

Open Shelf

November 2005

This month:

The Great Gatsby F. Scott Fitzgerald
A Great and Terrible Beauty
Libba Bray
The Awakening Kate Chopin
Hiroshima John Hershey
My Sister's Keeper Jodi Picoult
Goodnight Mr. Tom
Michelle Magorian
Much Ado About Nothing
William Shakespeare

city of mesa library young adult advisory council book review newsletter

Letter from the editor



November is a month of reflection, looking back on the good ol' days of turkey feasting and community fun. In keeping with that tradition, this month's issue looks back on the "classic" literature that we're all so familiar with. Sprinkled among these dust-gathering titles are those we deem *should* be classics, even if they haven't that auspicious standing yet. Sit back, relax, enjoy your tryptophan-filled turkey and read a few.

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The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Great Gatsby is, as they say, the "great American novel." Being in American Lit at school, I have read several "great American novels" that were not great. Although I will refrain from naming these (one rhymes with Marlet Letter and one rhymes with Muckleberry Finn), behold!: there IS a great American novel that actually is good!

Nick Caraway has moved east from his Midwest home. He comes to Long Island, where his cousin, Daisy, lives with her husband, Tom. Also, there are Daisy's friend Jordan and Nick's neighbor Jay Gatsby. The five of them spend summer fighting, cheating, lying, crying,

and having a gay old time. Sounds horrible, but it really is good. Short, too—nine chapters of Fitzgerald's incredible prose. Actually, make that eight good chapters and one lame ending chapter. But don't let that stop you! You'll have to read it when YOU take American Lit, so read it now and avoid hearing the tragic story of Fitzgerald's life, which your English teacher will not only tell you, but test you on. *The Great Gatsby* is probably the best classic American book out there.

—Alyssa Ratledge
★★★★

A Great and Terrible Beauty

Libba Bray

Gemma Doyle has been hidden away. After her mother's death in India, her family thinks it's best that she be cloistered at Spence Academy. Unversed in Victorian courtesies and social graces, she finds herself quickly isolated. But perhaps that is for the best, as Gemma has starting having visions...

Wait! Wait! Don't skip to the next review! I know—I, too, have been burned by too many vision/magic/historical fantasy books. However, Libba Bray is a gifted storyteller and character smith. Gemma and the Spence girls are surprisingly realistic and empathetic, especially with Bray's dialogue. In the last few chapters, the story begins to stray to the predictable and trite, but this infraction is easily forgiven when the rest of the book's excellence is taken into

account. The story is very feminine, so those of the masculine persuasion may not be as entertained. Girls, however, will love *A Great and Terrible Beauty*.

—Mary Beth Hutchinson
★★★★★

The Awakening

Kate Chopin

When reading a novel I know I will be tested on, my expectations are low. Fortunately, Chopin's *The Awakening* was a refreshing change.

Edna Pontiller is married to a wealthy, emotionally stunted Creole, Léonce. Though it's the nineteenth century, Edna still clings to the Renaissance ideal of love. As a result, this prominent New Orleans wife engages a man



rating system

bad; needs work ★
so-so ★★
average ★★★
good ★★★★
excellent; perfect ★★★★★

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named Robert in conversation. Robert is everything Léonce is not—brave, independent, intelligent—and he genuinely cares for her. However, when Edna's fling goes to Mexico for "business," Edna returns to her drab life.

Through a hardened, musical old maid, a loyal mother, and a handsome seducer (think Rhett Butler), Edna discovers what she wants is *freedom*—even if it means she'll die.

It's tender and tragic. It's also really short, so you can read it in an afternoon. I definitely suggest the goodness that is classic Kate Chopin.

– *Mandi Levendowski*
★★★★★

Hiroshima

John Hershey

We usually only see it from miles away—a mushroom cloud folding and unfolding on itself as it reaches into the sky. Here is the burning, festering, retching story from beneath the cloud. If you're curious about the occurrences of Hiroshima, and even if you're not, you need to read this book. Hershey presents this tragedy with poignant compassion, moving the reader to tears at times. This book will change your outlook on war. Brutal and surreal, it is required reading for all.

– *Mary Beth Hutchinson and
Luke Lambert*
★★★★★

My Sister's Keeper

Jodi Picoult

Wow. This book... WOW. The whole time I was reading it I could not put it down—and I have the detention slips to prove it. I have never read Picoult before, but now I'm going to look into her other work. The story begins in present day Rhode Island, when fourteen-year-old Anna Fitzgerald pawns the locket her father gave her seven years before to raise the money to hire a lawyer. Her case: suing for medical emancipation from her parents, meaning that legally her parents have no power over her when it comes to medical treatment.

The story starts before Anna is born, when her then two-year-old sister, Kate, is diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Her older brother,

Jessie, is not a good genetic match, and Kate's parents can't gamble that their next child will be. So, Sara and Brian Fitzgerald find a geneticist who picks out an embryo who matches Kate. Nine months later, Kate is given a transfusion of stem cells from her sister's cord blood. From then on, Anna is a "spare parts" kid, living her life to give her sister the biomatter she needs to live—cord blood, white blood cells, bone marrow, regular blood when Kate starts bleeding—it goes on and on.

The whole book is not just one story, but the stories of everyone involved, from the Fitzgerald family, to Anna's lawyer and her guardian ad litem. I won't tell you the ending, but be warned: it will make your jaw drop.

Moving, yet filled with enough humor to make you laugh out loud, *My Sister's Keeper* is a *great* read. What are you waiting for? Here's your invitation: go read it!

– *Patricia Langevin*
★★★★★

Goodnight Mr. Tom

Michelle Magorian

Goodnight Mr. Tom is about a small boy named William, who is evacuated from London during World War II and goes to stay with a gruff old man named Tom Oakley. With Will around the house, Tom is reminded of his dead wife and son. Being with Will softens the old man, and he comes to love the child. But when life is going so well, Will's mother mails a message for him to come back to London. When Will doesn't write to him, Tom worries that Will's abusive mother has gotten out of control.

Goodnight Mr. Tom was a touching story that I recommend for everyone.

– *Harmony Nelson*
★★★★★

Much Ado About Nothing

William Shakespeare

God, I love this play. I've read it on my own, seen the movie, and now I get to study it for Academic Decathlon. Even all the literary analysis I have to do does nothing to dampen my adoration for this play.

This is the tale of two pairs of lovers who get twisted up, turned around, and eventually put right with much laughter, tears, sinister

plotting, and witty turn-a-phrase. Beatrice and Benedick are meant for each other, and everyone knows it—only how do they get past their blatant dislike for one another? Hmm... Meanwhile, Benedick's buddy, Claudio, and Beatrice's cousin, Hero, can't stop making eyes at each other and decide to get hitched. Only, Don Jon decides he doesn't want that happening and concocts an evil plan to foil the match. Oh, the intrigue!

This is, in my opinion, one of Shakespeare's best. The banter between Beatrice and Benedick is so clever, so incredibly amusing... Ah, I love it. I will admit that the other couple, Hero and Claudio, I didn't enjoy as much, but the sheer awesomeness that is B+B made up for that. If you get a choice to read any Shakespeare play, read this one. I promise, it's good.

– *Jenny Knatz*
★★★★★

Where's FRANK?

FRANK Teen Literary Magazine 2005 is now on sale at all three City of Mesa Library branches for 75 cents, or read it for FREE in the library or your school media center. Teen submissions for the 2006 issue will be accepted until March 31, 2006. You can also sign up to join the teen editorial staff.

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<http://mesalibrary.org/teens/frank/>
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