

# Open Shelf

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2007

## This month:

**Evolution, Me, and Other Freaks of Nature** Robin Brande

**Drugs are Nice** Lisa Crystal Carver

**Walk Two Moons** Sharon Creech

**Give a Boy a Gun** Todd Strasser

**My Antonia** Willa Cather

**Godless** Pete Hautman

**Les Misérables** Victor Hugo

**Neverwhere** Neil Gaiman

## city of mesa library young adult advisory council book review newsletter

### Letter from the editor



With school winding down you may find yourself in possession of a lot more free time. Fill it with books, to be specific, *these* books.

Mary Beth Hutchinson  
Open Shelf Editor

### Evolution, Me, and Other Freaks of Nature

By Robin Brande

★★★★

This book was recommended to me (well, rather, forced upon me) by my friend. I thought it would be a typical YA novel, but I was pleasantly surprised.

The novel begins with Mena Reece's first day of high school—and from page one, something is obviously wrong. Ex-friends are outwardly hostile, including a mysterious girl in a too-tight Jesus shirt. On the first day, a nerdy eccentric named Casey befriends her. And, of course, he's too geeky and too nerdy to be considered friend (or boyfriend) material. While Mena is busy adamantly NOT falling in love with her science partner, the heat is rising in her biology class—her ex-best-friends from her Evangelical church have joined an anti-evolution brigade, turning their backs whenever the fatal "e" word is mentioned. Mena is trying to help and impress the biology teacher Ms. Shepard, while helping Casey get an A on their science project. The novel actually shows growth in Mena, while realistically addressing the teen experiences of self-discovery and first love.

I thought the evolution revolution was an amazing way to bring the debate into high schools. Brande tries to stay balanced, while offering ways to reconcile religion with science. Her writing style is honest, sarcastic, and believable for a teenager, and I definitely think that this book could make a big impression. Overall, a worthwhile (and less than a four hour) read.

-Mandi Levendowski

### Drugs are Nice

By Lisa Crystal Carver

★★★★★

Lisa's lifestyle was glamorous as a teen in an underground punk band with her best friend, where she had minimal parental control, and spent time gallivanting with misunderstood performance artists, and received letters from devoted-bordering-on-obsessed fans. She "settles down" with a French performer and the two embark on an unhealthy, wild love affair (even marriage), full of problems. Eventually Lisa moves back to America to "fall in love" with rocker Boyd, until things finally get out of control.

Lisa's memoir is a bare-all confession, with helpings of philosophy, psychology, and poetry on the side. Her writing is blunt and harsh, but she has the ability to morph into lyrical prose effortlessly. The book is tenderly destructive, and I absolutely loved it.

-Mandi Levendowski

### Walk Two Moons

By Sharon Creech

★★★★★

I cried after reading *Walk Two Moons*. The main character, Salamanca, is traveling with

her grandparents from Bybanks, Kentucky to Idaho to visit her mother. Along the way, she tells stories about her friend Phoebe to her grandparents. Since they are traveling in a car, there is plenty of time to talk about the many strange adventures with Phoebe. But there is also a time limit. Sal wants to see her mom on the day of her birthday. Then the story takes an amazing twist.

I absolutely loved this book. It was depressing but also enthralling at the same time.

-Catherine Millar-Haskell

### Give a Boy a Gun

By Todd Strasser

★★★★★

In a "various viewpoints" script, *Give A Boy A Gun* by Todd Strasser relates to the Columbine High School massacre. When two boys, Gary and Brendan, finally become fed-up with the bullies and cliques around them, they decided to plot revenge. Their plan: Hold everyone at a school dance hostage inside the school gym and shoot the people that messed up their lives. To the principal, they will give one bullet through the head; to the teachers that failed them, bullets through the chest; and to a certain football player, their main target, bullets to his knees so he can suffer forever. What led to this horrible event? Whose fault is it, if anybody's? Why did they do it? Could the event have been prevented? These questions run through the heads of the speakers in this book. It has a great plot presenting a universal problem throughout schools.

-Ashley Sanders

## My Antonia

By Willa Cather

★★★★★

**My Antonia** is one of those classics that come on summer reading lists, and you just don't want to even think about them. But this classic is something different from the dusty old books that go on and on about nothing really.

**My Antonia** takes place in the recently settled area of Nebraska, and is narrated from the point of Jim, a young boy sent to live with his grandparents on their farm. There he meets a young girl, a Bohemian (no, she's actually from Bohemia), on the farm next to his. Beautiful and full of vibrant life, she stands out from her surroundings like the sun in the sky. As the years pass, Antonia and Jim develop a special bond that lasts through time.

This is seriously one of the best classics I have ever read. It's part romance, and part Western historical fiction. But most of all, it's the touching story of a boy and his first love.

- **Gabrielle Hall**

## Godless

By Pete Hautman

★★★★★

Religion is an interesting thing. It's also an interesting thing to read about, although, generally, it's not very funny, and most of the time, it's noticeably unoriginal. **Godless** breaks down those barriers. It is written about a kid, Jason, who invents his own religion (Chutengodianism), which worships the water tower in his town. Setting this religion up seems like a great way to spend the summer, and Jason takes it as a joke. As Chutengodianism takes hold though, things get out of hand for Jason, and all the Chutengodians.

Apart from being an amazingly original idea, **Godless** is not a world in whose characters you don't believe. Jason, his best friend Shin, Henry, and Magda are all real people—average people. Hautman has a good grasp of the real essence of what happens when an idea created solely for the amusement of one bored teenager gets REALLY out of hand.

- **Oonagh Mcquarrie**

## Les Miserables

By Victor Hugo

★★★★★

Like the title suggests, **Les Miserables** will touch a very deep part of you through its depiction of human compassion and judgment.

The story is set on the brink of the French Revolution and follows the tale of an escaped prisoner and his struggle against the rules of society and his quest for redemption. This is heavy reading, but it is certainly worth your time. This book left me bawling at 2:30 a.m. on a school night. It is one of those books that stays with you long after.

- **Jenny Pang**

## Nowhere

By Neil Gaiman

★★★★★

Richard has a normal life. He goes about his days in London with his fiancé, until he finds a homeless person sprawled on the sidewalk bleeding and he tries to help her. He carries her back to his apartment and helps her recover. Door, the girl he helps, heals very quickly and seems to find things in his house he never knew he had. After a while, two men come to his door asking after their sister. They burst into his house and search for her, but she is nowhere to be found. Once they leave, she returns. Eventually Door asks Richard for a favor, and he is sent to an alley where he is told to spin three times. Once he leaves the alley, a man rises from the trash and leads him through the sewer. After Richard returns to his apartment he begins to go through his life again, but no one can see him. When he gets to work, his desk is missing and his apartment has been rented to another person. He knows something is very wrong and he is beginning to finally understand what happened. He knows it is all connected to Door and his friends.

- **Travis Holzer**



### rating system

bad; needs work ★

so-so ★★

average ★★★

good ★★★★

excellent; perfect ★★★★★

Visit the Library's Web Site:

[www.mesalibrary.org](http://www.mesalibrary.org)

and see the Teens page!

Get registered NOW for  
Anthology's 2007 Voices of Youth  
Poetry Slam.

Anthology, Inc. invites you to join us for the greatest performance poetry event to EVER take place in the Phoenix area. Teens 13-19 will read in a series of qualifying poetry slams across the valley, and the top finishers will star in a final extravaganza on April 28th, 2007 at the Burton Barr Branch of the Phoenix Library.

The preliminary competition at the City of Mesa Library will take place on Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, from 1-3 p.m., at the Main Library branch, 64 E. First St., in downtown Mesa.

Registration is FREE, but each preliminary event is limited to 15 participants. So, be sure to reserve your spot today. For a complete schedule of preliminary events, and further details, visit the festival website at: <http://voy.anthology.org> and register for your spot in Anthology's 2007 Voices of Youth Poetry Slam.

Meet the Authors of **Revenge of the Shadow King**, Jon Lewis and Derek Benz!

Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 11 a.m. to 12 noon,  
Youth Activity Room, City of Mesa Library,  
64 E. First St.

## What is YAAC?



The Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) is a group of teens from many of Mesa's junior and senior high schools. They hold meetings twice monthly to review books for this newsletter and to plan special activities. They also help the librarians in Mesa Public Library's Young Adult Room at the Main Library as volunteers and assist with programs.

If you are interested in becoming a member of YAAC, call (480) 644-2734 or stop by the Young Adult service desk and ask for an application.

Learn more at:

 [mesalibrary.org](http://mesalibrary.org)  
City of Mesa Library on the Web



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Great People, Quality Service!