

Open Shelf

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city of mesa library young adult advisory council book review newsletter

Letter from the editor



Well, we're back for one final year as Editors of *Open Shelf*. We hope you all enjoy our selection of "back at school and need an escape" books. Good luck in a new year!

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The Witch of Blackbird Pond

Elizabeth Speare
★★★★★

It is hard to be in a village full of Puritans—especially during the Witch Trials, and even more so when one of your own friends is accused of witchcraft. Poor Kit Tyler traveled from Barbados to Connecticut to a world full of mystery, witch crimes, and love. Kit stands up against certain perilous risks for love of her friends and family.

This is my favorite book of all time and I highly recommend it. I think Speare has a good sense of the colonial times.

-Catherine Millar-Haskell

The Joy Luck Club

Amy Tan
★★★★

Being forced to read so-called "classics" by school generally gives me reason to hate said novels. Luckily, **The Joy Luck Club** turned out to be a satisfying Ya-Ya sisterhood with an Asian twist.

Tan follows the lives of four Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters from Shanghai into San Francisco, where these women find peace and power through maj jong. Tan artfully describes the Moon Lady's wishes, the despairs of love and war, the pain of loss, and a fresh new take on hope.

I was surprised about how great this book is—it would have been easy for eight Asian women to blend into a single unnamable blur, but instead each woman maintains a distinct, singular identity. The book sometimes reads like exotic fantasy and others like a quiet recollection full of missed opportunities. But throughout the novel, Tan imparts beautiful pearls of Chinese wisdom that you'll definitely want to tuck into your pocket for a rainy day.

-Amanda Levendowski

The Kidnapping of Christina Lattimore

Joan Lowry Nixon
★★★★

This book is mainly about what Christina goes through while she is kidnapped and held hostage in a basement. Just before being kidnapped, Christina badly needed money for a school trip. She begged her grandmother for it, but grandma simply said NO. Then, suddenly she's kidnapped and the kidnappers say they want money in exchange for Christina. So her family

This month:

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Elizabeth Speare

The Joy Luck Club Amy Tan

The Kidnapping of Christina Lattimore Joan Lowry Nixon

Red Azalea Anchee Minn

Here Speeching American: A Very Strange Guide to English as it is Garbled Around the World Kathryn Petras and Ross Petras

Balefire Quartet Series Cate Tiernan

A Certain Slant of Light Laura Whitcomb Marie, Dancing Carolyn Meyer

thinks Christina planned it on her own for the money.

So, did Christina plan it, or did she really get kidnapped?

I really liked this book a lot. It's a mystery, so throughout the entire book you're trying to figure out "who dunnit?" I really recommend this book for people who like solving mysteries.

-Leticia Salazar

Red Azalea

Anchee Minn
★★★★★

She has always been a good communist. Proudly quoting Mao, desperate to believe, she is a model for others. However, she fails at the most



rating system

bad; needs work ★

so-so ★★

average ★★★

good ★★★★

excellent; perfect ★★★★★

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www.mesalibrary.org

and see the Teens page!

crucial step: giving up her individualism. It is this that ultimately gives Anchee Min her outsider's perspective on a time she was deeply involved in.

This is not a book about politics. Figures like Chairman Mao are mentioned more like deities than any kind of reality. This is more a book of people: Conniving, striving, barely surviving people each trying to carve out a small safe place in the new world order. No character is laid barer than Minn herself. She is so unblushingly free with her thoughts and details that I often had to remind myself that she wasn't writing about some fictional figment, but rather herself. The autobiography format is unique in that it gives you real life and real life isn't clearly laid out with facts figures and neat lessons. Often all you're given in the end is nothing more than a twinge of feeling of what life was like. But as any social historian will tell you, it is that feeling—more than any stat or figure—that lets you know what life was like.

-Mary Beth Hutchinson

Here Speeching American: A Very Strange Guide to English as it is Garbled Around the World

Kathryn Petras and Ross Petras

★★★★★

Here Speeching American is a hilarious book depicting how other-worldly types try to accommodate American travelers. I mean who wouldn't want to stay in the Aggressive Hotel chain in Cambodia? And just to warn you, "Be prepared for a nerve-racking experience. An outrageous rip-off on food and drinks and hotel rates," in the Philippines. Some of the notices in this book will make you question logic, like this road sign in Sozhou, China, "Beware of Safety." But this book is wildly funny and adds cheerful insight to traveling around the world. Definitely a great rainy day read.

-Ashley Mentzer

Balefire Quartet Series

Cate Tiernan

★★★

Twins Clio and Thais were separated at birth and kept in ignorance of the other's existence. When their father, Thais's guardian, dies, Thais is taken by a leather-clad woman stranger to live in New Orleans. As they start their senior year, the two run into each other on the first day of class and are left with quite the puzzle to solve.

As their story and the reasons for their separation unwind, readers are drawn into

a mystery of a quarter of a century old. Romance, betrayal, *la bonne magie*, adventure and mystery fill these books and the lives of these twin girls.

Now, the first two books started off incredibly promising: Tiernan's writing was as lyrical and vibrant as ever, and I was anxious to get to know and love the characters she was creating as much as I had those of her last series, **Sweep**. However, after the initial thrill was over **Balefire** started going rapidly downhill. The characters lacked depth and I began to find duplicates of characters from **Sweep**. Tiernan even tried to incorporate some of the main conflicts of **Sweep** (do I have a natural predisposition for evil?) into literally the last two pages of the series. The ending was sudden and anti-climactic, leaving me begging for more and not in a good way. It had SO MUCH potential, but so little was fulfilled. All in all, the series was okay, but not the best.

-Jenny Knatz

A Certain Slant of Light

Laura Whitcomb

★★★★★

Wow. What an amazing book. For being a first-time author, Whitcomb does a FINE job writing this book. It's full of incredible imagery and stunning detail. It kept me on the edge of my seat in suspense, and I couldn't stop reading it!

Helen, a 130 year old "Light" has been trailing after her hosts for as long as she can remember. One day, in her host's classroom, she is stunned to find a boy that watches her. Her invisibility has always been efficient, was there something wrong? Eventually, she discovers that James is also a Light, but in a human's, or "Quick's", body. They fall in love quickly, as Helen believes she has found the only other Light on Earth.

James encourages her to also adopt a human's body. She falls into the body of Jenny, one of James' classmates. Other schoolmates find the pair an odd couple, as Jenny comes from an extremely religious family, and James's host, Billy, has been known to be a delinquent and dabble in narcotics. The difficulties from jumping into a body and not knowing the family's tangled web of problems and rules is very complicated. In what I think is the best ending I've ever read, it all comes to a crashing halt. I can't give anything away, but I'll let you know it's unexpected! Read it! Now!

-Ashley Mentzer

Marie, Dancing

Carolyn Meyer

★★★★★

Marie Van Goethem dances in the Corps de Ballet at the Paris Opera. There she is discovered by Edgar Degas, a

famed French artist, and eventually becomes the model for his statue, "Little Dancer Aged Fourteen." She lives an extremely hard life with her mother and two sisters; Antoinette, the elder, and Charlotte, the younger. Their mother is a heavy drinker and spends most of what the girls earn from dancing, and what she earns from washing clothes, on Absinthe. One day, Edgar Degas finds Marie and demands that she model for him. This opens her up to a whole new world, a whole new spectrum of thinking, but when Antoinette gets arrested, and Marie must leave the opera to help her, her life changes.

This is an amazing book about a young girl's struggle to overcome the severe poverty she was born into and to raise herself above her class.

-Oonagh McQuarrie

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.

Look for the 2006 issue of FRANK later this year

You can also sign up to join the teen editorial staff.

Check

<http://mesalibrary.org/teens/frank/>
for more information.



What is YAAC?

The Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) is a group of teens from many of Mesa's junior and senior high schools. They hold meetings twice monthly to review books for this newsletter and to plan special activities. They also help the librarians in Mesa Public Library's Young Adult Room at the Main Library as volunteers and assist with programs.

If you are interested in becoming a member of YAAC, call (480) 644-2734 or stop by the Young Adult service desk and ask for an application.

Learn more at:

 mesalibrary.org
City of Mesa Library on the Web



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Great People, Quality Service!