

## **Book Talk:**

### **The Only Road by Alexandra Diaz**

Twelve-year-old Jaime makes the treacherous and life-changing journey from his home in Guatemala to live with his older brother in the United States in this gripping and realistic middle grade novel.

Jaime is sitting on his bed drawing when he hears a scream. Instantly, he knows: Miguel, his cousin and best friend, is dead.

Everyone in Jaime's small town in Guatemala knows someone who has been killed by the Alphas, a powerful gang that's known for violence and drug trafficking. Anyone who refuses to work for them is hurt or killed—like Miguel. With Miguel gone, Jaime fears that he is next. There's only one choice: accompanied by his cousin Ángela, Jaime must flee his home to live with his older brother in New Mexico.

Inspired by true events, *The Only Road* is an individual story of a boy who feels that leaving his home and risking everything is his only chance for a better life. It is a story of fear and bravery, love and loss, strangers becoming family, and one boy's treacherous and life-changing journey.

### **Drum Roll Please by Lisa Jenn Bigelow**

Melly only joined the school band because her best friend, Olivia, begged her to. But to her surprise, quiet Melly loves playing the drums. It's the only time she doesn't feel like a mouse. Now she and Olivia are about to spend the next two weeks at Camp Rockaway, jamming under the stars in the Michigan woods.

But this summer brings a lot of big changes for Melly: her parents split up, her best friend ditches her, and Melly finds herself unexpectedly falling for another girl at camp. To top it all off, Melly's not sure she has what it takes to be a real rock n' roll drummer. Will she be able to make music from all the noise in her heart?

### **Miscalculations of Lightning Girl by Stacy McNulty**

Lucy Callahan was struck by lightning. She doesn't remember it, but it changed her life forever. The zap gave her genius-level math skills, and ever since, Lucy has been homeschooled. Now, at 12 years old, she's technically ready for college. She just has to pass 1 more test--middle school!

Lucy's grandma insists: Go to middle school for 1 year. Make 1 friend. Join 1 activity. And read 1 book (that's not a math textbook!). Lucy's not sure what a girl who does calculus homework for fun can possibly learn in 7th grade. She has everything she needs at home, where nobody can make fun of her rigid routines or her superpowered brain. The equation of Lucy's life has already been solved. Unless there's been a miscalculation?

A celebration of friendship, Stacy McNulty's smart and thoughtful middle-grade debut reminds us all to get out of our comfort zones and embrace what makes us different.

## **Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds (eReads Audio)**

A cannon. A strap.  
A piece. A biscuit.  
A burner. A heater.  
A chopper. A gat.  
A hammer  
A tool  
for RULE

Or, you can call it a gun. That's what fifteen-year-old Will has shoved in the back waistband of his jeans. See, his brother Shawn was just murdered. And Will knows the rules. No crying. No snitching. *Revenge*. That's where Will's now heading, with that gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, the gun that was his brother's gun. He gets on the elevator, seventh floor, stoked. He knows who he's after. Or does he?

As the elevator stops on the sixth floor, on comes Buck. Buck, Will finds out, is who gave Shawn the gun before Will took the gun. Buck tells Will to check that the gun is even loaded. And that's when Will sees that one bullet is missing. And the only one who could have fired Shawn's gun was Shawn. Huh. Will didn't know that Shawn had ever actually USED his gun. Bigger huh. BUCK IS DEAD. But Buck's in the elevator?

Just as Will's trying to think this through, the door to the next floor opens. A teenage girl gets on, waves away the smoke from Dead Buck's cigarette. Will doesn't know her, but she knew him. Knew. When they were eight. And stray bullets had cut through the playground, and Will had tried to cover her, but she was hit anyway, and so what she wants to know, on that fifth floor elevator stop, is, what if Will, Will with the gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, MISSES.

And so it goes, the whole long way down, as the elevator stops on each floor, and at each stop someone connected to his brother gets on to give Will a piece to a bigger story than the one he thinks he knows. A story that might never know an END...if Will gets *off* that elevator.

Told in short, fierce staccato narrative verse, *Long Way Down* is a fast and furious, dazzlingly brilliant look at teenage gun violence, as could only be told by Jason Reynolds.

## **Becoming Kareem by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (eReads)**

At one time, Lew Alcindor was just another kid from New York City with all the usual problems: He struggled with fitting in, with pleasing a strict father, and with overcoming shyness that made him feel socially awkward. But with a talent for basketball, and an unmatched team of supporters, Lew Alcindor was able to transform and to become Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

From a childhood made difficult by racism and prejudice to a record-smashing career on the basketball court as an adult, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's life was packed with ""coaches"" who taught him right from wrong and led him on the path to greatness. His parents, coaches Jack Donahue and John Wooden, Muhammad Ali, Bruce Lee, and many others played important roles in Abdul-Jabbar's life and sparked him to become an activist for social change and advancement. The inspiration from those around him, and his drive to find his own path in life, are highlighted in this personal and awe-inspiring journey.

Written especially for young readers, *Becoming Kareem* chronicles how Kareem Abdul-Jabbar became the icon and legend he is today, both on and off the court.

### **Nightbooks by J.A. White (eReads)**

Alex's original hair-raising tales are the only thing keeping the witch Natacha happy, but soon he'll run out of pages to read from and be trapped forever. He's loved scary stories his whole life, and he knows most don't have a happily ever after. Now that Alex is trapped in a true terrifying tale, he's desperate for a different ending—and a way out of this twisted place.

This modern spin on the Scheherazade story is perfect for fans of *Coraline* and *A Tale Dark and Grimm*. With interwoven tips on writing with suspense, adding in plot twists, hooks, interior logic, and dealing with writer's block, this is the ideal book for budding writers and all readers of delightfully just-dark-enough tales.