May I Recommend Three Brand New, Stunning YA Books for Your Summer Reading List

Sissi Carroll

Big Mouth and Ugly Girl, by Joyce Carol Oates (HarperCollins, to be released May, 2002)

This is the first young adult novel that prolific novelist and Princeton professor of creative writing Joyce Carol Oates has written. While the genre is new to Oates, the issues she addresses in Big Mouth and Ugly Girl, including teens' struggle to balance self-loathing with self-acceptance, the imperative of peer relationships, and the reality of the threat of violence in today's high schools, are familiar to readers of contemporary adolescent/fiction. This is the story of Paul Richmond, a high school freshman, who is comfortless in every situation. His father left the home, his mother works in the main office, and his rich and powerful and rich father denies any connection to the plan, and is found guiltless. He is given a tuition waiver because his mother works in the main office. In some adolescents' worlds. Paul Richmond narrates, from within the walls of a juvenile detention center, the story of his year at an exclusive private school in Miami—the year in which his life was overwhelmed with gratitude. He begins to define right and wrong in terms of what Charlie asks him to do; as an initiation into Charlie's group of friends, for example, Paul bashes mailboxes while riding in Charlie's car, swinging hard liquor with the rest of Charlie's gang. When Charlie asks him to break into the school to change a grade that marhs Charlie's otherwise perfect record, Paul reluctantly agrees. Despite serious misgivings, Paul is so caught up in the idea that he is becoming popular, that he is willing to sacrifice his own sense of right to Charlie Good.

Flinn introduces a kid named David, a strange outcast and the son of the school's groundskeeper and cafeteria worker, as a shadowy figure who serves as a warning to Paul about what can happen when someone gets to close to Charlie Good—and when someone crosses him. David, we learn, had been accepted into Charlie's group the previous year, but this year, his life is miserable and isolated; somehow, he denied Charlie and is now suffering the consequences of continual taunting, and worse. When David's dog is killed, in revenge for its habit of using the bathroom on the school's tennis court (where Charlie reigns as king), Paul recognizes the fact that Charlie and his group are trouble. Again, though, he pushes aside his misgivings in order to revel in Charlie's attention. Even David's suicide, which Paul witnesses, is not enough to force Paul to denounce Charlie as a friend.

Finally, Charlie manipulates Paul into helping him plant a bomb in the school. He assures Paul that the bomb is designed only to scare the biology teacher; they use plans they find on the internet, using Paul's password on Charlie's computer, to build it. When the bomb is discovered, short of exploding, Paul and Charlie are questioned. Paul confesses; Charlie, wrapped in the protection of his powerful and rich father, denies any connection to the plan, and is found guiltless. Charlies, of course, rejects Paul; finally, when he is sent away to serve two years in a detention center, Paul realizes that the friendship for which he had sold his soul was a sham. Flinn paints a bleak picture of a teen who is willing to do anything to be popular and accepted. Though it may read as an extreme case, her warning to teens and those of us who work with them is right on target.

Hole in My Life, by Jack Gantos (Farrar Straus and Giroux, to be released April, 2002)

For those of us who know successful, popular YA novelist Jack Gantos through books like Jack's Black Book, Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key and Joey Pigza Loses Control, Hole in My Life will come as a shock. This is the autobiographical account of Gantos' six years in prison, where he served a sentence for his role in sailing a ship loaded with tons of hashish from the Virgin Islands to New York City, and for selling the drug in the city. As a reader, it was difficult for me—as it will be for others who are fans of Gantos' fiction—to reconcile the image I have of funny, light-hearted Jack Gantos with the image of him in a prison uniform, enduring such a troubling situation. This is a significant book, though, and one that teenagers will read and return to for many reasons. Gantos does not sugarcoat his story; his presents himself, during his late teen years, as a prospective loser, someone who was more interested in drinking and dreaming about writing a novel than in producing any creative work, someone for whom a day job in a restaurant was sufficient. He was easily bored with his life, and dismayed when the family moved to the Virgin Islands upon the hopes of his father, who built houses, that the economy of the Virgin Islands would bring relief to the family's financial drought. At this time, Gantos acknowledges, he was easily won over into illegal dealings by a smooth-talking, educated acquaintance, one who used money as a tool to seduce Gantos into service on the drug ship. The good news of this book, and the message that Gantos must be sending, is that early mistakes, even if they mark someone for life, do not have to define him for life. It was during his time in prison, while he was working in the clinic, that he finally began to write.
Your YA summer reading list. Tell Me Three Things. Author: Julie Buxbaum. I feel like I've been holding out on you on this one because I read and loved this book months ago. This brand new release from the author of The Silver Linings Playbook is on my summer reading list. In this coming-of-age story, good girl Nanette is drifting through her quiet suburban life until her teacher gives her a copy of the cult classic The Bubblegum Reaper. With that being said, these two lists may help you both find some books that are right for him: My own teen is required to pick two books from NPR's list of top 100 teen books for summer reading: http://www.npr.org/2012/08/07/157847723/top-100-teen-books. From New Releases to Enduring Faves, Here Are All the Books on Our Summer Reading List. We hope your beach bag is big enough for all of these! By Melanie Yates. Updated: Apr 30, 2019. BestProducts.com. This summer's about to get lit. Wherever your adventures take you (even if it's no further than your own backyard), we've picked 50 amazing books for summer reading to enjoy during your OOO time. So grab the sunscreen and your Kindle, because you have quite the stack ahead of you! View Gallery 50 Photos. Normal People is a self-aware read that feels unbelievably hyper-real, following the fraught emotional lives of two Irish teenagers who pretend not to know each other at school. 3 of 50. On The Come Up. amazon.com. This is the first young adult novel that prolific novelist and Princeton professor of creative writing Joyce Carol Oates has written. While the genre is new to Oates, the issues she addresses in Big Mouth and Ugly Girl, including teens' struggle to balance self-loathing with self-acceptance, the imperative of peer relationships, and the reality of the threat of violence in today's high schools, are familiar to readers of contemporary adolescent/young adult fiction. Although he has been kidding when he made the threat, two sisters—the daughters of a local fundamentalist preacher—overhear him and report him to school administrators. Matt is suspended pending investigation, and his parents are incensed; they decide to sue the school for injury to Matt's reputation.