



Good Reads 193

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Reviews from Stanchester Academy, Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Somerset

Good Reads

Chosen by Years 8-10 (12 -15 year-old) pupils from Stanchester Academy, Stoke-Sub-Hamdon, Somerset.

Thanks to Jonathan Guy, Librarian.

Montacute House

Lucy Jago, Bloomsbury, 978 0 7475 9795 7, £6.99 pbk

Cess is the poultry girl at Montacute House. She and her mother live alone though Cess has never met her father. She is looked down upon by the other villagers because of her illegitimacy; Cess has only two friends, both also social outcasts. There's William, who has a club foot ? thought of as a curse in Elizabethan England, and Edith, who's been chased out of the village for witchery by the woman-hating local priest.

Then Cess finds a precious locket in the hen coop. It's as though someone placed it there specifically for her to find. Suddenly some boys of the village start going missing, some are even found dead. When William joins their ranks, the villagers accuse Cess of sorcery. Determined to find William and prove her innocence, Cess embarks on a dangerous path which will bring her into contact with political intrigue, a coven of witches, and a great evil...

I really enjoyed Lucy Jago's debut novel. It's a superb mixture of a slightly supernatural element, with a very accurate picture of life in Elizabethan England. **Montacute House** shows life for both nobles and commoners, not just the politics and democracy at the time, through little details about houses and meals and costume, right through to social attitudes towards illegitimacy, witchcraft, marriage and disability. It creates a vivid picture in your head of what was really like then that is not easily escaped from for a while.

At the same time, the plot is tense, the mystery well worked out, and the central character is extremely appealing. Cess is a reluctant heroine but, as all good reluctant heroines do, she steps up to the plate at a time of crisis. She is very courageous and also intelligent and independent of thought ? a loveable, strong character. The one weakness in my opinion was the ending. To me it was slightly too rounded; for example I would have preferred something more realistic. Though saying that, this novel is a must-read for any teenager who enjoys historical fiction and a good disturbing mystery.

Rachael Palmer (Year 8)

Life: An Exploded Diagram

Mal Peet, Walker, 978 1 8442 8100 8, £7.99 pbk

Life: An Exploded Diagram is a fantastic story set during the Cold War and specifically focused on the emerging tensions of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is based around the lives of Clem, a working class boy from a council estate, and Frankie, the daughter of a wealthy landowner.

The plot line is such an amazing idea ? this really is storytelling at its finest! Mal Peet's clever wit and fantastic storyline bring this story alive; it's so realistic! The characters are brilliantly described and very likeable. Although the beginning of the story does seem to jump around a lot, you soon understand how everything fits together so perfectly. I love the historical aspect of the story and how it plays such an interesting key role that gives the story that edge over other books of a similar genre! In my opinion this is a book aimed at the older teenager and adult readers with aspects that appeal to both genders. Definitely a contender in this year's Carnegie Medal!

Eleanor Roda (Year 10)

Small Change for Stuart

Lissa Evans, Doubleday, 978 0 5525 6169 3, £5.99 pbk

This is a beautifully written book about family secrets and self discovery. One summer Stuart Horten, a boy small for his age (which doesn't help with an initial and surname such as his) finds himself languishing in a dead end town with his grandparents, and somewhat bored. However, as he begins to enquire about his family history he finds himself embarking on an expanding mystery involving a famous magician and his hidden workshop. The story, gentle, quirky and delightfully told throughout, follows Stuart's quest for answers and the truth. There are small clues that Stuart has work out to solve the mystery, and I love how all the clues lead to others and you keep discovering the answers. A wonderful book that I would recommend to anyone who likes a good mystery!

Kate Watson (Year 8)

Across the Universe

Beth Revis, Razorbill, 978 0 1413 3366 3, £6.99 pbk

Across the Universe has one of the most imaginative plots I've read in a long time. It is about a ship which is being sent into space to colonise another planet. People are frozen so they can be transported ? one of them is Amy, one of the main protagonists of the story. The ship's journey takes 300 years so there are thousands of people on the ship to make sure the ?frozen? get there safely ... except Amy gets woken up early ? she's the victim of an attempted murder. It is a combination of all of these things you'd imagine in the future - freezing people, travelling through space and the ?grav tubes?. It is not just Beth Revis' language that makes the book outstanding, it is as much about the plot that is both intricate but utterly convincing and keeps you permanently hooked.

The way the book is structured is also clever, alternate chapters being told by Amy and then Elder (another icy character!). I found myself wanting to quickly read one character's point of view because I then wanted to compare this to the other character's thoughts in the next chapter. Beth Revis keeps feeding the reader more information to make them want to read the chapter after that too. This keeps happening to make **Across the Universe** an *un-put-down-able* and unforgettable book.

Amber Pavey (Year 10)

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