



**Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award
2022-2023 Booktalk Scripts
Grades 6-8**



***Class Act* by Jerry Craft**

Have you enjoyed reading a graphic novel by Raina Telgemeier or Gene Luen Yang? If so, you need to read *Class Act*! In this graphic novel, our main character, Drew, is in 8th grade and experiences both funny and difficult times as he learns more about himself and friends at the prestigious school where he is one of the few students of color. Enjoy the companion graphic novel to Craft's Newbery award winning novel, *New Kid*, whether you have had a chance to read *New Kid* or not!

Author Website: <https://jerrycraft.com/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gCwS6FgsKs>

***Maybe He Just Likes You* by Barbara Dee**

Day after day, Mila wears the same baggy, green sweater to disguise her shape. Ever since members of the basketball team asked for good luck hugs before their big game and she did it because her friends encouraged her, Mila has felt uncomfortable with the unwelcome touching. There's the hand on her backside as she stands at her locker and the "accidental" bumping. Mila feels distressed and embarrassed. Who can she tell? Not the principal and the counselor – both men. Not her single mother who has enough worries with bills and job searching. Not even her best friend who calls it flirting! A free gym membership allows Mila to take a karate class where she discovers more than how to make a smooth karate chop. This realistic fiction novel gives us a bird's eye view of a delicate problem that all of us can learn from.

Author Website: <https://barbaradeebooks.com/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDIRmH2TTKc>

Reading Group Guide: <https://www.simonandschuster.net/books/Maybe-He-Just-Likes-You/Barbara-Dee/9781534432376#reading-group-guide>

***Starfish* by Lisa Fipps**

Life—not just middle school—is torture for seventh grader, Ellie, a white, Jewish Texan. From a young age when she joyfully cannonballed into a pool, Ellie was branded “Splash,” and her classmates lost no opportunity to compare her to the whales on her swimsuit. What's worse, Ellie can't even escape the fat-shaming at home! Her mother papers the refrigerator with fad diets and articles on bariatric surgery; her sixteen-year-old brother, Liam, blames Ellie for their fat-free, bland Thanksgiving dinner. Even her older sister, Anais, takes a while to appreciate Ellie. No wonder she finds relief swimming. Ellie does have her allies: her dad, the school librarian, her new friend, Catalina, and her therapist. Will the therapist's unconventional methods help Ellie

relinquish her Fat Girl Rules and stand up to the Queen Bee of Mean Girls? This novel in verse will keep you rooting for Ellie, an irresistible underdog.

Author Website: <https://authorlisafipps.com/>

Book Review: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKx4xditi8E>

Discussion Guide: http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9781984814500.pdf

Educator Guide: <https://www.adl.org/media/16886/download>

***Ground Zero* by Alan Gratz**

Brandon made a mistake and now he must go to work with his dad because he's been suspended from school. He punched a kid, but he doesn't regret it because he was standing up for another kid. Unfortunately, his dad doesn't see it that way. It's September 11, 2001 and his dad works at the Restaurant at the Top of the World in the Twin Towers. Brandon's life is about to change forever when a plane hits the Twin Towers. Can he get out to safety?

20 years later, Reshima is living in Afghanistan and American soldiers are searching their homes for the Taliban. Shortly afterwards, the Americans walk into a trap and Reshima tries to help. Can she keep her family and her new friend safe? Read this historical fiction novel based on true events and told in alternating voices to find out.

Author Website: <https://www.alangratz.com/>

Author Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xe3SD8XLD3I>

Discussion Guide: <https://www.scholastic.ca/kids/discussionguides/pdfs/ground-zero-discussion-guide.pdf>

***Wink* by Rob Harrell**

Ross is in seventh grade when he is diagnosed with a rare eye cancer requiring him to use a goopy eye cream that sometimes drips and to get radiation treatments that will cause his hair to fall out. Follow Ross' journey as his friends shy away, he discovers the guitar, and ultimately discovers true friendship in this humorous realistic fiction novel based on the author's own personal experience.

Author Website: <https://robharrell.com/about.html>

Author Book Introduction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVr7d5DAts>

Teacher Guide: <https://hcau-assets.supadu.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/23112707/Wink-Teachers-Notes.pdf>

***Scary Stories for Young Foxes* by Christian McKay Heidicker**

Seven little foxes are listening to scary stories from the Storyteller. Will the stories be scary enough to entertain them? The storyteller begins the story of Mia and Uly where danger lurks around every corner and danger has many appearances, though sometimes the scariest stories are

just foxes trying to live their lives. These kits attempt to survive disease, family, the Golgathrush, terrifying humans, and dangerous foxes. One by one, the little foxes scamper away. Will any of them be brave enough to stay to hear the end? Will Mia and Uly survive? Read this animal fantasy adventure horror story to find out.

Author Website: <http://www.cmheidicker.com/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kidFI8tKIOM>

***BenBee and the Teacher Griefer* by K. A. Holt**

Ben Bellows has failed his Language Arts state test, which lands him in summer school. There he meets three other classmates whose talents go deeper than a standardized test. Can Ms. J. convince these “divergent thinkers” that their worth adds up to more than a test score? How can the students and their obsession with Sandbox, a Minecraft-type game, save their teacher’s job? Readers will relate to the academic struggles, the personal challenges, and the power of believing in yourself when no one else can through this realistic fiction novel in verse.

Author Website: <https://kaholt.com/>

Author Book Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_q2sjc51IS0

***Murder on the Baltimore Express: The Plot to Keep Abraham Lincoln from Becoming President* by Suzanne Jurmain**

We all know that President Lincoln was assassinated at Ford’s theater in 1865, but did you know that a plan was designed to kill the newly elected but not yet sworn in President Lincoln in February of 1861 on his way to be inaugurated? Lincoln would have died as his train passed through Baltimore if not for the actions of Allan Pinkerton, who served as the head of Union Intelligence Service (precursor to the U. S. Secret Service) and founder of the famous Pinkerton Detective Agency. Pinkerton employed modern techniques for the times by employing women and African American agents. At this point in history, presidents didn’t have bodyguard protection, but Lincoln was going to need it, and he didn’t make that duty easy either - he kind of stood out and he didn’t always follow Pinkerton’s directions. Mr. Lincoln had much more important things to worry about.

Author Article: <https://littlebeebooks.com/behind-the-story-murder-on-the-baltimore-express/>

***Linked* by Gordon Korman**

Chokecherry, Colorado is not exactly a tourist destination. Most people are content for the town to go unnoticed until an unfortunate event brings national press. Someone has drawn a swastika on the wall at Chokecherry Middle School. Link Rowley, a popular athlete, does not really think too much about it until he learns a secret about his family: his ancestors are Jewish. He decides to complete a crash course in Judaism and have a bar mitzvah. Link becomes the unofficial mascot of the newest school tolerance project: a paper chain with six million links to represent

the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust. The entire school works towards this phenomenal goal with the hope of erasing the bad press. This plan goes awry when more swastikas appear around the school, and no one knows who is drawing them. A twist at the end will leave you surprised.

Author Website: <https://gordonkorman.com/>

Audiobook Excerpt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lOBpUdF-q0>

***Red, White, and Whole* by Rajani LaRocca**

In this heartwarming novel in verse, Reha is an eighth grade, first generation, Indian American who is trying to determine who she really is: American or Indian. She enjoys her family's Indian culture but at school she is trying to be American and fit in, and these two sometimes conflict. Then her world completely turns upside down with her mom's diagnosis of leukemia and she is determined to find a cure for her mom, even if it means being the perfect daughter.

Author Website: <https://www.rajanilarocca.com/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUY-cODUPIY>

***Too Bright to See* by Kyle Lukoff**

After Bug's dad died when she was a baby, she, her mom, and her gay, drag queen uncle moved to an old house in Vermont where there was evidence of ghosts. Now, eleven years later, her uncle has died and starts haunting her. She is convinced that he will not rest until he gets a message to her and snooping in his room leads to a hidden box of transgender pamphlets, but will she understand the message before the hauntings harm her?

Author Website: <http://www.kylelukoff.com/>

Author Reading Excerpt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JUcxjGMzGU>

Discussion Guide: http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9780593111154.pdf

Educator Guide: <https://www.adl.org/media/16420/download>

***Tracking Pythons: The Quest to Catch an Invasive Predator and Save an Ecosystem* by Kate Messner**

Pythons are typically only found in Southeast Asia, so when one was spotted in Florida, scientists were scratching their heads. How would a snake travel from Asia to America? Maybe people owned these pythons as pets and released them into the wild. Or perhaps some pet pythons escaped. Either way, these snakes started multiplying and eating every animal they came across, damaging Florida's environment. In this book, author Kate Messner travels to the swamps of Florida and learns what scientists are doing to track these pythons and stop them from spreading. You will read about scientists wrestling giant pythons, performing snake surgery, and searching the swamp to find where these creatures are hiding. By scanning the QR codes throughout the book, you will even see videos of their adventures in the wild.

Author Website: <https://katemessner.com/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJUajDR-eTs>

***Bloom* by Kenneth Oppel**

Unfortunately, there are so many things that can get in the way of a peaceful day. But would you have expected three teenagers in Canada to have to battle invading plant species for their very survival and that of the rest of the world? Continue reading the engaging Overthrow trilogy with Oppel's books *Hatch* and *Thrive*.

Author Website: <https://www.kennethoppel.ca/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpWN23pqjTU>

***Wild River* by Rodman Philbrick**

Daniel Redmayne has won a trip of a lifetime—a whitewater rafting trip in Montana with four of his classmates. His thrill and excitement are quickly replaced by shock and horror when the adult counselors get swept away after the dam breaks. The five middle schoolers are left alone to survive the elements, the wild animals, and even each other. Will Daniel and his classmates get rescued before their supplies run out? This non-stop, adventure thriller will have readers discovering that leaders can be forged from powerful friendships, from unwavering resilience, and from the strength to forgive.

Author Website: <https://rodmanphilbrick.com/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IqMUBTJuVs>

***Before the Ever After* by Jacqueline Woodson**

This novel in verse shares the story of a fictional professional football player's son watching his dad slowly succumb to the devastating effects of Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the result of numerous concussions causing brain damage. To ZJ, his dad is just his dad, but to his dad's fans including his own friends, he is a hero. Dad suffers from debilitating headaches, can't play football anymore, can't remember who "Little Man" is and is slowly slipping away right in front of ZJ's eyes. None of the doctors can explain what is wrong with his dad. In the author's notes, the unsung hero is the real-life doctor who fought for years to prove that repeated concussions resulted in permanent brain damage or CTE. In 2016, Dr Omalu's research was acknowledged and, therefore, pro sports and youth sports rules and concussion protocols were put into place to make playing contact sports safer.

Author Website: <https://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BoTsLIFm3I>

Teacher Guide: https://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9780399545436.pdf