery.

Death in the Fifth Position by Edgar Box (pen name of Gore Vidal). Dutton, 1952. Press agent Peter Sargeant turns detective to solve the murder of a ballerina.

The Willow Pattern by Robert Van Gulik. Scribner, 1964. Judge Dee is administering a Chinese city in the midst of a plague and a rash of crime. Though here fictionalized, Dee was a real seventh-century judge in the T'ang dynasty.

An Unsuitable Job for a Woman by P. D. James. Scribner, 1972. In this remarkable book, Cordelia Gray learns that

her partner has committed suicide, leaving her the business. Although she's a newcomer to the private investigator world, she is hired to find out about another suicide.

Dance Hall of the Dead by Tony Hillerman. Harper and Row, 1973. Reservation policeman Joe Leaphorn investigates the death of a young runner training for a religious ceremony.

Funeral Urn by June Drummond. Walker, 1976. By chance, Margaret Wooten finds herself in a lovely English village, and in the churchyard she finds a funeral urn filled with poisonous flowers.

Murder on the Yellow Brick Road by Stuart Kaminsky. St. Martin's, 1977. In 1940, a munchkin has been murdered on the set of *The Wizard of Oz*, and Judy Garland is frightened. Toby Peters comes to the rescue in the best of the series.

Strike Three, You're Dead by R. D. Rosen. Walker, 1984. Relief pitcher Rudy Furth is killed in the Providence Jewels's clubhouse, and outfielder Harvey Blissberg plays detective.

I Am the Only Running Footman by Martha Grimes. Little, Brown, 1986. The body of a young girl strangled with her own scarf is found near an old pub called I Am the Only Running Footman. Scotland Yard's Richard Jury is reminded of another murder, similar to this one, committed in Devon.

The Ritual Bath by Faye Kellerman. Morrow, 1986. A yeshiva in the Los Angeles hills is despoiled when a woman leaving the ritual bath is raped. Detective Peter Decker becomes involved.

The Master of the House by Robert Barnard. Scribner, 1994. A mother dies in childbirth, leaving four children and a crazy and ineffectual husband. When townspeople suspect something is wrong, two of the children find a body in the backyard.



Margaret A. Edwards Award Winner (1992)

Lois Duncan, **A True Storyteller**

The Margaret A. Edwards committee honored Duncan for her autobiographical *Chapters: My Growth as a Writer* and for her mystery/suspense books, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*; *Killing Mr. Griffin*; *Ransom*; *Summer of Fear*; and *The Twisted Window*.

Of all the Edwards Award winners, Duncan probably became a professional at the youngest age. She began submitting stories to magazines when she was ten. She sold her first short story when she was thirteen to *Calling All Girls*, and her first young adult novel, *Debutante Hill*, when she was twenty. At age twenty-seven, she found herself a single mother needing to support three young children. As she told Roger Sutton in a June 1992 *School Library Journal* interview, she grew up fast while learning to write not only the page-turners that kids love her for, but in between children's books and articles for women's magazines including *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Redbook*, and *Reader's Digest*. She did not want to be the kind of author who wrote the same story over and over again and so as soon as she finishes with one book, she refreshes her palate with a different kind of writing and then goes back to telling a new YA story.

Killing Mr. Griffin is one of her best-known books. She said it was inspired by her oldest daughter's first real boyfriend. While he was "the most charming young man you could ever meet," he was also a budding psychopath—"the kind of guy who would swerve in the road to run over a dog." She began wondering what a boy like this could do, how he could influence other teenagers, if he put his mind to it. Out of this wondering came a book that since 1978 has been read by hundreds of thousands of teenagers in spite of the fact that it regularly makes its way onto lists of censored books.

I Know What You Did Last Summer is also well known, partly because it was made into a major film. For an earlier edition of this textbook, Duncan confessed that one of the

most exciting evenings of her life was going to the theater to see "her" story, but her excitement soon turned into such disappointment that she forgot to eat her popcorn. The film was so different from the book that at first she thought she was in the wrong theater, but then she recognized some of her teenage characters, just not the adults or the setting. She had no boat in her story, but most of the movie takes place on a fishing boat owned by an insane man who chases the teenagers with a large meat hook. A boy, new to the story, gets shoved into a vat of boiling water, and when her heroine opens the trunk of a car she finds a corpse with crabs coming out of its mouth. But this is nothing compared to when she has to hide in a bin of ice surrounded by the cut-off heads of her friends.

Duncan said that she has always taken pride in being professional about the business side of her career and she understands that changes sometimes have to be made between a print edition and a film edition. For the sixth edition of this textbook, she wrote, "But the soul of a story should not be destroyed in the process. For a book that has been a mainstay in middle school literature classes for over 23 years, to be transformed into a slasher film without the knowledge and consent of the author goes past what is acceptable" (p. 100).

Duncan has a special reason for not wanting to desensitize young people to violence. In 1989, her youngest daughter, eighteen-year-old Kaitlyn, was murdered in what the Albuquerque Police Department classified as a random drive-by shooting. Duncan recounted the awful experience in a 1992 book for adults *Who Killed My Daughter?*, which many of her teen fans have also read. In hopes of keeping the case open and finding out who did the shooting, the Arquette family (Duncan's married name) has a website that asks for comments or clues. As of the end of May, 2007, nearly a thousand people had responded, but as of this writing the case is still unsolved. ❁



The Supernatural in YA Fiction

- All Hallows' Eve* by Vivian Vande Velde. Harcourt, 2006. In this collection of thirteen stories, a master writer has created ghosts, goblins, and witches galore.
- Beowulf* by Gareth Hinds. Candlewick, 2007. This beautifully created graphic novel made its way to several "Best Book" lists, at least partly because it coincided with the release of Robert Zemeckis's 2007 *Beowulf* film. The book was praised for keeping the rhythm and the tone of the original story even though it is considerably abridged. The story is told in boxes near each painting instead of inside speech bubbles.
- Beware! R. L. Stine Picks His Favorite Scary Stories*, edited by R. L. Stine. HarperCollins, 2002. Stine's name is meant to grab young readers who loved his earlier books. He wrote original stories for *Nightmare Hour* and *The Haunting House* (HarperCollins, 1999, 2001).
- The Entertainer and the Dybbuk* by Sid Fleischman. HarperCollins, Greenwillow, 2007. In this highly original book, readers get a new look at the anti-Semitism of the World War II era. Former American pilot Freddie Birch works as a ventriloquist and is surprised to find himself partnering with a dybbuk—a spirit or ghost—of a murdered Jewish boy who once helped Freddie escape from a POW camp.
- Fade* by Robert Cormier. Delacorte, 1988. Paul Moreaux, a young French Canadian, discovers that he has inherited a family gift/curse that comes to only one person in each generation: the ability to be invisible.
- The Ghost Belonged to Me, Ghosts I Have Been, The Dreadful Future of Blossom Culp, and Blossom Culp and the Sleep of Death* by Richard Peck. Delacorte, 1975, 1977, 1983, 1986. These delightfully funny books for middle school readers are about a boy who finds a charming, although somewhat outspoken, young woman from the past century living in the family barn.
- The Great Blue Yonder* by Alex Shearer. Clarion, 2002. Once tweens get over the sadness of twelve-year-old Harry's being killed on his bicycle, they will love—and laugh—at the story of how he returns home as a ghost.
- Horowitz Horror Stories: Stories You'll Wish You'd Never Read* by Anthony Horowitz. Philomel, 2006. Horror is out of control in these nine tales of kids and the unknown.
- In Camera and Other Stories* by Robert Westall, Scholastic, 1992. Readers who enjoy these stories will want to read Westall's *The Haunting of Chas McGill and Other Stories* (Greenwillow, 1993) and *Rachel and the Angel and Other Stories* (Scholastic, 1988).
- The Last Treasure* by Janet S. Anderson. Dutton, 2003. Wealthy John Matthew Smith died in 1881, but that doesn't keep his spirit from returning for an annual visit to see how the family is doing and to nudge things along in hopes of helping his descendants appreciate each other.
- The Lion Tamer's Daughter and Other Stories* by Peter Dickinson. Delacorte, 1997. In the title story, Keith is drawn into the dark side of the circus when he meets a duplicate of a longtime friend.
- The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold. Little, Brown, 2002. Fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon is on her way to school when she is raped and murdered in a cornfield. She tells her story from heaven as she watches over her family.
- The Presence: A Ghost Story* by Eve Bunting. Clarion, 2003. A young girl, injured and her best friend dead in a car crash, goes to a beloved church for solace and finds an evil presence instead.
- Restless: A Ghost's Story* by Rich Wallace. Viking, 2003. A cross-country runner running in a graveyard feels someone following him. Later the ghost of a young man touches him. He begins to see other spirits, including his older brother, dead for ten years.
- Skeleton Man* by Joseph Bruchac. HarperCollins, 2001. Young teens may get nightmares from this story based on a Mohawk legend about a man so hungry that he eats himself down to the bone. Fortunately, Molly manages to outwit the stranger and save herself and her parents.
- Skellig* by David Almond. Delacorte, 1999. When Michael goes out to explore new property his family has bought, he discovers Skellig in an old shed. Skellig first appears to be a sick old man, but later he appears to be something more. *Kit's Wilderness* (Delacorte, 2000) also has some intriguing supernatural elements.
- Vampires*, edited by Jane Yolen. HarperCollins, 1991. This wonderful collection of short stories will make readers shudder and, sometimes, laugh. Yolen's series for Harcourt Brace, *Here There Be Ghosts*, . . . *Dragons*, . . . *Unicorns*, . . . *Angels*, and . . . *Witches*, is beautifully put together.