



**Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award  
2023-2024 Book Talk Scripts  
Grades 6-8**



***Amari and the Night Brothers* by B. B. Alston**

Amari's brother has been missing for over a year and she will do anything to find him, even if it means believing in the supernatural. When she receives an invitation for the same summer camp her brother once went to, she might just get the lead she needs to find him, but is she prepared for the magical world she is about to enter? Read this fantasy and join Amari on her adventure to find out.

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

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7DiWGI69Vk>

Educators' Guide: <https://b0f646cfbd7462424f7a-f9758a43fb7c33cc8adda0fd36101899.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/teaching-guides/TG-9780062975164.pdf>

***Flooded: Requiem for Johnstown* by Ann E. Burg**

Experience the horror of 20 million tons of water rushing towards you without any warning literally destroying everything in its path, through the eyes of six of Johnstown, PA's youngest citizens. That is the same amount of water that goes over Niagara Falls every 36 minutes. Told through the imagined voices of real children who were there, some of whom won't survive. Could the disaster have been prevented if warnings had been heeded that the dam needed repair? Find why this historic disaster happened, if anyone was held responsible for it, how it started conversations about rich versus working class, how afterwards help came from hundreds of miles away in a time before the instant news of social media, how Red Cross founder Clara Barton was involved and how it changed Johnstown forever.

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

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

Historical Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nhDkpQokHI>

***Swim Team* by Johnnie Christmas**

First day at a new middle school is hard enough, but only one elective fits Bree's schedule: Swimming! Her greatest fear. Luckily her elderly neighbor Etta is an excellent swimmer and a great teacher. When chatting about why people in her building don't know how to swim, Etta tells the story of her old swim team that had to deal with Jim Crow laws. Eventually, with the help of Etta and a few other friends, Bree is able to step out of her comfort zone.

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

Author Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHSgiOg7Af8>

### ***What Lives in the Woods* by Lindsay Currie**

Twelve-year old Ginny Anderson portrays herself as a modern-day detective and emulates her favorite author Agatha Christie. Ginny finds herself spending her summer with her family in Michigan while her father restores Woodmoor Manor, a run-down mansion that holds many secrets. She soon discovers that many locals stay far away from Woodmoor due to rumors of disappearances and creatures in the woods. As Ginny searches for the truth to Woodmoor, the more the house seems to come after her. Is it just her love for mysteries and over-exaggerated mind playing games or is Ginny's life really in danger? If you dare, read *What Lives in the Woods* and see if Ginny can survive.

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

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qu-ak9pErs>

Discussion Guide:

[https://www.lindsaycurrie.com/files/ugd/c47227\\_f2e4a35350404fe98f275277a95748f7.pdf](https://www.lindsaycurrie.com/files/ugd/c47227_f2e4a35350404fe98f275277a95748f7.pdf)

### ***My Life in the Fish Tank* by Barbara Dee**

Zinnia Manning's fun-loving family is known for being noisy and tight-knit. At the beginning of seventh grade, though, Zinny's world comes crashing down when older brother Gabe steals and crashes his college roommate's car. His impulsive behavior and hospitalization uncover Gabe's bipolar disease. Now, a cloud hangs over the whole family as they strive to keep Gabe's mental illness a secret from classmates, teachers, and neighbors. Zinny has fond memories of her older brother taking her for ice-cream and making her feel special, but she also remembers the scary times. Even though Gabe is getting well, the shroud of secrecy that blankets the family destroys their closeness and rips Zinny apart. Her only consolation is science class where she is studying crayfish. When the science teacher, Ms. Molina, recommends Zinny for a spot at a summer marine biology camp, Zinny doesn't know what to do.

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

Author Reading Excerpt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zvhvXmXHng>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzdcyxNt5sk>

Reading Group Guide: <https://www.simonandschuster.net/books/My-Life-in-the-Fish-Tank/Barbara-Dee/9781534432338#reading-group-guide>

### ***The Curse of the Mummy* by Candace Fleming**

What would you think if the team you had worked with to discover the archeological find of the century all began to die from mysterious illnesses and accidents? Are you next? Were the cryptic messages found on the walls and tomb really a curse designed to protect the tomb from those who would dare disturb the peace of "the boy king", King Tut? But, how could a 600-year-old mummy possibly kill you? The mystery of the curse may have even extended beyond the

Egyptian site dig team to those who were only loosely associated with uncovering the tomb of King Tut. Read to see if you can solve the mystery of the curse of King Tut's tomb.

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

Author Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha1LwJfX8iA>

Fact Sheet: [https://www.candacefleming.com/pdfs/Curse\\_of\\_the\\_Mummy\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.candacefleming.com/pdfs/Curse_of_the_Mummy_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

Author Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaABo0b8Dgg>

Smithsonian Article: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-howard-carter-discovered-king-tuts-golden-tomb-180981052/>

### ***Alias Anna: A True Story of Outwitting the Nazis* by Susan Hood and Greg Dawson**

"I don't care what you do. Just live." These are the last words Zhanna hears from her father. After her Jewish family is forced from their home to march to the Drobitsky Yar, a mass grave, Zhanna's father bribes a guard to let her escape. She soon finds her sister and they enter an orphanage and they start playing a piano. The piano tuner wants them to go to music school where they are going to have to play for Nazis. Can they survive traveling from the USSR to Berlin and playing for people who want them dead? After all they are Jews and they were famous musical prodigies before the war. If anyone recognizes them . . .

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

Teacher Guide:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f5919b98dcebb0a60943339/t/62fa6e82788eec10a0d275ae/1660579463871/Alias+Anna+Teacher+Guide.pdf>

### ***The Fort* by Gordon Korman**

A group of friends discover the fort they built has been destroyed after a hurricane ravages their town, and then they accidentally come across an old bomb shelter. This abandoned shelter becomes a new fort for the friends and a place to build friendships and escape bullying as they work together to solve problems. But why is this bomb shelter here and can they keep it a secret? Read *The Fort* (Gordon Korman's 100<sup>th</sup> book!) to find out, especially if you ever wished you had a secret hideout!

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

Read an Excerpt: <https://gordonkorman.com/FROM-THE-FORT>

Audiobook Sample: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5-amldrLu4>

### ***Becoming Muhammad Ali: a novel* by James Patterson and Kwame Alexander**

Before Muhammad Ali, there was Cassius Clay, a young black boy from Louisville, Kentucky whose bike was stolen and he was determined to get it back, even if he had to learn to fight the bullies who stole it. Imagine being Ali's best friend Lucius, or Lucky as Cassius calls him, as a kid and watching him learn to box and cheer him on as he boxes his way to win after win, only to

watch it all be taken away when he took a personal and contentious stand against fighting in Vietnam. Ali's fight against the legal system meant he needed a different kind of fighting skills and friends like Lucky in his corner. Ali's place in history all began with a stolen bike, read this novel in verse to see how that act ended up creating the iconic boxer that "floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee."

Author Website: <https://kids.jamespatterson.com/>

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

Animated Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LPzTrF6sIM>

Live Action Book Trailer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iekODh\\_6Nrw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iekODh_6Nrw)

Author Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OUHaJx7ORk>

Educator's Guide: [https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BecomingMuhammadAli.Guide\\_.pdf?\\_ga=2.2136560.1319819454.1679091262-1763845067.1679091262](https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BecomingMuhammadAli.Guide_.pdf?_ga=2.2136560.1319819454.1679091262-1763845067.1679091262)

### ***Black Brother, Black Brother* by Jewell Parker Rhodes**

Two brothers from the same loving family: Donte, the dark-skinned brother, is into video games and books; Trey, the lighter brother, is a sports star at their posh school, Middlefield Prep. While the older Trey fits in, twelve-year-old Donte is constantly being harassed, particularly by smug classmate, Alan, whose wealthy father has the school in his back pocket. One day, Alan throws a pencil at a classmate, Samantha, but the teacher blames Donte. When Donte expresses his anger at the unfair accusation, the Headmaster over reacts and has Donte handcuffed and put in jail. During Donte's suspension from school, Trey shares with him an article about a former Olympic fencer, Arden Jones, working at the local Boys and Girls Club. An idea starts to form in Donte's head: Alan is captain of the fencing team at Middlefield. Can Donte beat this bully at his own game?

Author Website: <https://jewellparkerrhodes.com/children/>

Author Introduces Book: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tkYGwzazAk>

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UTaWHEHiPQ>

Novel Study: <https://jewellparkerrhodes.com/children/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Copy-of-Black-Brother-Black-Brother-Novel-Study-2.pdf>

### ***Born Behind Bars* by Padma Venkatraman**

Set in India, Kabir was born in prison after his mom was falsely accused of stealing from her employer. Now that he is nine years old, he has aged out of the prison system and must leave, but where will he go? Will he find his father? Will he be able to prove his mom is innocent so she can also be released? Join Kabir on his adventure in the realistic fiction, multicultural novel.

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

Discussion Guide: [http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers\\_guides/9780593112472.pdf](http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9780593112472.pdf)

Other Resources from the Author: <https://padmavenkatraman.com/born-behind-bars-2/>

### ***Ripped Away* by Shirley Reva Vernick**

What lengths would you go to save the life of your school crush? Abe Pearlman just wants Mitzy Singer to know that he exists, but when he visits a fortune teller, both of their lives are changed. They both wind up in Victorian England where Mitzy is now blind and both are now trying to survive the recent hysteria centered around the Jack the Ripper killing spree. They must work together to save the lives of those close to them in their new lives as well as figure out how to return to their previous lives. How is the past and present connected? Will the fortune teller's prophecy come true? Whose life is Abe supposed to save—Mitzy, a stranger, or his own? Read *Ripped Away* to discover that survival takes teamwork, trust, and courage that you never knew even existed.

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

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS9LNn4w2qc>

Learning Guide:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8ce87c081e4d7e1df41722/t/61099228bad90957cd645d63/1628017192560/Ripped+Away+-+Learning+Guide.pdf>

Author Interview: <https://diversebooks.org/qa-with-shirley-reva-vernick-ripped-away/>

### ***Race Against Time: The Untold Story of Scipio Jones and the Battle to Save Twelve Innocent Men* by Sandra Neil Wallace and Rich Wallace**

Sometimes it feels impossible to succeed when the system is against you. In October 1919, a group of Black sharecroppers were organizing a union. A white mob attacked, and many were killed, but others were rounded up and arrested. A quick trial put 12 of these men on death row. Then Scipio Africanus Jones, a self-taught attorney, started working to set these men free. Read about how Scipio Jones accomplished what many people thought was impossible.

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

Teaching Resources: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/race-against-time-scipio-jones>

News Broadcast about Upcoming Movie and Scipio Jones:

<https://www.thv11.com/article/news/local/the-defender-movie-scipio-jones-sterling-k-brown/91-4f3c8861-97f9-44f9-a6f7-6cfb06885740>

### ***Anne of West Philly: A Modern Graphic Retelling of Anne of Green Gables* by Ivy Noelle Weir, illustrated by Myisha Haynes**

Classic novels such as *Little Women* and *The Secret Garden* have recently been created into exciting new and full colored graphic novels! Consider a contemporary setting for the classic *Anne of Green Gables*. In this modernized tale, Anne has yet to have a stable home and family. What if she finds her forever family in Philadelphia? How will life change for Anne and her potential family? Explore Anne's experiences to find out more in this fast-paced graphic novel.

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

Illustrator Website: <http://www.myishahaynes.com/>

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

### ***New from Here* by Kelly Yang**

Remember having to stay indoors? Wear masks? Attend virtual school? Welcome to the coronavirus pandemic! The Wei-Evan family is experiencing the same things. While Dad remains working in Hong Kong, Mom flies back to California with the three children. They settle into online school, hoarding protective gear, and having fun with just themselves. The grim reality of the coronavirus lockdown hits home, though, when Mom instructs them to tell folks they are “new from here” so as not to stir up any anti-Asian racism. When Mom loses her job, and it becomes even harder for Dad to join the family, the kids start problem solving zany schemes to raise money for a plane ticket so their family will be together again. If you like stories you can relate to and laugh with, *New from Here* by Kelly Yang is your book.

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

Author Book Introduction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLhSNGijj00>

Author Reads Excerpt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1JfW4C4cIw>

Reading Group Guide: <https://www.kellyyang.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/New-From-Here-Reading-Guide.pdf>