

## **Books Café**

A Menu of Titles to Serve Your Students



### **NOVELS IN VERSE**

Novels written in blank verse have emerged in the past few years as a new genre. Many of these books deal with contemporary social issues, letting kids see the problems in a new light, and, just maybe, encouraging them to let their own feelings out on paper, or to share their poems with friends. Though not officially *novels*, I've also included a few non-fiction in verse titles on a variety of subjects. To find more using WebCat, search for **NOVELS IN VERSE**.

You can also find other titles at the following Web sites:

<http://www.dover.lib.nh.us/teenpage/novelsverse.htm>

<http://www.wiredforyouth.com/books/index.cfm?booklist=verse>



### ***Today's Special: Our featured title***

*Love That Dog*

Sharon Creech

Jack's journal reflects his reactions to poems his teacher, Miss Stetchberry, is sharing with her class ("Why doesn't the person just / keep going if he's got / so many miles to go before he sleeps?") and his own reluctant experiments with writing poems ("So much depends/ upon/ a blue car/ splattered with mud/ speeding down the road."). All the threads of the story are pulled together in Jack's final poem, "Love That Dog (Inspired by Walter Dean Myers)." Creech has created a poignant, funny picture of a child's encounter with the power of poetry. This tiny treasure of a book can be read in one sitting. It makes a wonderful read aloud as an introduction to poetry. Creech includes the poems mentioned in an appendix. Grades 4 - 8.



### ***Starters: Little bites to whet your appetite***

*Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart*

by Vera B. Williams

Amber and Essie, two girls living with their mother who is often at work while they're home alone, tell their story of waiting for their father's release from prison. In poems and pictures, Williams tell the sisters' story. Black-and-white pencil drawings through most of the book illustrate daily life and contrast with bright colored pencil drawings at the end in a family album. A story of hardship and hope. Picture Book.

*Owl Moon*

Jane Yolen; illustrated by John Schoenherr

A gentle, poetic story that lovingly depicts the special companionship of a young child and her father as they take a nighttime stroll to look for owls. Complemented by award winning soft exquisite watercolor illustrations. Perfect for reading aloud. 1988 Caldecott Medal, Notable Children's Book, Reading Rainbow selection. Picture Book.

*My Man Blue*

Nikki Grimes

Blue lost one boy to the streets and is determined that this time will be different. And Damon knows that even though he's the "man of the house," there's room for a friend like Blue in his life. At the end of the day, Damon has someone standing steadfast in his corner. Someone true . . . like Blue. Nikki Grimes's moving poems and Jerome Lagarrigue's bold paintings create an emotional and realistic bond of friendship between a man and a boy in a rough world. Picture Book.



***Entrées: Novels and non-fiction titles to chew on***

*Frenchtown Summer*

Robert Cormier

Eugene is remembering the summer of 1938 in Frenchtown, a time when he began to wonder "what I was doing here on the planet Earth." Here in vibrant, exquisite detail are his lovely mother, his aunts and uncles, cousins and friends, and especially his beloved, enigmatic father. Here, too, is the world of a mill town: the boys swimming in a brook that is red or purple or green, depending on the dyes dumped that day by the comb shop; the visit of the ice man; and the boys' trips to

the cemetery or the forbidden railroad tracks. And here also is a darker world—the mystery of a girl murdered years before. Robert Cormier’s touching, funny, melancholy chronicle of a vanished world celebrates a son’s connection to his father and human relationships that are timeless. Grades 6 and up.

*Make Lemonade*

Virginia Euwer Wolff

LaVaughn needed a part-time job. What she got was a baby-sitting gig with Jolly, an unwed teen mother. With two kids hanging in the balance, they need to make the best out of life -- and they can only do it for themselves and each other. Meanwhile, LaVaughn and her friends have other things to figure out. The sequel, *True Believer*, continues LaVaughn’s story and a third title is planned to make a trilogy. Grades 7 – 12.

*Keesha’s House*

Helen Frost

Keesha has found a safe place to live, and other kids gravitate to her house when they just can’t make it on their own. Seven teens facing such problems as pregnancy, closeted homosexuality, and abuse each describe in poetic forms what caused them to leave home and where they found home again. Stretching the boundaries of traditional poetic forms – sestinas and sonnets – Helen Frost’s extraordinary debut novel for young adults weaves together the stories of these seven teenagers as they courageously struggle to hold their lives together and overcome their difficulties. Michael L. Printz Honor. Grades 8 and up.

*Carver, A Life in Poems*

Marilyn Nelson

44 poems, told from the point of view of Carver and the people who knew him, celebrate his character and accomplishments. Includes prose summaries of events and archival photographs. Newberry Honor, Coretta Scott King Award. Grades 6 and up.

*New Found Land: Lewis and Clark’s Voyage of Discover*

Allan Wolf

Nontraditional narrative formats successfully re-create the historical journey. The primary narrator is Lewis’ dog, Seaman. Thirteen other voices, ranging from President Jefferson and Captains Lewis and Clark to drinker Hugh Hall, and York, Clark’s slave, relate the events from their perspectives. These diverse voices reveal in free verse the class structure of the expedition, as well as historical attitudes

toward African Americans, Indians, and women. A novel that will enrich American History studies and stimulate classroom discussion. (Review by *Linda Perkins* for *Booklist*) Grades 7 and up.



### ***Dessert: To satisfy a craving for more***

More Fiction:

*Heartbeat*

Sharon Creech

Run, run, run. That's what twelve-year-old Annie loves to do. When she's barefoot and running, she can hear her heart beating...thump-THUMP, thump-THUMP. It's a rhythm that makes sense in a year when everything's shifting. Her mother is pregnant, her grandfather is forgetful, and her best friend Max is always moody. Everything is changing, just like the apple Annie's been assigned to draw a hundred times. Grades 6 and up.

*Jump Ball: A Basketball Season in Poems*

Mel Glenn

Tells the story of a high school basketball team's season through a series of poems reflecting the feelings of students, their families, teachers, and coaches. Readers will recognize high school cliques and identify with the different voices. The tragic, page-turning ending will keep them reading. Grades 7 and up.

Other novels in verse by Mel Glenn:

*Split Image: a Story in Poems*

*The Taking of Room 114: A Hostage Drama in Poems*

*Who Killed Mr. Chippendale?: A Mystery in Poems*

*Foreign Exchange: A Mystery in Poems*

*Squeeze Play: A Baseball Story*

*One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies*

Sonya Sones

***My name is Ruby/This book is about me.*** /It tells the deeply hideous story of what happens when my mother dies and I'm dragged three thousand miles away from my gorgeous boyfriend, Ray, to live in L.A. with my father, who I've never even met because he's such a scumbag that he divorced my mom before I was born. /The only way I've ever even *seen* him is in the movies, since he's this mega-famous

actor who's been way too busy trying to win Oscars to even visit me *once* in fifteen years. /Everyone loves my father. /Everyone but me. Grades 7 and up.

Other titles by Sonya Sones: *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* and *What My Mother Doesn't Know*,

*Out of the Dust*

Karen Hesse

In a series of poems, fifteen-year-old Billie Jo relates the hardships of living on her family's wheat farm in Oklahoma during the dust bowl years of the Depression.

1998 Newberry. Grades 5 and up.

Other titles by Karen Hesse: *Aleutian Sparrow*, *Witness*, *Music of Dolphins*,

*Locomotion*

Jacqueline Woodson

When Lonnie was seven years old, his parents died in a fire. Now he's eleven, and he still misses them and his little sister, Lili, who was put into a different foster home because "not a lot of people want boys-not foster boys that ain't babies." But Lonnie hasn't given up. His foster mother, Miss Edna, is growing on him, and his teacher, Ms. Marcus, is showing him ways to put his jumbled feelings on paper. Told entirely through Lonnie's poetry, we see his heartbreak over his lost family, his thoughtful perspective on the world around him, and most of all his love for Lili and his determination to one day put at least half of their family back together. Jacqueline Woodson's poignant story of love, loss, and hope is lyrically written and enormously accessible. Grades 6 – 10.

More Non-fiction:

*World's Afire*

Paul Janeczko

These haunting poems of dreams and disaster, heroism and heartbreak, draw their power from a true event: the Hartford, Connecticut, circus fire of July 6, 1944, in which 167 people were killed and more than 500 injured. Grades 6 and up.

*The Trial*

Jen Bryant

Living in Flemington, New Jersey, in 1935, twelve-year-old Katie Leigh Flynn describes, in a series of poems, the effect on her small town of the ongoing trial of Bruno Hauptmann for the kidnapping and murder of Charles Lindbergh's baby son. Grades 5 to 9.

*Ann and Seamus*

Kevin Major

This novel is based on true events that took place off the treacherous coast of Newfoundland in 1828. Seventeen-year-old Ann Harvey helped her father rescue 163 passengers who were stranded after a ship carrying Irish immigrants ran aground. Subdued artwork in the bluish-gray tones of sea and spray sustains the brooding mood, and an endnote provides historical context. Grades 7 and up.