

SOUTH KINGSTOWN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
REVIEWS OF 2010 SUMMER READING SELECTIONS

GRADE 9

***Breathing Underwater* by Alex Flinn**

Nick Andreas, a sixteen year old, is good looking and a popular athlete at his school. At the start of the year, Nick begins to seek a relationship with Caitlin. Caitlin has always been unpopular until this year. She has lost a lot of weight and is emotionally insecure from a lifetime of obesity. They begin their relationship. Through a series of events, including jealous statements, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and some physical abuse, Nick crosses the line and almost kills Caitlin during a car ride. He is given a restraining order, forced to go to anger management classes, and write in a journal. He is continually in denial of his inappropriate behavior and struggles to face some difficult issues in his life. Nick resists the work in the class and does not consider himself to be an abuser. He struggles to come to terms with his abusive behavior as well as the abuse that he has suffered at the hand of his father. After a tragic event involving one of the other members of the anger management class, Nick is able to understand the seriousness of his actions.

Wright, Tiff. *AllReaders.com*. 19 May 2009 <http://www.allreaders.com/Topics/Info_35575.asp>.

***The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman**

Drawing inspiration from Rudyard Kipling's classic *The Jungle Book*, Gaiman tells the story of an orphaned boy, raised not in a jungle by animals but in a graveyard by ghosts. Bod, short for Nobody, wanders into the graveyard as an infant as his family is dispatched by "the man Jack." In the graveyard, Bod is discovered by the kindly ghosts of Mr. and Mrs. Owens, who entice the other local spirits to take the boy in and grant him the "Freedom of the Graveyard" (a special charm that gives Bod sanctuary within the graveyard's boundaries). Bod's childhood is filled with the varied lessons taught to him [by] the graveyard's residents. ... But little prepares him for the day when the man Jack returns to finish the job he started years ago.

Although he tips his hat to Kipling, Gaiman skillfully makes the story his own with his bound-

lessly creative imagery and energetic prose. In crafting the tale of Bod, Gaiman revisits the occasionally dark and funny, and always enthralling, ground he covered in *Coraline*. Many of the chapters stand alone as short stories, but every small adventure adds up to form a complete tale that feels timeless and important. And the climactic scene towards the end is not to be missed. Fans of his other works will not be disappointed, and there's a very good chance he'll amass an entirely new armada of admirers once word spreads about how phenomenal this book is. ... *The Graveyard Book* is, in a word, exceptional. Gaiman remains a force to be reckoned with, no matter the intended audience, regardless of the subject matter.

Farrey, Brian. *TeenReads.com*. Web. 18 May 2009 <<http://www.teenreads.com/reviews/9780060530921.asp>>.

Somewhere in contemporary Britain, "the man Jack" uses his razor-sharp knife to murder a family, but the youngest, a toddler, slips away. The boy ends up in a graveyard, where the ghostly inhabitants adopt him to keep him safe. Nobody Owens, so named because he "looks like nobody but himself," grows up among a multigenerational cast of characters from different historical periods that includes matronly Mistress Owens; ancient Roman Caius Pompeius; an opinionated young witch; a melodramatic hack poet; and Bod's beloved mentor and guardian, Silas, who is neither living nor dead and has secrets of his own. As he grows up, Bod has a series of adventures, both in and out of the graveyard, and the threat of the man Jack who continues to hunt for him is ever present. Bod's love for his graveyard family and vice versa provide the emotional center, amid suspense, spot-on humor, and delightful scene-setting. ... Gaiman has created a rich, surprising, and sometimes disturbing tale of dreams, ghouls, murderers, trickery, and family.

Honig, Megan. *School Library Journal* Oct. 2008, Vol. 54, Issue 10. Web. 18 May 2009. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ulh&AN=34681417&site=src-live>>.

***Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens**

In perhaps Dickens's greatest novel, an orphan named Pip grows up in harsh conditions, does a good turn for an escaped convict (as much out of fear as charity), then finds himself steadily climbing the socioeconomic ladder — enjoying “great expectations” — with the help of an unknown benefactor. He is summoned by a weird old lady named Miss Havisham who has left all the clocks in her mansion stopped at the time of her wedding, and the wedding breakfast moldering on the table, after being jilted by the groom. Pip falls in love with Miss Havisham's ward, Estella, who teases and torments him with Miss Havisham's approval. Off to London to become a gentleman, Pip learns what a true gentleman is and who his real friends are.

Loftus, David. *AllReaders.com*. 19 May 2009 <http://www.allreaders.com/Topics/info_1937.asp?BSID=0>

***Maus I* by Art Spiegelman**

With jarring accuracy and a seemingly innocent, obviously deceptive presentation, Art Spiegelman, renowned author/cartoonist, ... paints a perfect picture of the horrific events of the Holocaust... Spiegelman's use of symbolism is the driving force and intentional focus of these well-written, accurately detailed books. The World War II era becomes a “maus-trap,” with the Jews of Europe being defenseless mice, being taken away by Polish pigs and German Nazi rats. Art's parents are the main characters of these flashbacks, both being prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Strong character development allows us to observe their metamorphosis in a realistic, emotional progression. These incredible books [*Maus I* and its sequel, *Maus II*] are enjoyable in the sense that they are fun to read and easy to adapt to; the scare factor, however, is enormous. Man's inhumanity to man is so blatantly frightening that one is obviously upset upon understanding the deeper points. Well-paced and intriguing, this series educates, informs and enlightens the reader.

Teen Ink. Web. 15 May 2009 <<http://www.teenink.com/Poetry/article.php?link=Past/1996/7355.xml>>.

These Pulitzer Prize-winning books use the seemingly innocent art form of the comic strip to underscore the horror and depravity of the Jewish Holocaust as well as examine Spiegelman's tenuous relationship with his father, a survivor of the Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps. To great effect, the artist symbolically uses cats to characterize the Nazis

who imprison and annihilate the Jewish “mice.” A powerful companion to any World War II curriculum.

Fazioli, Carol. *School Library Journal* Nov. 2003: 84. Web. 15 May 2009 <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ulh&AN=11297598&site=src-live>>.

Told with chilling realism in an unusual comic-book format, this is more than a tale of surviving the Holocaust. Spiegelman relates the effect of those events on the survivors' later years and upon the lives of the following generation. Each scene opens at the elder Spiegelman's home in Rego Park, N.Y. Art, who was born after the war, is visiting his father, Vladek, to record his experiences in Nazi-occupied Poland. The Nazis, portrayed as cats, gradually introduce increasingly repressive measures, until the Jews, drawn as mice, are systematically hunted and herded toward the Final Solution. Vladek saves himself and his wife by a combination of luck and wits, all the time enduring the torment of hunted outcast. The other theme of this book is Art's troubled adjustment to life as he, too, bears the burden of his parents' experiences. This is a complex book. It relates events which young adults, as the future architects of society, must confront, and their interest it sure to be caught by the skillful graphics and suspenseful unfolding of the story.

Keeler, Rita G.. *School Library Journal* May 1987, Vol. 33 Issue 9: 124. Web. 18 May 2009 <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ulh&AN=5795317&site=src-live>>.

***Wolf Rider* by Avi.**

In this psychological thriller, Avi explores the dilemma of 15-year-old Andy, who is convinced that the crank call that he has received is the confession of a murderer. His father thinks he's lying. The school counselor warns him against “crying wolf.” Finding that the supposed victim is still very much alive only increases Andy's determination to unmask the would-be killer — if he can find him. Andy's heightening confusion and fear, and his increasing alienation from the adults in his world, are conveyed convincingly in an understated style with lots of dialogue.

Vose, Ruth. *School Library Journal* Dec. 1986, Vol. 33 Issue 4: 111. Web. 18 May 2009 <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ulh&AN=5735411&site=src-live>>.