

## 6-4 Turning Points

### Novel Previews

#### Core Novels

The Second Mrs. Gioconda by E. L. Konigsberg (A) The Mona Lisa... Why did Leonardo da Vinci lavish three years on a painting of the second wife of an unimportant merchant when all the nobles of Europe were begging for a portrait by his hand? No one knows for sure. But this story of Leonardo, his wayward apprentice Salai, and the Duke of Milan's plain young wife, Beatrice d'Este, may hold the clue to the most famous -- and puzzling -- painting of all time.

The Miracle Worker by William Gibson (C) **NO ONE COULD REACH HER**

Twelve-year-old Helen Keller lived in a prison of silence and darkness. Born deaf, blind, and mute, with no way to express herself or comprehend those around her, she flew into primal rages against anyone who tried to help her, fighting tooth and nail with a strength born of furious, unknowing desperation. Then Annie Sullivan came. Half-blind herself, but possessing an almost fanatical determination, she would begin a frightening and incredibly moving struggle to tame the wild girl no one could reach, and bring Helen into the world at last...

"An emotional earthquake ... a magnificent drama. A play with the power to wrench the heart." -- *New York Mirror*.

From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsberg (A)

When suburban Claudia Kincaid decides to run away, she knows she doesn't just want to run *from* somewhere she wants to run *to* somewhere--to a place that is comfortable, beautiful, and preferably elegant. She chooses the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Knowing that her younger brother, Jamie, has money and thus can help her with the serious cash flow problem she invites him along. Once settled into the museum, Claudia and Jamie, find themselves caught up in the mystery of an angel statue that the museum purchased at an auction for a bargain price of \$250. The statue is possibly an early work of the Renaissance master Michelangelo, and therefore worth millions. Is it? Or isn't it? Claudia is determined to find out. This quest leads Claudia to Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, the remarkable old woman who sold the statue and to some equally remarkable discoveries about herself.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams (C)

Join Douglas Adams's hapless hero Arthur Dent as he travels the galaxy with his intrepid pal Ford Prefect, getting into horrible messes and generally wreaking hilarious havoc. Dent is grabbed from Earth moments before a cosmic construction team obliterates the planet to build a freeway. You'll never read funnier science fiction; Adams is a master of intelligent satire, barbed wit, and comedic dialogue. *The Hitchhiker's Guide* is rich in comedic detail and thought-provoking situations and stands up to multiple reads. Required reading for science fiction fans, this book (and its follow-ups) is also sure to please fans of Monty Python, Terry Pratchett's Discworld series, and British sitcoms.

#### Guided Reading Novels

Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischmann (E) With his flair for persuading readers to believe in the ridiculous, Fleischman scores a hit with his new creation. Sid's skillful pictures emphasize events in the adventures of the orphan Jemmy, kept in his king's palace to be thrashed for the offenses committed by the royal heir, known as Prince Brat. It is forbidden to punish Brat, whose tricks multiply until Jemmy is tempted to escape the daily round of flogging. But the prince himself takes off and forces the whipping boy to go with him. As they get into and out of trouble on the outside, Jemmy hears that he has been accused of abducting Brat. When the prince arranges for their return to the palace, poor Jemmy fears the worst, but things turn out for the best at the story's satisfying close. Colorful types like a thief called Hold-Your-Nose Billy, Betsy and her dancing bear Petunia, et al., increase the fun.

Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card (C) Ender Wiggin is a very bright young boy with a powerful skill. One of a group of children bred to be military geniuses and save Earth from an inevitable attack by aliens, known here as "buggers," Ender becomes unbeatable in war games and seems poised to lead Earth to triumph over the buggers. Meanwhile, his brother and sister plot to wrest power from Ender. Twists, surprises and interesting characters elevate this novel into status as a bona fide page turner. It captured the [Nebula](#) and [Hugo](#) Awards

Shakespeare Stealer by Gary Blackwood (E+/A) Young Widge is an Elizabethan Oliver Twist with a talent for shorthand. Raised in an orphanage, he is apprenticed to an unprincipled clergyman who trains Widge to use a cryptic writing system that he's invented to pirate sermons from other rectors. Hired by a mysterious traveler, the boy is hauled off to London to attend performances of Hamlet in order to transcribe the script for another theater company. Naturally, all does not go smoothly, and in the course of trying to recover his stolen notebook, Widge goes to work at the Globe, eventually donning a dress and wig to play Ophelia before the queen. The true identity of the mysterious traveler provides a neat twist at the end. As in *Wild Timothy* (Atheneum, 1987; o.p.) and several of his other books, Blackwood puts a young boy in a sink-or-swim predicament in alien territory where he discovers his own strength. It's a formula with endless appeal. Not only must Widge survive physically, but he must also find his own ethical path having had no role models. When he is befriended by members of the acting company, he blossoms as he struggles with moral dilemmas that would never have dawned on him before. Tentative readers might be put off by Widge's Yorkshire dialect, but the words are explained in context. Wisely, much of the theater lingo is not explained and becomes just one more part of the vivid background through which the action moves. This is a fast-moving historical novel that introduces an important era with casual familiarity.

People of Sparks (sequel to City of Ember) by Jeanne DuPrau (E+/A) In this exciting and solidly constructed sequel to [The City of Ember](#), Jeanne DuPrau moves the story on entrancingly, bringing along her cast of characters from underground and adding new dimensions and relationships as the action escalates to a satisfying conclusion that still allows for further volumes in this fine fantasy. When teenagers Lina Mayfleet and Doon Harrow lead their people up out of the Earth, fleeing their dying underground city of Ember, everything is new and a little frightening to the refugees--the sun and the moon, birds, trees, fire...and the people of Ember are strange to the 322 citizens of Sparks, one of the few towns on Earth to survive the time of The Disaster. How can they feed and house the 400 Emberites, the leaders of Sparks wonder, when they have just begun to be able to feed themselves comfortably? But if they don't, these underground people with no survival skills will surely die in the wastelands. They take them in as best they can, but grumbling and bad feeling grows on both sides. Lina returns from a failed search for her persistent vision of a city of light to find the town, egged on by the power-hungry young thug Tick, once again at the point of war, forgetting how the Earth has been destroyed before. But Lina has seen the devastation left by The Disaster, and so she risks a brave move of reconciliation, and when Doon exposes Tick's trickery, the two sides join as the new people of Sparks.

A View from Saturday by E. L. Konigsberg (A) A powerhouse sixth-grade Academic Bowl team from Epiphany Middle School; the art of calligraphy; the retirees of Century Village, Florida; a genius dog named Ginger; and a holiday production of "Annie" all figure heavily in the latest book by E. L. Konigsberg, who has produced a [Newbery Medal](#)-winning children's tale to rival her classic [From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler](#), which won the Newbery Medal almost 30 years ago. The new book centers around a group of four brilliant, shy 12-year-olds and the tea party they have each Saturday morning. Konigsberg's wacky erudition and her knack for offbeat characters make this a funny and endearing story of friendship.

Stravaganza: City of Masks by Mary Hoffman (C) From the British author of the Amazing Grace books comes a novel, the first in a trilogy, about a teen stricken with brain cancer who travels between two worlds. In modern-day London, Lucien Mulholland undergoes chemotherapy treatments, but when he falls asleep clutching a mysterious book his father has given him, he is transported, or "stravagated," to an enchanting 16th-century Venice-like city called Bellezza, in the country Talia. Lucien can return only if he can get hold of the book again. In this colorful other world, rich with court intrigues and magic, he feels vibrantly alive, as opposed to his pain-ridden days back in England; his hair has grown back and he eats with relish. Bellezza is also where, as "Luciano," he meets lovely 15-year-old Arianna and Rodolfo, who created the book that acts as Lucien's "stravagation" talisman. Rodolfo explains that a stravagante is "a wanderer between worlds," and also the history of this magical travel. Now the secret

brotherhood dedicated to keeping the two worlds separate is being challenged by a faction with evil intent. Soon "Luciano" is caught up in their power struggle and learns there is a cost when one cannot stragavate properly. The Renaissance backdrop sets an elegant mood for the time-travel toggling. This complex, at times slow-moving and somber story line may disturb some middle-graders, but the novel will likely intrigue more sophisticated readers.