

It's a BIG

Books are the best way to open kids' minds

By Kathleen Isaacs

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, Americans have been surprised to discover that the way we see ourselves and the world isn't shared by others. Our society's values are not universal, and what we see as acts of good will aren't always taken that way. We may feel connected to the rest of the world by television, telecommunications, and the Internet, but these links are ephemeral. Our attention shifts from one story to the next, and the fleeting moments of sympathy and understanding are quickly lost. Furthermore, our preconceptions about other cultures can easily cloud our vision. How can we get beyond our own experiences? How can we help our children see the world more clearly and pave the way for genuine empathy? One way, of course, is through reading.



World After all

Last spring, when the Children's Book Council and the U.S. Board on Books for Young People (a division of the International Board on Books for Young People) sent out their first call for submissions for the 2006 Outstanding International Booklist—highlighting titles published in the U.S. last year—their guidelines called for books that “counteract cultural stereotypes, bridge cultural gaps, and build connections.”

At first, we feared we wouldn't have many books to choose from. We worried that publishers weren't acquiring books from abroad, that they wouldn't learn of our new list in time to submit books for consideration. But the response was enthusiastic, and we received 196 submissions. What surprised us was that 85 percent of the books were originally written in English, and published in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The others came from European publishers. A few had more exotic origins—a diary from China and a memoir of serving in the Israeli army (both published in France), a description of going to school in India, and a picture book set in South Africa. To our surprise and dismay, South and Central America were not represented at all.

Our list of 42 recommended books is an attempt to build a bridge between our country and the rest of the world. It represents the best of what U.S. publishers are offering today. As the first international book committee, we spent considerable time discussing selection criteria. We looked for books that represented the best of children's literature from other countries, that could introduce American readers to outstanding artists and writers, help our children see the world from other points of view, provide a perspective or address a topic otherwise missing from children's literature in the U.S., and exhibit a distinct cultural flavor. We hope these books offer a way to help young people see through others' eyes.

The Outstanding International Booklist Committee

Chair Kathleen Isaacs, Towson (MD) University; Joan Atkinson, University of Alabama; Ernie Bond, Salisbury (MD) University; Julie Corsaro, children's literature specialist, Chapel Hill, NC; Marian Creamer, Children's Literature Alive! Portland, OR; Micki Nevett, Westmere Elementary School, Albany, NY; Jinx Watson, University of Tennessee; Natalie Ziarnik, Elia Area Public Library, Lake Zurich, IL; Judy Zuckerman, Brooklyn (NY) Public Library; and Susan Stan, ex officio, Central Michigan University.

ADLINGTON, L. J. *The Diary of Pelly D.* HarperCollins/Greenwillow. Tr \$15.99. ISBN 0-06-076615-8; PLB \$16.89. ISBN 0-06-076616-6. Great Britain.

Gr 6-8—While excavating through postwar wreckage, 14-year-old worker Toni V. finds the diary of Pelly D., a spirited, carefree teenager who led a life of wealth and privilege before her futuristic society's genetic profiling led to genocide. This riveting dystopia will stun readers with its resemblance to the Jewish Holocaust.

BROWNE, Anthony. *My Mom.* illus. by author. Farrar. Tr \$16. ISBN 0-374-35098-1. Great Britain.

K-Gr 2—This affectionate and gently humorous picture book is notable for its compelling and comforting portraits of a workaday mom. Captions incorporating similes and patterned language convey the amazing variety of traits that make mothers everywhere special.

CLARKE, Judith. *Kalpana's Dream.* Front St. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 1-932425-22-5. Australia.

Gr 6-8—Neema, a seventh-grade Australian student and great-granddaughter of Kalpana, who is visiting from India, attempts to answer the question posed by her teacher, “Who am I?” This cross-cultural, intergenerational story combines magical and real worlds within a narrative told from various points of view.

DALY, Niki. *Ruby Sings the Blues.* illus. by author. Bloomsbury. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 1-58234-995-9. Great Britain.

K-Gr 2—Lyrical text and vibrant mixed-media illustrations tell the story of a girl and her “boom-box” voice. Ruby is ostracized because of loudness until the day her jazzy neighbors teach her to harness her powerful voice. Though the story could take place anywhere, Daly's South African context shines through.



DE DÉU PRATS, Joan. *Sebastian's Roller Skates*. illus. by Francesc Rovira. Kane/Miller. Tr \$15.95. ISBN 1-929132-81-6. Spain.

K-Gr 2—Sebastian, a shy boy, discovers a pair of abandoned roller skates. Overcoming his fear of falling and failing, he learns to skate and in so doing, he's able to express his newly acquired self-confidence. Watercolors and collages illustrate Sebastian's change as the colors move from gray to bright.

DELANEY, Joseph. *Revenge of the Witch*. (The Last Apprentice Series, Bk. #1). HarperCollins/Greenwillow. Tr \$14.99. ISBN 0-06-076618-2; PLB \$15.89. ISBN 0-06-076619-0. Great Britain.

Gr 6-8—Thirteen-year-old Thomas Ward begins his apprenticeship with the Spook to learn how to keep the world free of boggarts, ghosts, and evil witches. During his early training, Thomas unintentionally releases a malevolent witch from captivity, resulting in a series of shivery events.

DYER, Heather. *The Girl with the Broken Wing*. illus. by Peter Bailey. Scholastic/The Chicken House. Tr \$15.99. ISBN 0-439-74827-5. U.K.

Gr 3-5—In this witty Welsh novel, a girl crashes onto a skylight and startles twins James and Amanda out of bed. This girl, whose name is Hilary and who just happens to have wings, has decided to stay for an unspecified period of time with the siblings' family. Many humorous moments ensue as this "guardian angel" experiences daily life at school and on family outings.

GALLEGO GARCÍA, Laura. *The Legend of the Wandering King*. tr. from Arabic by Dan Bellm. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine Bks. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 0-439-58556-2. Spain.

Gr 6-8—An adventure steeped in legend and pre-Islamic poetry. Prince Walid dreams of being the best poet in the realm yet loses the poetry competition to a poor weaver. After eliminating his rival, Walid spends the rest of the novel seeking redemption and discovering that true poetry comes from the heart.

GARDNER, Sally. I. *Coriander*. Dial. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 0-8037-3099-3. Great Britain.

Gr 6-8—At the heart of this atmospheric yet highly readable historical fantasy is privileged Londoner Coriander Hobie. After a malevolent Puritan preacher locks her in a chest, the girl is transported to a lush, parallel fairy world with startling similarities to Cromwell's England.

GRANT, K. M. *Blood Red Horse*. (The deGranville Trilogy, Bk. #1). Walker. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 0-8027-8960-9. U.K.

Gr 6-8—The crusades of 1185–1193 come alive as two brothers bid England and the

girl they love farewell and with their father and the horse Hosanna board ship for the Holy Land. Battles are gory, men die, horses die, and Hosanna's wounds bring enemies together. A thrilling historical ride offers adventure, romance, love, and loss.

GREY, Mini. *Traction Man Is Here!* illus. by author. Knopf. Tr \$15.95. ISBN 0-375-83191-6; PLB \$17.99. ISBN 0-375-93191-0. Great Britain.

K-Gr 2—Powered by the imagination, Traction Man always saves the day, even when confronted by rather embarrassing fashion trends. Fast-paced adventures of this intrepid action figure and his sidekick, scrubbing brush, are accompanied by brightly designed, comically expressive illustrations.

GRIBBIN, Mary & John Gribbin. *The Science of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*. illus. by Tony Fleetwood. Knopf. Tr \$15.95. ISBN 0-375-83144-4; PLB \$17.99. ISBN 0-375-93144-9. England.

Gr 9 Up—A description of the scientific theories and principles underlying Pullman's fantasy trilogy. The authors explore the material of the universe, the unconscious mind, the quantum world and dimensions beyond, choice and randomness, and the nature of life, light, and entanglement.

HAWORTH-ATTARD, Barbara. *Theories of Relativity*. Holt. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 0-8050-7790-1. Canada.

Gr 9 Up—Banished from the house by his mother so her new man won't know about his existence, 16-year-old Dylan tries surviving on the streets with teen runaways and those who prey on them. With no family to turn to, some do-gooders offer a hand if he wants to accept it.

HEARN, Julie. *The Minister's Daughter*. S & S/Atheneum. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 0-689-87690-4. Great Britain.

Gr 9 Up—During a time in English history when Puritans and pixies presumably coexisted, a minister's daughters accuse Nell, a "merrybegot" (one conceived during May Day festivities), of witchcraft. Historical fiction and fantasy seamlessly merge in this passionate and intriguing adventure.

HEYDLAUFF, Lisa. *Going to School in India*. photos. by Nitin Upadhye. Charlesbridge. RTE \$21.95. ISBN 1-57091-666-7. India.

Gr 3-5—This captivating nonfiction book is filled with a collection of photographs, first-person narratives, and cultural information woven into a multifaceted examination of how children go to school in various parts of India. Some students take cable cars across craggy mountains while others have class in a bus temporarily parked in a city neighborhood. The bright foldout pages, textured

backgrounds, and snippets of children's comments contribute to an appealing format for young readers.

HOLUB, Josef. *An Innocent Soldier*. tr. from German by Michael Hofmann. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine Bks. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 0-439-62771-0. Germany.

Gr 6-8—Farmhand Adam Feutcher, conscripted into Napoleon's Grande Armée in 1812, tells his story: the cruelty of a sadistic sergeant; rescue by an aristocratic, young lieutenant; and the horrors of battle, starvation, cold, and betrayal. Only the growing friendship with "his" lieutenant saves them both. Page-turning historical fiction; a poignant and personal view of war.

HUSSEY, Charmian. *The Valley of Secrets*. illus. by Christopher Crump. S & S. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 0-689-87862-1. Great Britain.

Gr 6-8—Orphan Stephen Lansbury has always been without family, so he is shocked when he inherits an English estate from his late uncle. The surprises multiply as he sets out to discover something about himself and the family he never knew. The adventure that unfolds is part fantasy, part ecological mystery.

LAGUNA, Sofie. *Surviving Aunt Marsha*. Scholastic. RTE \$15.95. ISBN 0-439-64485-2. Australia.

Gr 3-5—When their parents fly off to Paris to renew their wedding vows, 11-year-old Tina and her two younger brothers are left at home in Melbourne, Australia, in the care of their dreaded aunt, a former nurse with unpopular views on nutrition and appropriate free-time activities. The kids' frustration grows more intense day by day, culminating in a final hilarious conflict in which Aunt Marsha gets her just desserts and all emotions flow freely.

LANAGAN, Margo. *Black Juice*. HarperCollins/Eos. Tr \$15.99. ISBN 0-06-074390-5; PLB \$16.89. ISBN 0-06-074391-3. Australia.

Gr 9 Up—Ten short stories about unknown worlds, deftly and darkly told. With her "hung-headed shame," one protagonist must sink in the tar pit as punishment for wrongdoing. Young adult readers will find these tales alien, yet eerily familiar and memorable, twisted and scary.

MCCAUGHREAN, Geraldine. *Not the End of the World*. HarperTempest. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 0-06-076030-3; PLB \$17.89. ISBN 0-06-076031-1. U.K.

Gr 9 Up—The story of the Great Flood is told by Timma, Noah's youngest daughter, with occasional contributions from other family members and animal passengers. A unique telling as readers learn about the Ark, filthy and teeming with ailing animals and humans. Moral and ethical dilemmas are posed as pleas of those unable to board the boat are ignored.

McKAY, Hilary. *Permanent Rose.* S & S/Margaret K. McElderry Bks. Tr \$15.95. ISBN 1-4169-0372-0. Great Britain.

Gr 6-8—In this third installment in the Cason family saga (*Saffy's Angel*, *Indigo's Star*; both S & S), the household is as chaotic as ever. Rose is determined to find her departed friend, Tom, and she has some humorous misadventures in her quest. Realistic dialogue and irresistible characters enliven the tale.

McNAUGHTON, Colin. *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day.* illus. by Satoshi Kitamura. Farrar. Tr \$16. ISBN 0-374-35634-3. England.

K-Gr 2—With a nod to inspirational teachers, McNaughton describes the transformation of an ordinary child's ordinary day into an extraordinary learning experience. A non-conformist teacher encourages his students to visualize what they hear in music he plays. His invitation stirs the children's imaginations. The illustrations expand the color palette and convey the text's wry humor and characters' subtle gestures.

MICHAEL, Livi. *The Whispering Road.* Putnam. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 0-399-24357-7. U.K.

Gr 6-8—Set in Victorian England, this historical fantasy follows the trials and adventures of poverty-stricken siblings Joe and Annie who had been left by their mother at a workhouse when they were very young and were then sold to an abusive farmer. After their escape from the farm, Joe and Annie travel a dangerous road and meet questionable as well as kind strangers as they search for their mother. This suspenseful and sad yet ultimately hopeful novel will be relished by fans of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*.

MORGENSTERN, Susie. *It Happened at School: Two Tales.* tr. from French by Gilian Rosner. illus. by Serge Bloch. Viking. Tr \$14.99. ISBN 0-670-06022-4. France.

Gr 3-5—Droll humor, clever dialogue, multiple perspectives, and a distinctive French sensibility invigorate a matched set of engaging stories about teachers, students, and parents. Spare, spiky sketches add a touch of whimsy to the mayhem.

NÄSLUND, Görel Kristina. *Our Apple Tree.* illus. by Kristina Digman. Roaring Brook. Tr \$15.95. ISBN 1-59643-052-4. Sweden.

K-Gr 2—The illustrations of a productive and generous apple tree show its magic: everyone enjoys a delicious apple. "Every seed could be an apple tree... [and] everyone likes apples." With soft, pastel pictures spilling from one page to another, we find honor in the simple apple tree.

NEIL, Philip. *The Pirate Princess: And Other Fairy Tales.* illus. by Mark Weber. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine Bks. Tr

\$19.99. ISBN 0-590-10855-7. U.K.

Gr 3-5—Seven tales told by the famous Jewish storyteller Reb Nachman of Bratslav are made very accessible to readers. Seemingly similar to traditional fairy tales, these all have a spiritual underpinning based on Kabbalistic beliefs. An introduction, background notes, and an extensive bibliography are included in this handsome book.

NILSSON, Per. *You & You & You.* tr. from Swedish by Tara Chace. Front St. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 1-932425-19-5. Sweden.

Gr 9 Up—The lives of three young people begin as separate plot strands and then intertwine as they help one another make crucial decisions and gain perspective on their futures. Attitudes toward sex and death convey a non-American viewpoint.

ORMEROD, Jan. *Lizzie Nonsense: A Story of Pioneer Days.* illus. by author. Clarion. RTE \$15. ISBN 0-618-57493-X. Australia.

K-Gr 2—In the bush country of frontier Australia, Lizzie's lively imagination keeps her mother entertained as they work and wait for her father to return from his trip to town to sell the sandalwood he has cut.

PAVER, Michelle. *Wolf Brother.* (The Chronicles of Ancient Darkness Series, Bk. #1). HarperCollins. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 0-06-072825-6; PLB \$17.89. ISBN 0-06-072826-4. Great Britain.

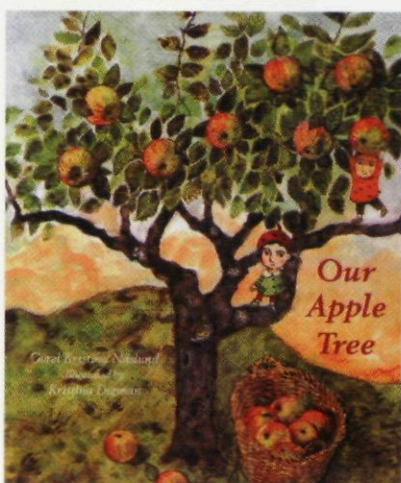
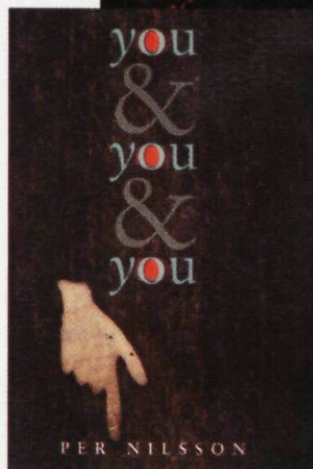
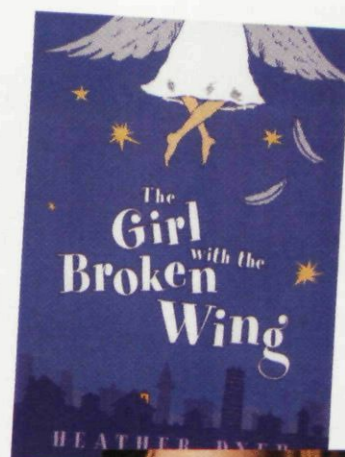
Gr 6-8—In a Stone Age land of clan rivalries, mystical spirits, and vast wilderness, Torak embarks on a journey at the behest of his dying father to destroy a demonic bear whose evil powers threaten civilization. With his wolf cub as companion and guide, Torak confronts human, spiritual, and natural enemies in this fast-paced, coming-of-age adventure/quest fantasy.

PULLMAN, Philip. *The Scarecrow and His Servant.* illus. by Peter Bailey. Knopf. Tr \$15.95. ISBN 0-375-81531-7; PLB \$17.99. ISBN 0-375-91531-1. England.

Gr 3-5—When lightning strikes and humanizes a scarecrow, Jack partners up with him and their journey begins. They survive many narrow escapes as they're chased and stalked. This tale of friendship comes to a satisfying conclusion with good rewarded and evil punished. Bailey's line drawings enhance the old-fashioned humor.

ROSE, Malcolm. *Framed!* (Traces Series). Kingfisher. pap. \$5.95. ISBN 0-7534-5829-2. U.K.

Gr 6-8—Luke Harding, 16, is the youngest Forensic Investigator (FI) graduated from his English prep school. Immediately there's a murder and all evidence points to Luke. With sidekick Malc, his trusty robot who conducts DNA testing onsite, and for-



bidden girlfriend, Jade, Luke hopes to snare the real killer. This high-interest, readable tale is fast moving, and its characters are likable and engaging.

ROSEN, Michael. *Michael Rosen's Sad Book.* illus. by Quentin Blake. Candlewick. RTE \$16.99. ISBN 0-7636-2597-3. England.

Gr 3-5—Prompted by the death of his teenage son, Rosen writes a heartfelt and deceptively simple book about handling the swirling emotions of love, anger, and grief and moving on with life. Blake's ink-and-watercolor illustrations perfectly capture the emotions of the story.

SPILLEBEEN, Geert. *Kipling's Choice.* tr. from Dutch by Terese Edelstein. Houghton. Tr \$16. ISBN 0-618-43124-1. Belgium.

Gr 9 Up—In 1915 as he lies dying in Loos, France, on the field of his first battle, Rudyard Kipling's 18-year-old son, John, remembers his childhood preparation for service to his country and the carefree days before the Great Picnic turned out to be something quite different.

STEINHÖFEL, Andreas. *The Center of the World.* tr. from German by Alisa Jaffa. Delacorte. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 0-385-72943-X; PLB \$18.99. ISBN 0-385-90266-2. Germany.

Gr 9 Up—Told from the perspective of Phil, a gay teen, this compelling coming-of-age novel focuses on people closest to him and moves thematically between his childhood and adolescence. The story concludes, coming full circle, as Phil addresses and reveals his most perplexing questions. Exquisite, lyrical writing.

UPDALE, Eleanor. *Montmorency on the Rocks: Doctor, Aristocrat, Murderer?* illus. by Nick Hardcastle. Scholastic/Orchard. RTE \$16.95. ISBN 0-439-60676-4. Great Britain.

Gr 6-8—The continuing adventures of Montmorency and his underworld alter ego, Scarper, involve bombs, death, and drug addiction. The Victorian setting adds to the dark intrigue and may lead readers to other period classics.

VALCKX, Catharina. *Lizette's Green Sock.* illus. by author. Clarion. RTE \$15. ISBN 0-618-45298-2. France.

K-Gr 2—As Lizette tries to find a missing sock, she has amusing and realistic encounters with friends and bullies. As she begins to use a new perspective, Lizette figures out her dilemma and moves on, satisfied with her place in the world. A spunky little heroine gets her domestic dramas under control!

WILSON, Jacqueline. *The Illustrated Mum.* Delacorte. Tr \$15.95. ISBN 0-385-73237-6; PLB \$17.99. ISBN 0-385-90263-8. England.

Gr 6-8—Dolphin adores her mother, Mari-gold, who has vivid tattoos all over her body.

But Mum's manic depression becomes overwhelming for Dolphin and her older sister, Star. Difficult family situations are portrayed realistically but leavened with humor.

WOODING, Chris. *Poison.* Scholastic/Orchard. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 0-439-75570-0. Great Britain.

Gr 6-8—Poison's quest begins when pharises substitute a changling for her younger sister. She meets unusual friends along the way who help her face unpredictable adversities. Ultimately, she must not only play a pivotal role in the battle between the lords of the realm, but also discover some uncomfortable truths about her own life.

WYNNE-JONES, Tim. *A Thief in the House of Memory.* Farrar/Melanie Kroupa Bks. Tr \$17. ISBN 0-374-37478-3. Canada.

Gr 9 Up—After a dead body is discovered on his family estate, teenager Declan becomes obsessed with finding out what happened to his mother, who disappeared several years earlier. This beautifully written and distinctive novel combines a suspenseful mystery with an intriguing family drama about secrets.

YAN, Ma. *The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl.* tr. from French by Lisa Appignanesi. HarperCollins. Tr \$15.99. ISBN 0-06-076496-1; PLB \$16.89. ISBN 0-06-076497-X. France.

Gr 6-8—Born into an impoverished family in a remote part of China, Ma Yan's schooling seemed to be over when she reached 13. Then her mother thrust her diaries into the hands of a French journalist, who edited and published them—ensuring the girl's future.

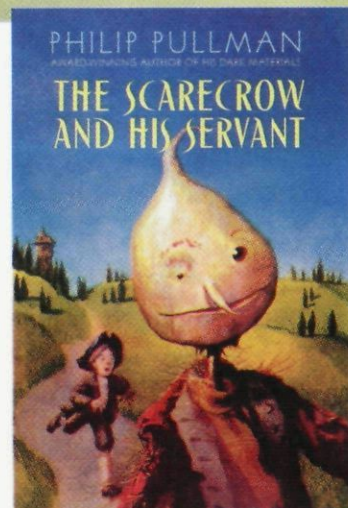
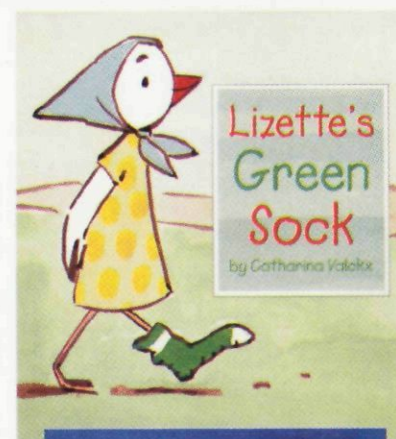
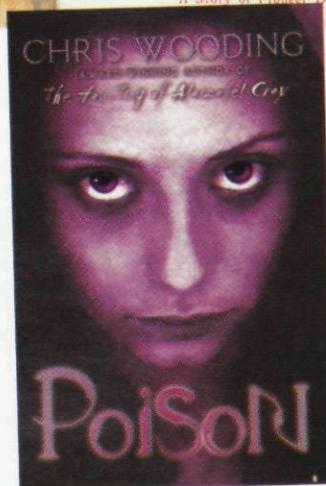
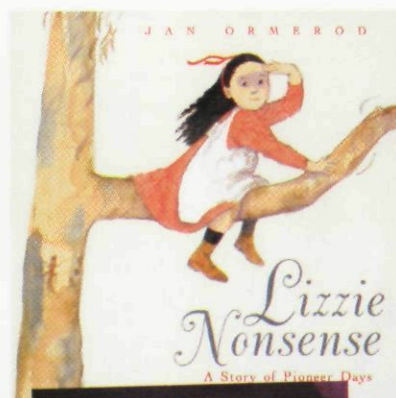
ZENATTI, Valérie. *When I Was a Soldier.* tr. from French by Adriana Hunter. Bloomsbury. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 1-58234-978-9. France.

Gr 9 Up—Zenatti chronicles two years of compulsory military service in the Israeli army, her initial excitement with the uniform and gun, grueling training, an unexplained anxiety attack, and posting to a security listening post as she grows up and away from old friends.

ZUSAK, Markus. *I Am the Messenger.* Knopf. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 0-375-83099-5; PLB \$18.99. ISBN 0-375-93099-X. Australia.

Gr 9 Up—Ed Kennedy has a dead-end job, loser friends, and a smelly dog. He drifts through life without goals. But after accidentally stopping a bank robbery, Ed finds himself becoming an agent of change, and as he carries out a series of random missions he finds that he might actually care.

Kathleen Isaacs teaches children's literature at Towson University in Maryland.



© 2006 School Library Journal, Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Copyright of School Library Journal is the property of Reed Business Information and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.