

Virginia Readers' Choice  
Middle School Annotations

**Bystander.** James Preller, Feiwel & Friends, 2009.

Eric is the new kid at school, and Griffith is the school bully who welcomes Eric into his circle of friends. Initially Eric does not get involved, thankful that Griffith's bullying is directed at someone other than himself, but he soon realizes that he must take a stand. Can he make a difference?

**Chasing Lincoln's Killer.** James Swanson, Scholastic, Inc., 2009.

(Adapted from Swanson's *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer* [HarperCollins, 2006]). Originally planning to kidnap Abraham Lincoln and hold him hostage, John Wilkes Booth instead assassinated Lincoln. With his co-conspirators, John Wilkes Booth leads investigators on a twelve-day manhunt through Virginia, Maryland, and Washington before he is surrounded by authorities and killed.

**The Leanin' Dog.** K.A. Nuzum, HarperCollins, 2008.

11-year old Dessa Dean watched helplessly as her mother froze to death in a Colorado winter storm. Now grieving, she and her father go through the motions of living in their small, remote cabin. Remembering her mother's death, Dessa cannot make herself go outside. One day she spots an injured, but untrusting dog wandering near the cabin. Can the pair help each other overcome their fears?

**Mockingbird.** Kathryn Erskine, Penguin Young Readers Group, 2010.

Ten-year old Caitlin and her father are reeling over the sudden death of Caitlin's brother in a middle school shooting. Her guidance counselor tells her she needs closure, but "closure" does not come easily to Caitlin, who suffers from Asperger's Syndrome.

**Out of My Mind.** Sharon Draper, Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2010.

Melody is a fifth grader with cerebral palsy. She cannot move her body (except for her thumbs), or communicate in any way, but she remembers every word anyone has ever said. Finally, with the help of technology, Melody is able to communicate with her family and classmates. But are they really interested in what she knows, and what she has to say?

**Pop.** Gordon Korman, HarperCollins, 2009.

Marcus, the new kid in the neighborhood and hopeful championship high school team quarterback, practices football alone in the park. One day he is joined by Pop, who turns out to be Charlie Popovich, a famous retired NFL linebacker, who is both charismatic and erratic. What could explain Charlie's odd behavior? What is his family keeping from the community, and why don't they want Marcus to help him?

**The Rock and the River.** Kekla Magoon, Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2009.

Chicago, 1968. Thirteen-year old Sam Childs is torn between loyalty to his father, a well-known preacher who supports the non-violent teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his older brother, Stick, who supports the new Black Panther Party.

**The Strange Case of Origami Yoda.** Tom Angleberger, Abrams, Harry N., Inc., 2010.

6<sup>th</sup> grade Dwight is weird. He wears an origami finger puppet of Yoda. But can Yoda foretell the future? Dwight undertakes a scientific investigation to find out.

**Ways to Live Forever.** Sally Nicholls, Scholastic Inc., 2011.

Eleven-year old Sam is in the last months of his life, losing his battle with leukemia. Sam, with the help of his chronically ill friend, Felix, writes a book about his experiences with leukemia including questions to answer, and interesting facts. They also create a "to do" list, making every effort to get each item done before they die.

**When the Whistle Blows.** Fran Cannon Slayton, Penguin Group (USA), 2009.

Based on the author's family stories, *When the Whistle Blows* portrays the life of teenager Jimmy Cannon and his character-filled family through seven consecutive Halloweens from 1943-1949 in their small railroad town in West Virginia.