

2023-24 Book Blitz Jr. 4th -5th Grade Titles Synopses

***Bhai for Now* by Maleeha Siddiqui**

"When Ashar and Shaheer meet, they quickly discover they're twins and will stop at nothing to get to know the parent they've been separated from, learning along the way that they may not like each other, but they definitely need each other."

From the Publisher

A fresh and fun new spin on the Parent-Trap story, by Indies Introduce author Maleeha Siddiqui. Ashar is busy with the ice hockey team, studying to get into the best school, and hanging out with his friends. Shaheer and his father are always moving, following his dad's jobs. Shaheer has given up hope of finding a place where he can put down roots, a place that feels like home. The two boys have nothing in common.

But when they meet on Shaheer's first day at his new school, it's like looking in a mirror. They quickly figure out that they're twins, separated as babies. And they are determined to do whatever it takes--including secretly switching identities--to get to know the parent they've been separated from. This is the story of two long-lost brothers who, while they might not like each other, just might need each other. *Bhai for Now* is by turns heartwarming and hilarious, and with an unforgettable Muslim family and friendship story at its core.

***The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q. Rauf**

"When quiet, nine-year-old Ahmet arrives in their classroom, a boy and his friends fail to draw him out but try a new plan after learning he is a Syrian refugee."

From the Publisher

In the vein of timely titles such as Katherine Applegate's *Wishtree* and Alan Gratz's *Refugee* comes a touching, accessible middle-grade debut about the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis, as well as the life-changing power of friendship and standing as an ally. There used to be an empty chair at the back of Mrs. Khan's classroom, but on the third Tuesday of the school year a new kid fills it: nine-year-old Ahmet, a Syrian refugee.

The whole class is curious about this new boy--he doesn't seem to smile, and he doesn't talk much. But after learning that Ahmet fled a Very Real War and was separated from his family along the way, a determined group of his classmates band together to concoct the Greatest Idea in the World--a magnificent plan to reunite Ahmet with his loved ones. Balancing humor and heart, this relatable story about the refugee crisis from the perspective of kids highlights the community-changing potential of standing as an ally and reminds readers that everyone deserves a place to call home.

***City Spies* by James Ponti**

"Sara Martinez is facing years in the juvenile detention system for hacking into the foster care computer system to prove that her foster parents are crooks. But then she gets a second chance when a mysterious man offers her a chance to join a group of MI6 affiliated spies."

From the Publisher

In this thrilling new series that Stuart Gibbs called "a must-read," Edgar Award winner James Ponti brings together five kids from all over the world and transforms them into real-life spies--perfect for fans

of Spy School and Mrs. Smith's Spy School for Girls.

Sara Martinez is a hacker. She recently broke into the New York City foster care system to expose her foster parents as cheats and lawbreakers. However, instead of being hailed as a hero, Sara finds herself facing years in a juvenile detention facility and banned from using computers for the same stretch of time. Enter Mother, a British spy who not only gets Sara released from jail but also offers her a chance to make a home for herself within a secret MI5 agency.

Operating out of a base in Scotland, the City Spies are five kids from various parts of the world. When they're not attending the local boarding school, they're honing their unique skills, such as sleight of hand, breaking and entering, observation, and explosives. All of these allow them to go places in the world of espionage where adults can't.

Before she knows what she's doing, Sarah is heading to Paris for an international youth summit, hacking into a rival school's computer to prevent them from winning a million euros, dangling thirty feet off the side of a building, and trying to stop a villain...all while navigating the complex dynamics of her new team.

No one said saving the world was easy...

***Confessions of a Class Clown* by Arianne Costner**

Seventh-grader Jack Reynolds loves making people laugh but he needs help to make his wacky MyTube channel take off, and making friends is not exactly his strong suit.

From the Publisher

This middle-school class clown's hilarious online videos might get thousands of views . . . but is fame worth the price of friendship? A heartfelt story with multiple perspectives about the challenges of social media.

Meet Jack Reynolds. Making people laugh is his life's work. Jack's wacky MyTube channel is really starting to take off. The only problem is, for the truly epic posts, he needs a collaborator. And, well, he doesn't exactly have any friends. So Jack has to swallow his pride and join the new afterschool club, Speed Friendshiping. But who would make the best partner in comedy?

One student could help catapult Jack to internet fame . . . or even become a true friend. But what will it cost him to go viral? This middle school novel explores themes of friendship, belonging, and the ways social media can put pressure on today's kids.

***Merci Suarez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina**

"Merci Suarez knew that sixth grade would be different, but she had no idea just how different. For starters, Merci has never been like the other kids at her private school in Florida, because she and her older brother, Roli, are scholarship students. They don't have a big house or a fancy boat, and they have to do extra community service to make up for their free tuition. So when bossy Edna Santos sets her sights on the new boy who happens to be Merci's school-assigned Sunshine Buddy, Merci becomes the target of Edna's jealousy. Things aren't going well at home, either: Merci's grandfather and most trusted ally, Lolo, has been acting strangely lately -- forgetting important things, falling from his bike, and getting angry over nothing. No one in her family will tell Merci what's going on, so she's

left to her own worries, while also feeling all on her own at school."

From the Publisher

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So when bossy Edna Santos sets her sights on the new boy who happens to be Merci's school-assigned Sunshine Buddy, Merci becomes the target of Edna's jealousy. Things aren't going well at home, either: Merci's grandfather and most trusted ally, Lolo, has been acting strangely lately -- forgetting important things, falling from his bike, and getting angry over nothing. No one in her family will tell Merci what's going on, so she's left to her own worries, while also feeling all on her own at school. In a coming-of-age tale full of humor and wisdom, award-winning author Meg Medina gets to the heart of the confusion and constant change that defines middle school -- and the steadfast connection that defines family.

***Nightmares!* By Jason Segel**

"Twelve-year-old Charlie and his friends must stop nightmares from taking over their town before it's too late."

From the Publisher

Charlie Laird has several problems.

1. His dad married a woman he is sure moonlights as a witch.
2. He had to move into her purple mansion—the creepiest place in Cypress Creek.
3. He can't remember the last time sleeping wasn't a nightmarish prospect. Like even a nap.

What Charlie doesn't know is that his problems are about to get a whole lot more real. Nightmares can ruin a good night's sleep, but when they start slipping out of your dreams and into the waking world . . . well, that's something only Charlie can face. And he's going to need all the help he can get, or it might just be lights-out for Charlie Laird. For good.

***Odder* by Katherine Applegate**

"Odder spends her days off the coast of central California, practicing her underwater acrobatics and spinning the quirky stories for which she's known. She's a fearless daredevil, curious to a fault. But when Odder comes face-to-face with a hungry great white shark, her life takes a dramatic turn, one that will challenge everything she believes about herself--and about the humans who hope to save her."

From the Publisher

Meet Odder, the Queen of Play:

Nobody has her moves.
She doesn't just swim to the bottom,
she dive-bombs.
She doesn't just somersault,
she triple-doughnuts.
She doesn't just ride the waves,
she makes them.

Odder spends her days off the coast of central California, practicing her underwater acrobatics and spinning the quirky stories for which she's known. She's a fearless daredevil, curious to a fault. But when Odder comes face-to-face with a hungry great white shark, her life takes a dramatic turn, one that will challenge everything she believes about herself--and about the humans who hope to save her.

Inspired by the true story of a Monterey Bay Aquarium program that pairs orphaned otter pups with surrogate mothers, this poignant and humorous tale told in free verse examines bravery and healing through the eyes of one of nature's most beloved and charming animals.

***Rescue* by Jennifer A. Nielsen**

"657 days ago Meg's British father left their home in France to fight the Nazis, leaving some codes in a jar for her to decipher, and Meg and her French mother moved to the Perche, a region in France near Normandy known for its forests; now Meg watches the German soldiers in town, and sometimes carries messages for the French resistance--but suddenly things have gotten much more dangerous: there is a wounded British officer hiding in her grandmother's barn, a family of German refugees who are trying to get to Spain, and the Nazis have arrived on the door stop searching for the fugitives."

From the Publisher

From New York Times bestselling author Jennifer A. Nielsen comes a thrilling World War II story of espionage and intrigue, as one girl races to save her father and aid the French resistance.

Six hundred and fifty-seven days ago, Meg Kenyon's father left their home in France to fight for the Allies in World War II, and that was the last time Meg saw him. Recently, she heard he was being held prisoner by the Nazis, a terrible sentence from which Meg fears he'll never return. All she has left of him are the codes he placed in a jar for her to decipher, an affectionate game the two of them shared. But the codes are running low, and soon there'll be nothing left of Papa for Meg to hold on to at all.

Suddenly, an impossible chance to save her father falls into Meg's lap. After following a trail of blood in the snow, Meggie finds an injured British spy hiding in her grandmother's barn. Captain Stewart tells her that a family of German refugees must be guided across Nazi-occupied France to neutral Spain, whereupon one of them has promised to free Meg's father. Captain Stewart was meant to take that family on their journey, but too injured to complete the task himself, he offers it to Meg, along with a final code from Papa to help complete the mission -- perhaps the most important, and most difficult, riddle she's received yet.

As the Nazis flood Meg's village in fierce pursuit, she accepts the duty and begins the trek across France. Leading strangers through treacherous territory, Meg faces danger and uncertainty at every turn, all the while struggling to crack her father's code. The message, as she unravels it, reveals secrets costly enough to risk the mission and even her own life. Can Meg solve the puzzle, rescue the family, and save her father?

***The Sisters of the Neversea* by Cynthia Leitich Smith**

From Follett

Based on J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan. In this magical, modern twist on Peter Pan, stepsisters Lily and Wendy are spirited away to Neverland by a mysterious boy and must find a way back to the family they love.

From the Publisher

Native American Lily and English Wendy embark on a high-flying journey of magic, adventure, and

courage to a fairy-tale island known as Neverland' Lily and Wendy have been best friends since they became stepsisters. But with their feuding parents planning to spend the summer apart, what will become of their family and their friendship? Little do they know that a mysterious boy has been watching them from the oak tree outside their window. A boy who intends to take them away from home for good, to an island of wild animals, Merfolk, Fairies, and kidnapped children, to a sea of merfolk, pirates, and a giant crocodile. A boy who calls himself Peter Pan.

Swim Team by Johnnie Christmas

"Bree can't wait for her first day at her new middle school, Enith Brigitha, home to the Mighty Manatees--until she's stuck with the only elective that fits her schedule, the dreaded Swim 101. The thought of swimming makes Bree more than a little queasy, yet she's forced to dive headfirst into one of her greatest fears. Lucky for her, Etta, an elderly occupant of her apartment building and former swim team captain, is willing to help."

From the Publisher

Bree can't wait for her first day at her new middle school, Enith Brigitha, home to the Mighty Manatees--until she's stuck with the only elective that fits her schedule, the dreaded Swim 101. The thought of swimming makes Bree more than a little queasy, yet she's forced to dive headfirst into one of her greatest fears. Lucky for her, Etta, an elderly occupant of her apartment building and former swim team captain, is willing to help.

With Etta's training and a lot of hard work, Bree suddenly finds her swim-crazed community counting on her to turn the school's failing team around. But that's easier said than done, especially when their rival, the prestigious Holyoke Prep, has everything they need to leave the Mighty Manatees in their wake.

Can Bree defy the odds and guide her team to a state championship, or have the Manatees swum their last lap--for good?

Virtually Me by Chad Morris and Shelly Brown

"Five tweens navigate the pandemic by attending an experimental virtual reality school."

From the Publisher

Using personalized avatars, a group of kids look for a fresh start in school when a virtual reality academy opens after a pandemic.

This school year, Bradley, Edelle, and Hunter will be wearing virtual-reality headsets and attending a three-dimensional, simulated school while interacting as avatars. Having a customized avatar is a bonus as some students want to hide behind a new identity.

Bradley is eager for a brand-new identity. A cool avatar will allow him to escape the bullies who have made fun of him for years and gives him a fresh start to make new friends on his own terms.

Edelle is forced to attend the virtual school by her mom who says she's too obsessed with being at the top of the "Best-Looking Girls" list circulating at school. Even worse, Edelle's mom insists she chooses a generic avatar. Mortified by how her avatar looks, Edelle registers under a new name so no one can identify her. But will she lose her prized social status if no one can recognize her?

Hunter is known for his popularity, charm, and his lustrous mane of hair, except with his recent diagnosis of alopecia, his hair has begun to fall out, even his eyebrows. VR school allows him to maintain his popularity--and the illusion of a full head of hair--even if it means hiding behind an avatar. He tells his friends that once his grades are back up, he'll return to school in person. But he wonders how being isolated will affect his relationships.

As Bradley, Edelle, and Hunter get to know each other in their virtual environment, they realize that the school is not all fun and games and the simulated environment just brings different problems than an in-person school. Each student will see themselves and their world through a new lens as they learn about what true friendship means and the difference between fitting in and belonging.

Wild River by Rodman Philbrick

When a dam fails and rushing waters sweep away their adult supervisors, five middle schoolers on a white-water rafting adventure are left alone with few supplies and the opportunity to forge powerful bonds as well as develop dangerous disagreements.

From the Publisher

Daniel Redmayne is fast asleep on the first night of a white water rafting trip, when he's awoken by screams. The dam has failed. The river is surging, and their camp will be under water in a matter of moments.

As the shrieking roar of the river rushes closer, the kids scramble to higher ground. They make it; their counselors do not.

Now they're on their own, with barely any food or supplies, in the middle of the Montana wilderness. Do Daniel and his four classmates have what it takes to stay alive until they can get rescued? Alone in the wild, they forge powerful bonds -- but develop dangerous disagreements. If nature doesn't break them, they might just destroy each other.