

Barb's BookSpot: Episode 3

Middle Grade Chapter books to Read Aloud

March, 2015

***A Snicker of Magic* by Natalie Lloyd. Scholastic, 2014.**

Felicity Pickle is 12 years old when she, her Mom and younger sister move back to Midnight Gultch. It seems they move household every time things get a little tough. Felicity is a word collector, and a poet, and she befriends Jonah, a boy her age who secretly performs random acts of kindness around town. Legend has it that there was once magic in this town, but due to a curse it was lost long ago. Felicity hopes that somehow, she can help restore the magic, especially magic to help her convince Mom settle down and make a home. Believable characters, an interesting setting, beautiful language, and reference to the power of stories, are the magic that make this book a great selection to share.

***Rain, Reign* by Anne M. Martin. (Schneider Family Book Award, 2015) Fiewel & Friends/Macmillan, 2014.**

Struggling with symptoms of Asperger's, Rose finds comfort in her set routines and rules. She particularly loves collecting homonyms; her name is one (*Rose, rows*) and she named her dog with a triple homonym (*Rain, reign, rein*). Rose lives with her single Dad, who is frustrated, finding it difficult to understand her obsessions, particularly the one she has about ALWAYS following rules. When her dog is lost during a storm, and then found, Rose discovers that her beloved pet has a microchip identifying him as belonging to another family. Following the rules would mean she has to return Rain to his rightful owners. How can she decide? This book provides readers with an opportunity to see the world through the eyes of an individual with Autism.

***The Greenglass House* by Kate Milford, with illustrations by Jaime Zollars. Clarion, 2014.**

The Greenglass House is a smuggler's inn immersed in folklore about daring escapes and larger than life folk heroes. It is set high on a hill in a remote location, so not many guests are expected in the dead of winter. Milo, age 12, lives here with his adopted parents, and looks forward to their quiet, family time. He might even get up the nerve to ask about his real parents, a quest he has long held dear. But without warning, a whole series of unusual guests begin to arrive, one at a time, over the Christmas vacation, Milo's curiosity is piqued. Each guest seems to have some bit of memorabilia, an heirloom, a map, or a trinket that is related to the house or to its legendary former owner. Each appears to be on a quest of their own – is it treasure they seek? Milo joins forces with the cook's daughter, Meddy, to unveil the mysterious identities of the guests, their quests, and perhaps uncover the mystery hidden in the house.



***Half a Chance* by Cynthia Lord. Scholastic, 2014.**

Lucy's family has just moved to a cabin in a lakefront community in New Hampshire. Most residents are summer folk, but Lucy's family will be staying year-round. Her father is a famous photographer who travels a lot, and more than anything Lucy hopes to gain his approval. She is a fine photographer herself, but all too often, she sees the world through the lens of her camera instead of with her heart. She befriends Nate, who lives in the cabin next door, and together they help Nate's Grandma monitor a loon family nesting on the lake. Grandma Lilah is a member of a loon preservation society, but due to her frailty and forgetfulness, she can no longer venture out on her own, or get into the kayaks and canoes. Lucy and Nate decide to enter a photography contest, judged by Lucy's father, under Nate's name, to win prize money so they can buy a pontoon boat for Grandma. For the "Lost" category of the contest, they disagree about using a picture that Lucy secretly took of Grandma Lilah when she was confused and scared. Lucy thinks it tells the truth, but Nate thinks it portrays Grandma at her worst. Is it fair to use someone's image without their permission- even if the shot is good enough to win? Realistic characters, complex and intergenerational relationships, and much visual appeal make this a great story to read aloud, sure to provoke discussion about ethics and responsibilities.

***The Fourteenth Goldfish* by Jennifer L. Holm, with illustrations by Tad Carpenter. Random House, 2014.**

Ellie is in fifth grade, and she lives with her Mom who is the drama teacher at her school. One day, mom comes home with vaguely-familiar boy who looks about 13 years old, introducing him as Melvin, her long lost cousin. It turns out Melvin is really her scientist grandfather, who has discovered a way to reverse aging, and consequently has regressed. Grandpa is aged 76, now trapped in the body of a teenager, and he's locked out of his lab since they don't recognize him. He can't drive, open a bank account, and he must go back to school with generation he can barely comprehend. He retains his judgmental opinions and domineering personality, but under guardianship of his own daughter, he must learn to see things from a different perspective. Ellie, a *tell-it-like-it-is* narrator, learns a lot about life, about the ethical questions forced by science, about the relationships in her family, and about herself. All are treated with humor and light-hearted tone, in this fast-paced novel which will be great fun to share. This one might make you laugh out loud.

