

Unit 8-2 Do the Right Thing

Novel Previews

Glory Field by Myers -- This moving, effective novel is a sort of Roots for young adults. It chronicles the African American experience through the lives and times of one family, beginning in 1753 with the capture of Muhammed Bilal in Sierra Leone. He survives his journey to America on a slave ship to become the founder of a family, whose history The Glory Field is all about. Readers then meet one of his descendants, Lizzy, a young slave who works on a plantation in 1864 on Curry Island, South Carolina. From slavery, escape, and the Civil War, they follow the fortunes of the family to the year 1900. Then, teenaged Elijah migrates North. Chicago of the 1930s is described through the experiences of Luvenia, 16; Curry of 1964 is seen through the eyes of Tommy, also 16. The last part of the story is set in the present and focuses on Malcolm and Shep, teenaged cousins who have come to Curry from New York City for a family reunion. The decades pass swiftly and are connected by characters who appear in one segment of the saga and reappear later as survivors from the past or as memories. Each part of the story ends on a hopeful note, yet each is unfinished.

Chernowitz by Arrick -- A boy who suffers anti-Semitic abuse at the hands of a classmate during his ninth and tenth grade years plots revenge against his tormentor.

Diary of Anne Frank by Goodrich -- The value of the Diary is unparalleled especially given Anne Frank's ability to describe the minute details of her feelings at such a young age. It is a first-hand account of the extremes that the Jews of Europe had to suffer under the persecution of the Nazi regime. Many readers have marveled at Anne's spirit, hope, and determination which I believe is misunderstood in the context of her situation. For most of the time spent in the Annexe she is certain that she'll be back in school soon enough. Naturally, at age 13 her own naivete would prevent her from grasping the potential future at stake. One remarkable fact is the quick transition from child to teen upon the realization that their lives are truly at stake about 2/3rds through. The reality sets in and she begins to suffer depression and fear.

Warriors Don't Cry by Beals -- Beals, one of the nine black students who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, AR, in 1957, tells an incredible story of faith, family love, friendships, and strong personal commitment. Drawing from the diaries she kept, the author easily puts readers in her saddle oxfords as she struggles against those people in both the white and black communities who would have segregation continue. Her prose does not play on the sympathy of readers; it simply tells it like it happened. She shares the physical, mental, and emotional torture and abuse she suffered at the hands of teenagers and adults. She also shares the support, the encouragement, and the help she received from both whites and blacks.

Malcolm X By Any Means Necessary by Haley -- Myers organizes Malcolm X's life into four stages: his childhood; his adolescence; his period of working under Elijah Mohammad; and his life after breaking with the Nation of Islam. Throughout, his experiences and actions are presented in a broader social context, from the beliefs of Marcus Garvey, who exerted such an influence upon Malcolm's parents, to the culture of adolescent black males in the 1930s and 1940s, to the contrasts between the Nation of Islam's views and those of Martin Luther King, Jr, with all the shadings in between. The author discusses the evolution in Malcolm's character, as his belief in Islam gradually taught him that not all whites were the enemies of African-Americans. He strikes a good balance between his subject's personal life and broader social issues and movements. Myers does not judge whether or not Malcolm X's views were better than those of King, but rather shows how both appealed to specific audiences and contributed to the struggles of the 1960s.

Rosa Parks (Don't Know Much About series) by Kenneth Davis -- "The only tired I was, was tired of giving in." Far from the myth of the naive little seamstress, this biography shows Parks as a longtime human rights activist whose refusal to give up her seat on the bus in 1955 grew from her many years of political work. Part of the Don't Know Much About series, this conveys history in a question-and-answer format. The accessible text and design invite discussion among readers (including some older than the target audience). Plenty of questions ("Why did Rosa Parks join the NAACP in 1943?" "Who were the Scottsboro Boys?") and clear, detailed answers; dramatic sidebars; quotes; and news photos and sketches clarify the history of the civil rights struggle and introduce people who made a difference. A bibliography and a chronology are included, but there are only a few documented sources.

Summer of My German Soldier by Greene -- The summer that Patty Bergen turns twelve is a summer that will haunt her forever. When her small hometown in Arkansas becomes the site of a camp housing German prisoners during World War II, Patty learns what it means to open her heart. Even though she's Jewish, she begins to see a prison escapee, Anton, not as a Nazi, but as a lonely, frightened young man with feelings not unlike her own.

In Anton, Patty finds someone who softens the pain of her own father's rejection and who appreciates her in a way her mother never will. While patriotic feelings run high, Patty risks losing family, friends -- even her freedom -- for this dangerous friendship. It is a risk she has to take and one she will have to pay a price to keep.

Devil's Arithmetic by Yolen -- In this novel, Yolen attempts to answer those who question why the Holocaust should be remembered. Hannah, 12, is tired of remembering, and is embarrassed by her grandfather, who rants and raves at the mention of the Nazis. Her mother's explanations of how her grandparents and great-aunt lost all family and friends during that time have little effect. Then, during a Passover Seder, Hannah is chosen to open the door to welcome the prophet Elijah. As she does so, she is transported to a village in Poland in the 1940s, where everyone thinks that she is Chaya, who has just recovered from a serious illness. She is captured by the Nazis and taken to a death camp, where a young girl named Rivka, who teaches her how to fight the dehumanizing processes of the camp and hold onto her identity, befriends her. Through Hannah, with her memories of the present and the past, Yolen does a fine job of illustrating the importance of remembering. She adds much to children's understanding of the effects of the Holocaust, which will reverberate throughout history, today and tomorrow.

Farewell to Manzanar by Wakatsuki Houston -- During World War II a community called Manzanar was hastily created in the high mountain desert country of California, east of the Sierras. Its purpose was to house thousands of Japanese American internees. One of the first families to arrive was the Wakatsukis, who were ordered to leave their fishing business in Long Beach and take with them only the belongings they could carry. For Jeanne Wakatsuki, a seven-year-old child, Manzanar became a way of life in which she struggled and adapted, observed and grew. For her father it was essentially the end of his life.

At age thirty-seven, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston recalls life at Manzanar through the eyes of the child she was. She tells of her fear, confusion, and bewilderment as well as the dignity and great resourcefulness of people in oppressive and demeaning circumstances. Written with her husband, Jeanne delivers a powerful first-person account that reveals her search for the meaning of Manzanar. *Farewell to Manzanar* has become a staple of curriculum in schools and on campuses across the country. Last year the San Francisco Chronicle named it one of the twentieth century's 100 best nonfiction books from west of the Rockies.

