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## New Authors, New Books, and New Horizons

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## New Authors, New Books, and New Horizons

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This is a time of transition for *Reading Horizons* as it moves from a print to an online journal format. To celebrate this transition, we have selected some of the best debut books published recently. For avid readers, there's nothing quite as exciting as discovering a new author or two and paying attention as these new voices join the familiar ones already beloved by bibliophiles. The entrance of a new author on the children's and young adult publishing scene is something to cheer. As you read our brief reviews, you will see that these first-time authors have showered the world with hours of wonderful reading enjoyment. Judging from these first efforts, it's doubtful that any of them will experience the dreaded sophomore slump, promising even more reading pleasure in the future.

### Grades K-3

Enersen, Adele. (2012). *When my baby dreams*. New York: HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray. 48 pages, \$14.99, ISBN: 978-0-062-07175-0.

Garnering immediate attention as soon as some of the photos appeared on the Web, this book started out as a tribute to the author's baby daughter Mila on her blog entitled "Mila's Daydreams" at <http://milasdaydreams.blogspot.com/>. Drawing on the fascination that babies have for their parents and grandparents, the author has taken photographs of Mila that will certainly bring smiles to readers' faces—and likely prompt several adult readers to reach for their own cameras in order to immortalize their offspring. The intent in this colorful book with its simple lines, and original photographs



is to act out the baby's dreams (or the mother's fantasies for her daughter). Among other carefully and cleverly staged moments, the photos show a baby petting a lamb, fashioned from gauzy material and black and white socks; walking through a cotton candy forest created from knitted and crocheted throws; and traveling the world on the back of a blue elephant, again fashioned from cloth folded to form its body and trunk. Young readers will enjoy looking at the adorable photos of Mila as she has all sorts of adventures, all while she is sleeping safely at home, seemingly never twitching at all through all these creative efforts. No one could possibly resist smiling at the photo of Mila "splish-splashing with her tail" (unpaged) formed from a green crocheted piece draped around her lower body. Above all, it's comforting to know that someone who loves you is right there by your side, keeping a watchful—and obviously very busy—eye on you and dreaming of all the places you may someday go.

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Lewis, Caron. (2012). *Stuck with the blooz*. Illus. by Jon Davis. New York: Harcourt Children's Books. 40 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-547-74560-2.

It is difficult to explain to others what it means to feel blue or slightly depressed. Sometimes words just aren't adequate to describe the emotion or to sort out what prompts the blues. This picture book tries to make sense of those feelings with which just about everyone is familiar. Apparently, the root of the blues could be just about anything. Because she knows the signs of the blues approaching, a girl tries valiantly to keep them away, and then when they arrive anyway, she tries to figure out what brought them on. Because the text and illustrations personify the blues as a huge, oozy, blue blob of a monster, readers can see how he puts a damper on all the girl's happy moments, even ruining her chocolate milk and lemonade with his blue drappiness. The melancholic feelings that accompany her are represented through digitally painted illustrations and generous amounts of white space. The book captures this particular feeling quite well, even depicting its swift departure, leaving just as swiftly as it comes.

## Grades 4-6

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Ashley-Hollinger, Mika. (2012). *Precious Bones*. New York: Delacorte. 344 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-385-74219-1.

The summer of 1949 brings lots of heartache, adventure, and mystery to ten-year-old Precious Bones, her mother, and part-Miccosukee Indian father Nolay. The trouble begins with a huge storm that fills their home with water (and a couple of snakes). Then two murders take place, and Nolay is considered a prime suspect for each of them. Bones learns lessons about miracles, family, friendship, grief, abuse, discrimination, judging others, and kindnesses that help her to develop as a compassionate, well-rounded person. Ashley-Hollinger creates a setting so rich that readers can feel the heat and humidity of the Florida swamp, experience the bites of pesky mosquitoes, and hear the sounds of the birds and animals. Likewise, readers will find many of the book's well-developed characters occupying places in their hearts. The plot is gripping, engaging, and has enough suspense to make it a book that is hard to put down.



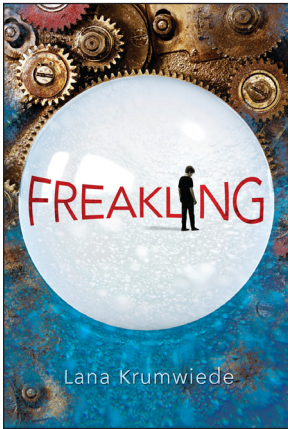

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Dias Lorenzi, Natalie. (2012). *Flying the dragon*. Illus. by Kelly Murphy. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. 240 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-580-89434-0.

Fifth grader Skye (born Sorano) has no idea that she has a cousin who lives in Japan until her cousin Hiroshi arrives to live in Virginia while their grandfather undergoes treatment for cancer. Both children are drawn to this elderly man who is a skilled artist and kite builder although Hiroshi resents sharing his grandfather with Skye. In interesting parallels, Skye resents being forced to learn Japanese so that she can communicate better with her relatives while Hiroshi is unfamiliar with American idioms and classroom customs. Although Skye dislikes being asked to translate for her cousin, she also tries to provide English tips about slang so that he can fit in more easily. The author de-



scribes vividly the resentment and insecurities that fill both Skye and Hiroshi. Skye's reflection on how she chose to adopt an American name rather than her Japanese one will remind readers of the thoughtless cruelty of those who make fun of anything they don't know or understand. The passages in which Grandfather tries to bring his grandchildren together through their shared interests in the beautiful dragon kite they are flying are particularly memorable. Grandfather's approach to life--and death--remind readers that hearts matter more than objects. The changes in both Skye and Hiroshi are believable, an acknowledgement that anyone can change for the better. This debut title from a new author promises readers much thoughtful enjoyment.

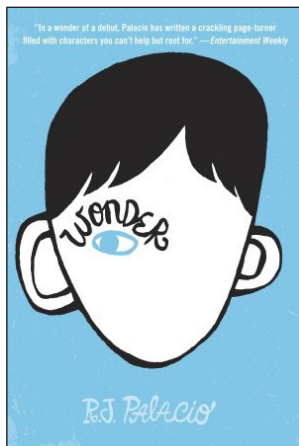


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Krumwiede, Lana. (2012). *Freakling*. Watertown, MA: Candlewick Press, 320 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-763-65937-0.

Debut author Lana Krumwiede has written an intriguing and engaging dystopian novel that will appeal to middle grade readers. Taemon is born into a society where people have telekinetic powers but must first visualize an action and then make it happen using psychic powers called psi. Taemon is the antithesis of a super hero because he loses his psi and then is forced to cover up his lack of the power that others in his city take for granted. After his secret is revealed in a sports tournament, Taemon is banished to a powerless colony.

At the “dud farm,” he learns many secrets that could give even greater power to the psi wielders. When Taemon accidentally leaks a secret, he must return to the society that banished him to save two groups of people. Taemon learns many lessons about justice, loyalty to family, and loyalty to society. Readers will appreciate the opportunity to enter into Taemon's intriguing world, and the multifaceted plot will keep them turning the pages. The perfectly crafted ending will leave them eager to learn more about Taemon and his society in the sequel scheduled to come out in 2013..



Palacio, R.J. (2012). *Wonder*. New York: Random House, 313 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-3758-6902-0.

Ten-year-old August Pullman regards himself as rather ordinary, while others see him as anything but normal due to his extreme facial abnormalities. Auggie explains the dissonance between how he sees himself and how others regard him: "But I know ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go" (p. 3). His life changes once his parents enroll him as a new fifth grader at Beecher Prep School. This will be Auggie's first experience in school since he has been homeschooled during the previous years due

to his numerous surgeries. Not only must he deal with the looks and whispers of his new classmates but also a cruel game in which students that touch him and fail to wash within 30 seconds of contact will have "The Plague." In addition to learning about the traditional subjects of language arts, social studies, science, and math, Auggie also learns powerful lessons about friendship, courage, loyalty, and betrayal. His school days teach him about overcoming unexpected challenges as well as introducing him to bullies and their abilities to coerce others into joining their cruel behavior toward anyone different from the norm. Palacio skillfully narrates the story from alternating points of view, offering insights from Auggie and some of his classmates as well as his teenage sister and her friends. This is a WONDER-ful book, brimming with hope and possibilities balanced against thoughtless acts of unkindness based on ignorance.

## Grades 9-12

Andrews, Jesse. (2012). *Me and Earl and the dying girl*. New York: Harry N. Abrams. 304 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1419701764..

No one really knows Greg Gaines, and that's exactly the way he likes it. Although he gets along with all the cliques in his high school, he doesn't fit anywhere. In fact, he only feels engaged when coming up with ideas for the movies that he and his friend Earl create. After classmate Rachel Kushner is diagnosed with leukemia, Greg's mother insists that he spend time with her since they were once something of an item. He does so, unwillingly, and strangely, Rachel seems to understand Greg's humor and the films starring Cat Stevens, the family feline. Greg's emotional detach-

ment as he hides behind jokes and the camera while Rachel's death is imminent keeps him from realizing just how unique this dying girl is as well as how precious life is, hiding those feelings from himself and even the book's readers in the end. Anyone who has dealt with the loss of someone or faced his/her own mortality will surely be moved by this story filled with insight and pathos mingled with wonderfully hilarious descriptions of the dreadful films Greg and Earl create. In Greg's case, art becomes more important than all the living and dying that occur around him.

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Clayton, Colleen. (2012). *What happens next*. New York: Little Brown/Poppy. 310 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-0-316-19868-4.

Everything changes after sixteen-year-old cheerleader Sid Murphy is date raped while on a ski trip with several classmates from her Cleveland, Ohio high school, an incident about which she can remember very little. She tells no one about what happened, not even her mother or two best friends, Kirsten and Paige. Her initial avoidance of them angers them, and they shun her at school, leaving her completely alone. Sid is kicked off the cheerleading squad, and volunteers to work in the AV room rather than attend one of her classes. At first repulsed and then attracted to Corey Livingston, a classmate with a reputation of his own, Sid thinks she knows how to manage everything while keeping the rape a secret. Desperate to erase the parts of her—her large boobs and her rear—that seem to attract male attention, Sid begins running at all hours of the night and eating next to nothing. She clearly needs help, but she keeps blowing everyone off. This debut author has done a great job of creating a likeable character in Sid while exploring her emotions thoroughly. The high school years can be fueled by gossip and assumptions, many of which are completely wrong and downright presumptuous. Teen readers are sure to race through the pages of the book to find out what happens next. In the end, while everything isn't perfect for Sid, she has the resources to survive and to begin to heal. What happens next—for better or for worse—is up to her.



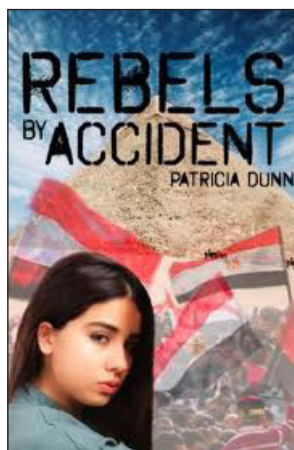
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Dunn, Patricia. (2012). *Rebels by accident*. New York: Alikai Press. 225 pages, \$12.95, ISBN: 978-0-9854921-2-0.

Mariam wants to appear to be a “normal” American more than anything else. She hates everything about being Egyptian and Muslim. Her desire to fit in leads to



her sneaking off to a party that results in her being sent to jail. Shocked and disappointed, her parents decide she needs to go visit her grandmother in Cairo. Mariam's best friend Deanna accompanies her on the trip to Egypt. The girls quickly learn that Mariam's grandmother—her Sittu—is both wise and wonderful. While in Egypt Mariam comes to terms with her bicultural identity and heritage, falls in love, and experiences her first kiss. Several surprises, including the revolution that toppled Mubarak's government, cut the friends' visit short. Mariam learns many lessons while in Egypt, but her biggest discovery is the strength she finds within when called to tackle difficult and important tasks.



Howard, A.G. (2012). *Splintered*. New York: Amulet/Abrams, 377 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-14197-0428-4.

Life for Alyssa Gardner is anything but boring. Yes, Alyssa goes to school where she deals with mean girls and she even has a part-time job, but she can hear the voices of flowers and bugs. As readers turn the pages of this beautifully crafted, lyrical book, they learn that Alyssa is the great-great-great-great-great granddaughter of Alice Liddell, Lewis Carroll's inspiration for Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*. Alyssa must keep many of her gifts/delusions secret because she is afraid that she will one day end up institutionalized like her mother since her family has been cursed with insanity ever since Alice went down the rabbit hole. To break this curse, Alyssa must go on a quest—down the rabbit hole—to right the wrongs of Wonderland. Her friend (and real-world crush) Jeb accompanies her on this journey. Yet, in Wonderland she is torn between Jeb and her enchanting guide Morpheus. She quickly learns that in the dark world of Wonderland, nothing is what it appears to be, nor is anyone.

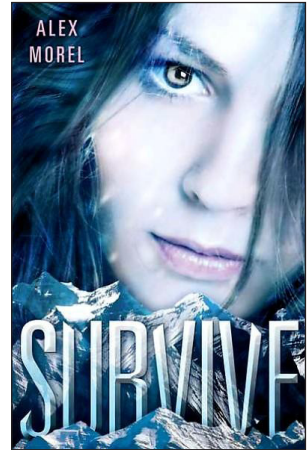




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Morel, Alex. (2012). *Survive*. New York: Penguin/Razorbill. 259 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-1-595-14510-9.

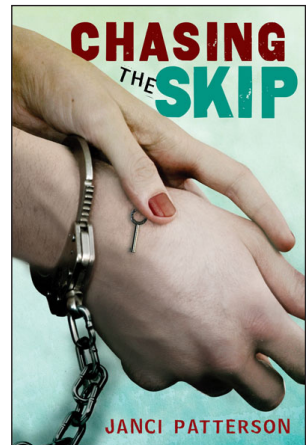
Jane Solis has planned everything carefully. On leave from the hospital for Christmas, she is preparing to swallow the pills that will kill her when her plane crashes in a wilderness area. Only Jane and her annoying seatmate, Paul Hart, survive. Strangely, with as much determination as she had wanted to die, Jane now wants to survive, and the duo gather food and supplies before walking and climbing as far as they can in order to improve their chances of being spotted by a search plane. Forced to rely on each other, they form a strong connection, and reveal their secrets to one another, hers about her suicide attempts and his about his estrangement from his father. When an accident further incapacitates Paul, Jane must summon the strength to go for help, possibly saving the two of them, and to reach out for her own future. Teen readers will surely be touched by the poignant, short-lived romance between Jane and Paul and be amazed at her will to live and his generosity. Teen readers will question some of the decisions made by Jane and Paul along their journey and ponder what they might do in order to survive, and how those particular decisions might shape their own futures.



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Patterson, Janci. (2012). *Chasing the skip*. New York: Henry Holt, 228 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-8050-9391-9.

In Janci Patterson's first novel, *Chasing the Skip*, she examines the challenges faced by young people who are raised by absentee parents. Fifteen-year-old Ricki knows the drill when her mother takes off—she goes to stay with her paternal grandmother. However, this time, her grandmother decides it is time for Ricki's father to take over. The father, Max, disappeared before Ricki was born so she does not really know him and is not excited to join him as he travels around the intermountain west looking for "Skips," criminals who have jumped their bail. Ricki's days are filled with tension as she struggles to become acquainted with her father, to trust him, and gain his trust. The tension quickly escalates when Ricki finds herself attracted to the

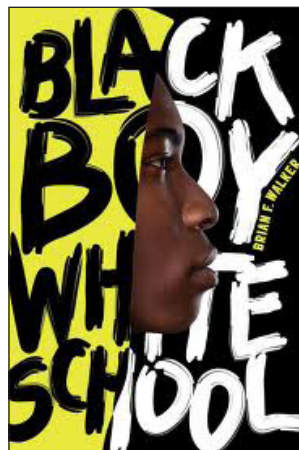


newest “Skip”—a wild, self-assured, teenaged bad boy. Readers will appreciate the well developed characters, and the twists in the plot that keep them turning the pages.

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Walker, Brian F. (2012). *Black boy white school*. New York: HarperTeen. 256 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-0-061-91483-6.

Sixteen-year-old Luke’s publisher sends him on a publicity tour when the book he wrote chronicling his spiritual journey starts selling and gaining attention. Due to a scheduling glitch, Matt, Luke’s older brother, will be responsible for getting him to the book signing venues on time, but Matt has his own agenda involving his girlfriend Alex. Matt rents a Hummer and heads across the country along Route 66. The fact that Fran, a girl on whom Luke once had a crush, comes along adds to the complications. The descriptions of the book signings during which Luke must field difficult questions and sign until his arm aches are spot-on as are the complaints Luke utters throughout the scenic detours on which Matt takes his fellow passengers. Luke is portrayed realistically, floundering from one mistake to another, disappointing and betraying himself and others. Luke is, after all, a seeker, and if he isn’t sure exactly what he believes or how firm that belief may be, his seeking is typical of an adolescent. Threaded through the storyline is the very real consideration of how much an author owes to his/her readers, an issue worth pondering in this time in which authors have written partially fictionalized memoirs. Also, worth noting is the media frenzy that ensues once Luke is found to be less than forthright about his book and some of the events occurring on the trip. Once again, readers will be astonished at how quickly the media—or social network, for that matter—can create or destroy someone’s image. Although the problems Luke is facing seem resolved rather quickly in the end, this title is thoughtful and encourages readers to reflect on their own actions and beliefs. While tackling serious issues, this title does so with humor and moments of bonding between siblings and friends.



### **About the Authors**

Barbara A. Ward and Terrell A. Young are dedicated bibliophiles who love teaching as much as reading. Ward is on the faculty at Washington State University in Pullman, and Young at Brigham Young University in Provo.