A literary approach to the Cinderella tale is simply to take two or more examples of the tale and read, analyze, and compare them, looking for similarities and differences in both the narrative and the illustrations in these picture book versions. Children may be surprised to discover that in some Cinderella tales, there is no glass slipper or fairy godmother. Nevertheless, the story is considered a version of the Cinderella story. You and the children can work together to generate a list of story characteristics and decide which or how many elements must be present in order to say, "That's a Cinderella story." Then, once a clear understanding of Cinderella elements is in place, children can apply their knowledge by reading and responding to other variants from a variety of world cultures.

European Variants

Latin American Variants

Native American Variants

Rural American Variants
African Variants


Asian Variants


Middle Eastern Variants


Three collections of less familiar Cinderella versions include Cinderella Tales from Around the World collected by Heidi Anne Heiner (2012) and part of the SurLaLune Fairy Tale Series, Judy Sierra's Cinderella (1992), from the Oryx Multicultural Folk Tale Series, and Cinderella Tales from Around the World (LEAP's Global Understanding Book Series) by Ilia Lane Gross (LEAP, 2001). Studying folktale variants from a variety of cultures opens an avenue to understanding basic characteristics underlying the simple folk story. Folktales extol the qualities of goodness, mercy, courage, and love, which children can see are valued in all cultures. However, children's literature professors Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, and Bryan (2012) remind us of the importance of going beyond using only traditional literature and folktales to teach children about cultures. We also need to teach children to read critically, looking for cultural details that add authenticity to the folktale and avoiding those that reflect negative or inaccurate stereotypes.

Once children have encountered a variety of Cinderella tales from different cultures, they may also begin to notice the different ways the heroine herself is portrayed. In some Cinderella tales, the protagonist takes responsibility for herself and doesn't look to others for help. This contrasts with the classic Perrault heroine waiting for the prince to find her and the Disney Cinderella with whom children are usually most familiar. This basic attribute of Cinderella as an active or passive figure can be a subtle and interesting area to address with children. Traditional stories can be useful tools for learning about gender roles (Mello, 2001). Several modern interpretations of Cinderella provide heroines with attributes usually credited to male heroes. These characters are not "modern revisionist creations by contemporary authors, but rather authentic folk heroines of the past whose stories are finally being put in book form" (Sloan and Vardell, 2004).
appropriate scripts, but once those were in place it was quicker from year to year. Many scripts are freely available from sites on the Internet. Generous teacher friends and colleagues shared their scripts for my cause as well.

My logistics for operating the club follow. When I found a script that looked interesting and was an appropriate reading level for my club, I made a print copy of the script for each club member. (However, experiment with the latest technology that you have available at your school; there is a lot of potential for the use of tablet devices and readers’ theater.) I had a fairly large club that was split into two groups, reading two different scripts. Determining which child got which role in the script was determined by the fair process of “lucky duck pulls.” I wrote club members’ names on Popsicle sticks and randomly pulled these out to match people to character parts. This worked well for me, as I wasn’t showing favoritism and the more advanced readers weren’t dominating the longer, and possibly more interesting, roles. After I passed out the script and parts were assigned, each person then would highlight his or her part and read it silently. I made myself available to help with pronunciation and clarification of words. Each group would then huddle together and read the entire script aloud. I encouraged them to find a “voice” and to use accents that were appropriate to the character. We had many laughs together over this. Finally, “It’s show time!” One group would perform their readers’ theater for the audience, which usually was comprised of the other half of the club. We were always happy to perform for others too, and would invite people to listen. Club members were greatly motivated to do their best, knowing they had an audience.

My club was open to second through fourth graders with a wide range of ability. Laying the ground rules early on in the club helped the children understand that members would be kind at all times; there would be no eye rolling or snickering at slow readers. I was proud of members’ patience when some of the children struggled through passages. I nurtured a positive atmosphere and it paid off, benefiting struggling readers. I would encourage you to work closely with teachers to see how you can tie in curricular objectives; however, not if it threatens to drown out the aspect of fun and enjoyment. Learning to read for enjoyment was my primary goal with this club.

Document how your club meets state and national standards. The library should be a vital part of every school. When teachers and administrators see the value we bring with our passion for building literacy and supporting educational objectives by infusing engaging connections to the curriculum, we can’t be ignored. Publicize your efforts. We can’t be quiet about the value we add to education for the sake of our children and a literate nation.

TYPES OF CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION

Many different subjects have been featured in contemporary realistic fiction, including survival, the search for identity, the roles of family and peers, growing up, animals, and sports. The tone of the story can range from serious and tense to humorous and even outrageous. Authors like Beverly Cleary, Judy Blume, and Betsy Byars are at the top of their game writing humorous stories for the middle grades with important points subtly tucked inside. They are frequently on lists of children’s favorites across the globe. Judy Blume is
probably one of the few children's authors who is also a millionaire because her books have sold so well for so many years. Her novel *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* is a hilarious read aloud (and followed by several sequels with the same funny family of characters). And of course, the little girl who has given several generations of girls (and boys) permission to be themselves, Ramona Quimby, the creation of Beverly Cleary, is also the subject of several excellent novels for reading aloud across the grades. Each of these novelists has created many excellent novels that are real, contemporary, and pleasurable to read and ushered in many more humorous growing up stories such as those by Sara Pennypacker, Lisa Yee, Andrew Clements, and more. Blume is sometimes somewhat controversial in that her books for older readers (such as *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, Yearling, 1970) also deal with young people's questions about their developing sexuality in ways that are frank and honest, but never sensational. And her ear for natural dialogue and the woes of growing up is unmistakable.

**Contemporary Realistic Fiction Subtopics**

*(Self, Family, Friends)*

When it comes to realism, many authors have tackled tough topics that today's children face in their daily lives. This includes searching for a sense of self, exploring one's place inside and outside the nuclear family, and coping with the growing importance of relationships with friends, even budding romances. In addition, these stories may be set in the context of modern urban life or a more rural community, surrounded by people who don't understand you or engaging with people from diverse backgrounds who do. Characters may be gifted, isolated, abused, abandoned, loved, disabled, and more. All these variables add shading to the essential growing up story that makes up the vast majority of contemporary realistic fiction for young people.

For one example of a family story that seems almost old-fashioned in its focus on sisterly summer fun, look for Jeanne Birdsall's National Book Award-winning *The Penderwicks* (Knopf, 2005) and its sequels. The family (with four daughters) rents a cottage on a grand estate and befriends the young, lonely son of the main house for a summer full of innocent adventures reminiscent of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. For a more hip and comic take on family life, look for Sharon Creech's novel *Replay* (HarperCollins, 2005). Presented in thirty-nine short scenes, the book introduces readers to Leo's chaotic extended family and all his constant worries squeezed in between them. Many of Creech's works offer a lighter look at family life, always grounded in a meaningful theme.

Another, more serious view of family life is presented in Nikki Grimes's Coretta Scott King honor book *The Road to Paris* (Putnam, 2006). Removed from her home and her alcoholic mother, Paris has bumped from one foster home to another and finally becomes comfortable with the Lincolns, despite being separated from her beloved brother. A hopeful ending has Paris reunited with her brother and trying life together with their mother once again. Katherine Paterson tackled similar themes with her Newbery honor book *The Great*
*Gilly Hopkins* about a foster child and her struggles with accepting love as well as loss (Crowell, 1978). The Russian writer Leo Tolstoy reminds us that “happy families are all alike, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” This is true even in children’s novels.

In Pam Muñoz Ryan’s Pura Belpré honor book *Becoming Naomi León* (Scholastic, 2004), eleven-year-old Naomi Soledad Leon Outlaw lives with her Gram, who is her great-grandmother, and her anxious younger brother, Owen, until their mother shows up and fights for custody for selfish reasons. Naomi’s talent for soap carving and a trip to their birth father in Mexico merge to provide a satisfying conclusion. Beverly Cleary’s Newbery Medal book *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Morrow, 1983) echoes similar themes with a lonely young boy coping with newly divorced parents and estrangement from his father.

Notice that multiculturalism is also reflected in more and more titles of contemporary realistic fiction, with authors of color telling stories that come from their own growing up experiences. More of the same shines through Grace Lin’s novels, *The Year of the Dog* (Little, Brown, 2006), *The Year of the Rat* (Little, Brown, 2009), and *Dumpling Days* (Little, Brown, 2012), in which a young girl copes with everyday childhood concerns (like finding her own talents, coping with a friend moving away) while parallel stories from her mother’s and grandmother’s experiences growing up Taiwanese are sprinkled throughout. Candace Fleming writes about a boy’s worries about fitting in and making friends in *Loui J DisCOVERS AMERICA* (Atheneum, 2005). He is a new immigrant from India and his #1 desire is to own a pet. Perspectives from various cultures add leaven and richness to the usual family story. In Julia Alvarez’s Pura Belpré medal–winning novel *Return to Sender* (Knopf, 2009), a family of undocumented Mexican laborers helps a Vermont family farm survive and their lives intertwine in unexpected ways.

Unfortunately, children are also coping with grave and serious issues, too, all around the world and right here at home. In Jacqueline Woodson’s award–winning novel *Locomotion* (Putnam, 2003), young Lonnie Collins Motion (nicknamed “Locomotion”) tells his story in poems and prose as he copes with the death of his parents in a fire, adjustment to a foster home setting, and separation from his younger sister, revealing a resilient spirit throughout. In Gigi Amateau’s *Claiming Georgia Tate* (Candlewick, 2005), Georgia Tate Jamison has lived with her Nana and Granddaddy Tate in Mississippi since she was an infant. When her birth father wants her to visit and then abuses her, she convinces Nana that she must come home immediately. The loving relationship between Georgia and her grandparents helps this novel transcend its frightening subject. Cynthia Rylant’s Newbery medal novel *Missing May* (Orchard, 1992) tells a parallel story of a young girl raised by an elderly couple but coping with the devastating death of one of them. And in Kevin Henkes’s serious story *Olive’s Ocean* (Greenwillow, 2003), a Newbery honor book, the protagonist faces the death of a classmate she barely knew, but who admired her.

Characters in contemporary novels are also living with disabilities that have an impact on them and those around them. In R. J. Palacio’s novel *Wonder* (Knopf, 2012), Auggie Pullman strives for a normal life in a new school despite a significant facial deformity, but with a sense of humor and strength of spirit that make him both admirable and engaging. As the story is filtered through
multiple points of view (family, friends, Auggie), we see a community struggling with empathy and acceptance. Cynthia Lord gives us the sister’s point of view in Rules (Scholastic, 2006), about a girl who loves her autistic brother and tries to help him cope with the rest of the world by creating rules to guide him (about whom to hug, for example), but is equally frustrated by the cost to herself and her family. In Sarah Weeks’s novel So B It (HarperCollins, 2004), Heidi, the twelve-year-old protagonist, has a kind of role reversal relationship with her mother, So B. It, a severely mentally disabled woman. The bond is close and authentic, however, and propels Heidi on a journey of self-discovery. In Esmé Raji Codell’s novel Sahara Special (Hyperion, 2003), a fifth grader with “special needs” struggles with insecurities, including a secret desire to be a writer. And Jack Gantos’s series about a young boy with attention deficit issues, Joey Pigza (e.g., Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), is equal parts honestly painful and hysterically funny—and never at the expense of stereotyping the different characters.

We need more and more realistic stories with contemporary characters living with disabilities. As Temple, Martinez, and Yokota remind us, “When child readers recognize something in a story that is similar to their own feelings or thoughts, they realize they are not alone” (2011, p. 295). Esmé Raji Codell (2007), teacher, librarian, “radiologist,” and author of How to Get Your Child to Love Reading: For Ravenous and Reluctant Readers Alike (Algonquin, 2003), as well as Sahara Special, explains, “My wish was that this story would help children be hopeful that no matter where they live or how they live or what’s in their file . . . a lot of kids are lonely, even when they are standing right next to someone else who might be lonely, too. That’s a bad situation, but it can be fixed in real life and in stories.”

**Contemporary Realistic Fiction Subgenres (Adventure, Mystery, Animals, Sports)**

A variety of contemporary novels for young people may involve families and friendships in the background, but the special emphasis of the story—such as survival or adventure, mystery, animals, or sports—is the driving force of the story. These “subgenres” of realism are also very popular with young readers, particularly during the ‘tween years when children are beginning to take on more responsibility for themselves, for their problems, for animals, for a team or group, and for society, as they head toward adulthood.
Adventure. Adventure stories are strong on plot and action with survival often the focus of the book. One standout author of these action-filled realistic novels for kids is Gary Paulsen. Not only is he a prolific author with more than 100 books to his credit, he writes novels full of conflict, with crisp dialogue, and protagonists who often go it alone. He is also the name to know when it comes to luring boys into reading longer works. Unfortunately, many boys seem to stop reading fiction by fifth grade or so, and they are often reluctant readers altogether. Gary Paulsen’s writing can grab even these reluctant readers. In his now classic survival novel *Hatchet* (Bradbury, 1987), a Newbery honor book, Brian is on his way to spend the summer with his dad after his parents’ divorce. The small plane that he is on crashes in the Canadian wilderness and he must survive alone for over a month. I love the fact that Brian is not well versed in survival lore and learns what not to do through trial and error, rather than being an instant survivalist. It makes the book even more believable. *Hatchet* continues to be very popular, and there are several sequels to it.

Carl Hiaasen, known for his writing for adults, has carved out a name for himself with eco-adventures for young people that are also in demand, like *Chomp* (Knopf, 2012), about a boy whose father wrinkles alligators. Hiaasen’s “save the owls” story, *Hoot* (Knopf, 2002), was also made into a successful feature-length film. For more realistic adventure novels, look for the works of Will Hobbs, Jean Craighead George, Graham Salisbury, and Louis Sachar.

Mystery. Mysteries emerge as a very popular choice with children in the middle grades that are stretching their problem-solving skills. This is often where the interest in mystery series like *Nancy Drew* and the *Hardy Boys* blossoms. Look for the popular series featuring girl detective *Sammy Keyes* by Wendelin Van Draanen or the interactive series *39 Clues* by various authors including Rick Riordan, Gordon Korman, Linda Sue Park, among others. Art shapes the backdrop for the mysteries of Blue Balliett, such as *Hold Fast* (Scholastic, 2013), as well as the classic mystery by E. L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (Atheneum, 1967), a Newbery medal book. Other Newbery-winning mysteries include *The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin (Dutton, 1978). The mystery format is so popular, you will also encounter this “subgenre” in other major genres, including *historical* mysteries by authors such as Zilpha Keatley Snyder and Avi, as well as mysteries in *fantasy* such as the ghost stories of Betty Ren Wright or John Bellairs.

Animals. Animal stories maintain their hold on children’s imaginations even into the older grades. However, in novel form they usually involve adventure and serious conflict. Here, an animal plays a major role in the story, often serving as a major character. The relationship between the protagonist and the animal acts as the crux of the story and serves to help the child grow up a bit. *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo (Candlewick Press, 2000), a Newbery honor book, is an excellent example of this kind of story, with a stray dog adopting a lonely girl and helping her connect with her father and the people in her community. Phyllis Reynolds Naylor’s *Shiloh* (Atheneum, 1991) is another “dog” story in which the protagonist’s relationship with the dog, Shiloh, is a key element in helping him to
grow up, even forcing him to make important moral and ethical choices. The characters were so compelling that Naylor wrote several Shiloh sequels. It's interesting to note that both Because of Winn-Dixie and Shiloh have also been adapted into feature-length films, capitalizing on the appeal of people and their pets' stories. Keep in mind that these pets never talk in contemporary novels (that would make it a fantasy novel). They consistently behave as animals would, but their relationship with the child is the key, echoing the experiences of so many children who care for beloved animals. In addition, you may also find animals as characters in many popular historical fiction novels (and book-based movies) such as the classics, Old Yeller (Harper, 1956), a Newbery honor book by Fred Gipson, and Where the Red Fern Grows (Double-day, 1961) by Wilson Rawls.

Sports. For many children, sports and recreation are an important part of their growing up experiences, and several authors have captured this in their writing of contemporary realism for young people. For years, Matt Christopher has been the go-to guy for sports novels for children, with over 100 titles depicting nearly every competitive sport that children might encounter from baseball to soccer, skateboarding to wheelchair basketball. Gradually, even girls have been portrayed as athletes and "wannabes." In more recent years, John H. Ritter has also authored appealing sports novels for young readers, often using the themes of competition and cooperation to mirror other struggles in the protagonist's life, as in Fenway Fever (Philomel, 2012). Mike Lupica, well known for his writing for adults, has also made a successful transition to writing sports books for kids with several novels including the New York Times bestselling basketball story True Legend (Philomel, 2012). Also look for sports-themed novels by Gary Soto or Dan Gutman. Sports fiction appeals to young athletes, of course, but offers all readers a deeper understanding of the beauty of a game well played and a validation of the life lessons to be learned from discipline and teamwork.

**Short Stories for Children**

Authors are also tackling contemporary issues in the literary format of the short story. Short story collections are particularly helpful for reading aloud since their length is often just right for one sitting. They also lend themselves to discussion afterward. Story collections by Gary Soto, such as Baseball in April (Harcourt, 1990), or Cynthia Rylant, such as Every Living Thing (Atheneum, 1985), offer powerful writing for young people on a variety of topics. Other examples of short stories for children include:

- **Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul** by Jack Canfield (Vermilion, 2001)
- **Guys Read: Funny Business** edited by Jon Scieszka (Walden Pond, 2010)
- **Guys Read: Other Worlds** edited by Jon Scieszka (Walden Pond, 2013)
- **Guys Read: The Sports Pages** edited by Jon Scieszka (Walden Pond, 2012)
- **Guys Read: Thriller** edited by Jon Scieszka (Walden Pond, 2011)
- **Hey! Listen to This: Stories to Read Aloud** by Jim Trelease (Penguin, 1992)
Out of Bounds: Seven Stories of Conflict and Hope by Beverley Naidoo (HarperCollins, 2003)
Sideway Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar (HarperCollins, 1998)
Tripping Over the Lunch Lady and Other School Stories edited by Nancy Mercado (Dial, 2004)
When I Went to the Library: Writers Celebrate Books and Reading edited by Deborah Pearson (Groundwood, 2001)

Children's magazines and periodicals (such as Stone Soup and others) can also be an excellent source of current short fiction for children by both popular and up-and-coming authors. And don't forget that there are also collections of short stories in other genres, especially fantasy (e.g., ghost stories, scary stories, etc.) and nonfiction (e.g., true stories, sports vignettes, etc.).

Transitional Novels

Somewhere between the novel and the short story lies the short novel or transitional novel, a natural bridge from the highly visual "easy readers" first created by Dr. Seuss (with the "I Can Read" series) to longer novels without any illustrations. Today's "transitional novels" are often decorated in strategic places (like chapter headings and endings) or illustrated with doodles, cartoons, and sketches. Many of these transitional "chapter books" are generally 100 pages long or longer with short chapters to structure the story. Small sketches or illustrations appear regularly throughout the narrative, at least every few pages. They offer visual interest, but unlike "easy readers," these are not as essential to understanding the story as illustrations usually are when reading picture books. These shorter illustrated novels provide visual cues, larger fonts, and more white space to assist the developing reader in building fluency and confidence. Horning (2010) identifies four major attributes of this format:

- A simple vocabulary without too many surprising descriptors or multisyllabic words
- Sentences that are relatively short, direct, and uncomplicated
- Brief episodes, chapters, or intervals that stand out to the reader
- Content compelling enough to hold a child's interest but not so complicated that it's hard to follow (pp. 133-136)

Many of these transitional novels also emerge as popular series books with central characters that have continuing adventures. Look for some of these popular examples:

Amber Brown (Paula Danziger)
Bink & Gollie (Kate DiCamillo)
Calvin Coconut (Graham Salisbury)
Captain Underpants (Dav Pilkey)
Charlie Joe Jackson (Tommy Greenwald)
Clarice Bean (Lauren Child)
Clementine (Sara Pennypacker)
Creature from My Closet (Obert Skye)
Diary of a Wimpy Kid (Jeff Kinney)
Dork Diaries (Rachel Renée Russell)
Hank Zipzer (Henry Winkler)
Ivy and Bean (Annie Barrows)
Judy Moody and Stink (Megan McDonald)
Junie B. Jones (Barbara Park)
Justin Case (Rachel Vail)
Marvin Redpost (Louis Sachar)
My Life (Janet Tashjian)
Ruby Lu and Alvin Ho (Lenore Look)
Sam and Gooney Bird (Lois Lowry)

Series

Series books for young people have been popular for over 100 years, and the continuing appeal to young audiences of today is undeniable. Whether it’s the long-running Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Encyclopedia Brown, or Boxcar Children series, young readers enjoy the familiarity of reading about the same characters in each story. (By the way, did you know that the Nancy Drew books were written by a variety of hired authors? There’s no such person as author “Carolyn Keene.”) Like transitional novels, series books meet an important need for the developing reader. They may be somewhat predictable, but they provide a structure and instant context that help build reading fluency. Much like adults’ enjoyment of soap operas or other television programs, young readers find the series books satisfying, if formulaic. In fact, studies have found that many proficient adult readers were once voracious readers of series books as children.

Of course, series books have enormous appeal, even if they’ll never win any literary awards for writing. But over time, various literary characters have become so popular that the authors who created them have continued their stories in additional novels. These literary sequels or “series” can be very satisfying reading, too. Check out the continuing adventures of these timeless characters created by Newbery medal and honor authors:

Alice (by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor)
Anastasia (by Lois Lowry)
Brian (by Gary Paulsen)
Cammy (by Virginia Hamilton)
Joey Pigza (by Jack Gantos)
Pacy Lin (by Grace Lin)
Ramona Quimby (by Beverly Cleary)
Shabanu (by Suzanne Fisher Staples)
Teddy and Bobby (by Laurence Yep)

Another new trend is offering series books in graphic novel format, such as the enormously popular Babysitter’s Club, now a graphic novel series. And of
course there are many memorable characters whose adventures are serialized in *fantasy* and *historical fiction* novels, too, but those are other chapters.

### CONTROVERSY AND CONTEMPORARY REALISM

![Bridge to Terabithia](image)

This genre can also be very controversial in that the content is current and contemporary and often reflects the challenges of urban life and global issues today. Book characters may be coping with the death of a loved one; the divorce of parents and family separations; personal sexuality issues; physical, mental, or emotional disabilities; war and persecution; and other real-life crises that touch us all in one way or another. In addition, some contemporary novels include some violence or profanity that many adults feel is not appropriate for children to encounter in books. Thus, this is the genre that may be subject to more book challenges. Read for yourself and see what you think. This is some of the best, most thought-provoking writing for kids, but it also can be edgy and disturbing—like real life for many kids, unfortunately.

For example, author Judy Blume is sometimes somewhat controversial in that her books for older readers (such as *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*) also deal with young people's questions about their developing sexuality in ways that are frank and honest, but never sensational. Because her writing has often been challenged, she is quite a vocal and effective speaker on the subject of books. Check out her website for more information (http://www.judyblume.com). The ALA list of “The 100 Most Frequently Banned/Challenged Books of 2000–2009” includes several landmark books of contemporary fiction for children (as well as other genres) including *Bridge to Terabithia* and *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, both by Katherine Paterson; *Blubber* and *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume; the *Alice* series by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor; *Olive's Ocean* by Kevin Henkes; the *Junie B. Jones* series by Barbara Park; and the *Anastasia* series by Lois Lowry. Each of these has been immensely popular with children but has also been challenged by someone somewhere along the way.
Book Challenges and Censorship

Book challenges and potential censorship are a fact of life in libraries, particularly for those of us who work in children’s and youth services. We are all concerned about the experiences we provide for our children and want to be sure they grow up in a safe and healthy environment. However, what we deem appropriate for children is a highly subjective judgment and varies greatly from person to person. When it comes to children’s literature, the genres of contemporary realistic fiction and fantasy are generally the most frequent targets of challenges today.

Those who work in the book field believe strongly in open access to books. I believe families should be involved in reading and talking about books and can decide what might not be appropriate for their own children. Libraries and schools, however, are public institutions with a responsibility to the community at large. Communities are not usually homogeneous, and often an outspoken minority wants to decide what is appropriate for the whole community. Here we must be careful. As the American Library Association recommends, we need calm procedures in place for people to raise their questions about appropriate reading material. We need representative committees that can discuss and decide these issues in an open and democratic forum where differences of opinion can be respected.

Our first priority should be to have a good book selection and collection development policy in place. How do we select books for the library? Is this process documented in writing? Next, it’s critical to have a protocol for book challenges or grievances in place—again in writing. How are grievances reported and handled? Be sure that is clear and in writing. Third, this is not a “fight” to take on alone. Often a separate committee is formed for each stage: selection and grievance. Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, and Bryan (2012) also recommend dealing with one book at a time to keep the situation manageable and remind us that we need to recognize the emotional quotient in this process, and as we listen calmly “we should also get someone else to listen: (like) another librarian. . . . Having someone else present helps keep everyone honest and serves to reduce tension” (p. 213). Inform the library director, utilize the committees in place, muster your resources, including the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) and their many excellent tools including the online Intellectual Freedom Manual (ifmanual.org).

The ALA defines a book challenge as “a formal, written complaint, filed with a library or school, requesting that materials be removed because of content or appropriateness.” Challenges can be based on a variety of reasons, the most common being for sexually explicit material, offensive language, unsuitability to age group, presence of occult themes or promoting the occult or Satanism, violence, homosexual themes, or promoting religious viewpoints. Among the most challenged authors (2005–2012) of books for young people are Alvin Schwartz, Judy Blume, Lois Lowry, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, and Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson. One irony: Often banned books become the most sought after. There is nothing more irresistible to kids than something a grown-up has said you can’t have. (Maybe we should ban math textbooks!)

Of course, the greatest danger may well be our own caution working against us. Will we avoid purchasing or promoting Blume or Lowry because we anticipate challenges? This kind of self-censorship is also a problem. We
need to be aware of our community demographics, but hold to our goal of providing a quality collection. In addition, we need to reflect on our own biases and prejudices and consider how they might be affecting our acquisition decisions. It gets sticky! As Amy Hielsberg (1994) observed, "Some of the best books are those that disturb us, challenge our complacency. Nobody tries to ban bland books."

Banned Books Week (every September):
http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bannedbooksweek.htm

Additional Resources
Asheim, Lester. "Not Censorship but Selection." http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/basics/notcensorship.htm

MAJOR AUTHORS OF CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION

In recent years, most children’s book authors have established their own Web presence on the Internet with personal websites. In fact, new authors who are just getting started are finding using Web tools and social media an essential aspect in reaching out to readers and promoting their work. Most author website URLs or addresses center around their names, with a few notable exceptions (like Katherine Paterson’s website, for example). Thus it’s sensible to begin the search for an author on the Web by typing in his or her name, as well as by “Googling” him or her. If they don’t have a personal website, however, it is still possible to find out information about them through the research that others have conducted about these authors. This includes Professor Kaye Vandergrift’s website, author interviews on Cynthia Leitich Smith’s website, videos on YouTube, databases like TeachingBooks.net, publishers’ websites, the Internet Public Library (IPL), and Wikipedia, as well as “old school” reference resources like Something About the Author and the Tenth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators (2008), for example.
Authors Online

Here's a partial list of some established authors of contemporary realistic fiction who maintain consistent websites. In addition, many authors also maintain blogs with weekly, even daily entries such as Cynthia Leitich Smith, Grace Lin, Lois Lowry, Linda Sue Park, and Lisa Yee, among others. (Keep in mind that some of these authors listed below also write books in other genres, and that many authors in other genres also maintain helpful websites. This is just a sampling.) More children's author websites are popping up all the time.

Avi http://www.avi-writer.com
Blue Balliett http://www.blueballiettb ooks.com
Jeanne Birdsall http://www.jeannebirdsall.com
Judy Blume http://www.judyblume.com/
Betsy Byars http://www.betsybyars.com/
Matt Christopher http://www.mattchristopher.com
Beverly Cleary http://www.beverlycleary.com
Andrew Clements http://www.andrewclements.com
Esme Raji Codell http://www.planetesme.com/
Sharon Creech http://www.sharoncreech.com/
Candace Fleming http://www.candacefleming.com/
Jack Gantos http://www.jackgantos.com/
Nikki Grimes http://www.nikki grimes.com/
Virginia Hamilton http://www.virginiahamilton.com/
Kevin Henkes http://www.kevinhenkes.com/
Carl Hiaasen http://www.carlhi aasen.com/
Grace Lin http://www.gracelin.com/
Lois Lowry http://www.loislowry.com/
Linda Sue Park http://www.lspark.com/
Katherine Paterson http://www.terabithia.com/
Sara Pennypacker http://www.sarapennypacker.com
John H. Ritter http://www.johnritter.com/
Pam Muñoz Ryan http://www.pamm unozryan.com/
Louis Sachar http://www.louissachar.com
Cynthia Leitich Smith http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/
Jerry Spinelli http://www.jerryspinelli.com/
Sarah Weeks http://www.sarahweeks.com
Lisa Yee http://www.lisayee.com/

Of course, this is just a partial list of some of the outstanding individuals who have created engaging contemporary realistic fiction for young readers. These folks are some of the many authors you can find online. An author's website usually offers a photo of the author, brief biographical information, a list of his or her books, awards won, downloadable audio and video clips, and often much more. Many authors' sites go well beyond presenting their own works to include recommendations for additional reading, tips for children
MAJOR AUTHORS OF FANTASY

When you look for the best examples of modern fantasy, you may also be surprised to find some of the best children’s literature being published in any genre. Many of the big award winners have been fantasy novels that create memorable characters and deal with powerful themes. Indeed, The Giver by Lois Lowry is considered one of the most important children's books ever written for young people. Each of these novels has used fantasy as the backdrop for putting young people (or mice who think like young people) in the position of saving the world (or at least their corner of the world). This vicarious reading experience can be very empowering for children who often feel powerless in the scary world of adults.

Fantasy Authors and Works in Audio Form

Each of the following individuals has an established reputation for creating quality fantasy novels for young people. For each name, an example of his or her work in the unabridged audiobook format is cited to get you started listening to fantasy. More new authors are emerging all the time, so be alert to the books kids are choosing and make a note of those new talents creating fantasy that kids enjoy. In addition, each of these big name authors has created many more enjoyable fantasy novels to look for. This is just a sampling.

Lloyd Alexander, The Book of Three (Listening Library, 2007)
Philip Ardagh, A House Called Awful End (Listening Library, 2003)
Natalie Babbitt, Tuck Everlasting (Audio Bookshelf, 2001)
T. A. Barron, The Lost Years of Merlin (Listening Library, 2000)
L. Frank Baum, The Wizard of Oz (Blackstone Audio, 2005)
Franny Billingsley, The Folk Keeper (Listening Library, 2000)
Holly Black, The Spiderwick Chronicles (Listening Library, 2007)
Eoin Colfer, Artemis Fowl: The Last Guardian (Listening Library, 2004)
Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games (Scholastic, 2008)
Susan Cooper, The Dark Is Rising (Listening Library, 2000)
Roald Dahl, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (HarperChildren's Audio, 2002)
Jeanne DuPrau, The City of Ember (Listening Library, 2006)
Catherine Fisher, Incarceron (Listening Library, 2010)
Cornelia Funke, Ghost Knight (Listening Library, 2012)
Shannon Hale, The Princess Academy (Full Cast Audio, 2007)
Eva Ibbotson, The Beasts of Clawstone Castle (Recorded Books, 2006)
Brian Jacques, Redwall (Listening Library, 2005)
Diana Wynne Jones, A Charmed Life (Recorded Books, 2004)
Derek Landy, Skulduggery Pleasant (HarperChildren’s Audio, 2007)
Madeleine L’Engle, A Wrinkle in Time (Listening Library, 2006)
Lois Lowry, *The Giver* (Listening Library, 2001)
Christopher Paolini, *Eragon* (Listening Library, 2004)
Tamora Pierce, *Circle of Magic: Sandry's Book* (Full Cast Audio, 2003)
Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief* (Listening Library, 2005)
Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler), *The Bad Beginning* (Listening Library, 2003)
Betty Ren Wright, *The Dollhouse Murders* (Live Oak Media, 1999)

For children new to fantasy, listening to a book in audio form can be a great way to introduce the genre. Since many fantasy novels are longer works, this format provides a storytelling experience that makes what can be a challenging work more accessible for some readers. And look how many fantasy novels have been recorded for listening in recent years.

---

**Authors in Action: Grace Lin**

Grace Lin is both an author and an illustrator with a variety of works and awards to her credit. She wrote and illustrated several popular picture books including her Lin Family books, *Dim Sum for Everyone!, Kite Flying, Fortune Cookie Fortunes*, and many others. She also has authored several novels, including the Pacy Lin series with *The Year of the Dog, The Year of the Rat, and Dumpling Days;* the easy reader series *Ling & Ting;* and the fantasy novels *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon,* a 2010 Newbery honor title and *New York Times* bestseller, and the companion book, *Starry River of the Sky.* Many of her books reflect her Taiwanese heritage and blend her childhood in upstate New York alongside the Chinese tales and legends of her culture. Here she addresses that unique combination and how it has shaped her as a writer and artist.

**Why Couldn’t Snow White Be Chinese? Finding Identity Through Children's Books**

by Grace Lin

When I was in third grade, the class decided to put on a production of *The Wizard of Oz.* The news spread across the playground like an electrical current, energizing every girl to ask, “Who will play Dorothy?” The thought was thrilling and delicious, each of us imagining ourselves with ruby shoes. I whispered to my friend Jill, “Do you think I could be Dorothy?”

Jill stared at me in shock. “You couldn’t be Dorothy. You’re Chinese. Dorothy’s not Chinese.”

And then I remembered. I was different. I felt stupid for even thinking I could be the star of a play. That Dorothy, like everyone and everything else important, was not like me.
entrée into stories of the past. The novel-in-verse form also lends itself to reading aloud, particularly for dramatic readings in parts for multiple voices that help bring history to life.

Connecting Poetry and Historical Fiction

Poetry can also capture the people, places, and emotions of the past in vivid images and language. As Cullinan, Scala, and Schroder (1995) observe, "Reading poetry about other cultures allows our students' minds to travel to the four corners of the universe." Consider linking poems and poetry books with historical literature before or after reading a historical novel. This helps children make connections and remember the people, places, and times more vividly. You may be surprised how many connections are possible—and how much children enjoy it. Here is a sampling of history-related poetry to get you started.


Katz, Bobbi. Comp. 2000. We, the People. New York: Greenwillow.


For more great ideas, see:

**MAJOR AUTHORS OF HISTORICAL FICTION**

Historical fiction has long been an important part of children’s literature. Authors are branching out with more different kinds of settings and characters than ever before. Some authors are even experimenting with genre conventions. However, one of the things that sets authors of historical fiction apart is research: conducting careful research, citing sources, offering recommendations for further reading, and generally grounding their fictional story in an authentic, believable setting. Fortunately, several individuals have made this their domain, so we have many wonderful works to seek out, including many Newbery medal and honor titles.

**Authors across the Eras**

Look for historical fiction by the following noteworthy authors, among others. Just for fun, their names are arranged along a historical timeline based on one exemplary work of historical fiction for which each is known. The year that is listed is the setting for the novel. Each of these authors has written many other works of historical fiction that fall in other eras, as well. This is just a sampling.

1100s: Linda Sue Park, *A Single Shard* (Clarion, 2001)
1300s: Avi, *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* (Hyperion, 2002)
1492: Michael Dorris, *Morning Girl* (Hyperion, 1992)
pre-1500: Sid Fleischman, *The Whipping Boy* (Greenwillow, 1986)
pre-1500: Karen Cushman, *The Midwife’s Apprentice* (Clarion, 1995)
1775: James and Christopher Collier, *My Brother Sam Is Dead* (Four Winds, 1974)
1840: Paula Fox, *The Slave Dancer* (Bradbury, 1974)
1850: Gary Paulsen, *Nightjohn* (Delacorte, 1993)
1858: Kathryn Lasky, *True North* (Scholastic, 1996)
1859: Julius Lester, *Day of Tears* (Jump at the Sun, 2005)
1880s: Patricia MacLachlan, *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (Harper, 1985)
1918: Kirby Larson, *Hattie Big Sky* (Delacorte, 2006)
1930s: Christopher Paul Curtis, *Bud, Not Buddy* (Delacorte, 1999)
1930s: Mildred Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Dial, 1976)
1940s: Katherine Paterson, *Jacob Have I Loved* (Crowell, 1980)
1944: Patricia Reilly Giff, *Lily’s Crossing* (Delacorte, 1997)

Each of these authors has written multiple works of outstanding historical fiction, often set in different historical eras and locations. Reading historically can help children understand how events and issues of the time affected different people. For example, simply gathering and reading the six books set in the 1930s from this list reveals interesting details about Depression-era life in the United States as experienced by Japanese Americans, African Americans, children in rural settings, and children with disabilities. This can lead to an interesting discussion about how our perceptions are formed in part by where we are “planted.” Study guides for many of these novels are also available at Sparknotes.com, among other sources.
Authors in Action: Kirby Larson

Kirby Larson has written both picture books and novels, winning a Newbery honor citation for Hattie Big Sky, the novel inspired by her great-grandmother who did indeed homestead in Montana as a young woman. Using extensive research and a gift for creating memorable characters, Larson has since authored several other works of historical fiction including the sequel, Hattie Ever After, as well as The Friendship Doll, The Fences Between Us (in the Dear America series), and Duke, as well as the picture books Two Bobbies: A True Story of Hurricane Katrina, Friendship, and Survival and Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine, and a Miracle in collaboration with her good friend Mary Nethery. Here she shares some of the background in telling Hattie’s continuing story in an interview on KidsRead.com.

Interview with Kirby Larson

Hattie Brooks had a great adventure in Hattie Big Sky, and here she is in another quest to find a connection to her family. Why did you want to revisit Hattie and bring her to San Francisco?

I had no intention of revisiting Hattie! I thought I'd completed her story with Hattie Big Sky; however, a stampede of readers did not agree with me and wrote to tell me so. I'm a firstborn and hate to disappoint people. So after getting all of those letters and emails, I began to think about what might make me want to write more about Hattie. Several summers ago, I reread Hattie Big Sky and found I really enjoyed Hattie's company. And I saw where I'd (unintentionally) left myself a little story breadcrumb in the guise of Hattie's "scoundrel" uncle, Chester. And why San Francisco? Because Hattie was ready for Adventure, with a capital A.

What were the feathers that Hattie picks up around San Francisco supposed to mean for her?

I'm an amateur bird watcher but a professional bird appreciator. At our beach cabin, I watch huge eagles circling above the bay, tiny kingfishers diving for dinner, and all sizes of birds in between. I am in awe of birds' ability to do something that it took mankind thousands of years to imitate: to fly. In my mind, those feathers signaled an affirmation of Hattie's decision to spread her wings, and to soar where others couldn't or wouldn't.