

NewYear:NewReads Ms. Putz

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.

Small Spaces by Katherine Arden

After suffering a tragic loss, eleven-year-old Ollie only finds solace in books. So when she happens upon a crazed woman at the river threatening to throw a book into the water, Ollie doesn't think--she just acts, stealing the book and running away. As she begins to read the slender volume, Ollie discovers a chilling story about a girl named Beth, the two brothers who both loved her, and a peculiar deal made with "the smiling man," a sinister specter who grants your most tightly held wish, but only for the ultimate price.

Ollie is captivated by the tale until her school trip the next day to Smoke Hollow, a local farm with a haunting history all its own. There she stumbles upon the graves of the very people she's been reading about. Could it be the story about the smiling man is true? Ollie doesn't have too long to think about the answer to that. On the way home, the school bus breaks down, sending their teacher back to the farm for help. But the strange bus driver has some advice for the kids left behind in his care: "Best get moving. At nightfall they'll come for the rest of you." Nightfall is, indeed, fast descending when Ollie's previously broken digital wristwatch, a keepsake reminder of better times, begins a startling countdown and delivers a terrifying message: RUN.

Only Ollie and two of her classmates heed the bus driver's warning. As the trio head out into the woods--bordered by a field of scarecrows that seem to be watching them--the bus driver has just one final piece of advice for Ollie and her friends: "Avoid large places. Keep to small."

And with that, a deliciously creepy and hair-raising adventure begins.

Becoming Kareem: by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

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.

Scary Stories for Young Foxes by Christian McKay Heidicker

The haunted season has arrived in the Antler Wood. No fox kit is safe.

When Mia and Uly are separated from their litters, they discover a dangerous world full of monsters. In order to find a den to call home, they must venture through field and forest, facing unspeakable things that dwell in the darkness: a zombie who hungers for their flesh, a witch who tries to steal their skins, a ghost who hunts them through the snow . . . and other things too scary to mention.

Featuring eight interconnected stories and sixteen hauntingly beautiful illustrations, *Scary Stories for Young Foxes* contains the kinds of adventures and thrills you love to listen to beside a campfire in the dark of night. Fans of Neil Gaiman, Jonathan Auxier, and R. L. Stine have found their next favorite book.

The Big Game by Tim Green

Danny Owens is dedicating his seventh-grade season to his Super Bowl champion father, who recently passed away. Danny promises everyone that, just like his dad, he'll dominate the big game at the end of the season and earn a spot on the high school varsity team.

Then his English teacher catches him cheating on a test. Even though Danny can retake it, he knows there's no point. He can't read. And if Danny can't pass this class, he won't be eligible to play in the championship game that could unlock his future.

Dry by Neal Shusterman

The drought—or the Tap-Out, as everyone calls it—has been going on for a while now. Everyone's lives have become an endless list of don'ts: don't water the lawn, don't fill up your pool, don't take long showers.

Until the taps run dry.

Suddenly, Alyssa's quiet suburban street spirals into a warzone of desperation; neighbors and families turned against each other on the hunt for water. And when her parents don't return and her life—and the life of her brother—is threatened, Alyssa has to make impossible choices if she's going to survive.

The Uglies by Scott Westerfield

Tally is about to turn sixteen, and she can't wait. In just a few weeks she'll have the operation that will turn her from a repellent ugly into a stunningly attractive pretty. And as a pretty, she'll be catapulted into a high-tech paradise where her only job is to have fun.

But Tally's new friend Shay isn't sure she wants to become a pretty. When Shay runs away, Tally learns about a whole new side of the pretty world—and it isn't very pretty. The authorities offer Tally a choice: find her friend and turn her in, or never turn pretty at all. Tally's choice will change her world forever.