



Waves of YA, Episode 14: Middle School Must Reads

Transcript:

00;00;07;02 - 00;00;26;17

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Hello and welcome to Waves Of YA, a podcast Focused on Young Adult Literacy brought to you by the Ocean County Library's Teen Literacy Work Group. Today's episode is Middle Grade Must Reads. My name is Kristen. I'm the teen librarian at the Little Egg Harbor Branch. Joining me today, we have:

00;00;26;19 - 00;00;30;09

Erin

[ERIN] Hi, I'm Erin from Lakewood. I'm a children's librarian.

00;00;30;17 - 00;00;34;16

Chris

[CHRIS] And I'm Chris from Lakewood. I'm the teen librarian.

00;00;35;03 - 00;00;43;11

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Great. So let's start it off. What do you enjoy about middle grade books? And have you read anything lately that checks all the boxes for you?

00;00;43;22 - 00;01;19;20

Chris

[CHRIS] I like middle grade because there's no love triangle. If there is a romance, it's like, oh, I don't like that. But they read, really? I just read the framers and like, they kind of like each other. But like, I think a lot of people are figuring out, which is great. So super fun. Really? Like, we're just going. And that was a very, oh, they like each other! but the adults know.

00;01;19;20 - 00;01;42;04

Kristen

[KRISTEN] There's always something like the adults know and the kids don't. But I think that a lot of the pieces of middle grade that are cool are like them figuring it out without a ton of adult interference.

You're figuring it out the way that you would as a ten year old or a 12 year old. And I definitely enjoy that piece.

00;01;42;28 - 00;01;58;15

Erin

[ERIN] And it's also they're just at the right age where they're just starting to kind of figure out who they're going to be. And so these books can have a massive influence on, you know, helping children discover who they are.

00;01;59;23 - 00;02;23;06

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yeah, that's that's definitely a really great way to say all the things that are jumbled in my head. Yeah, they're just figuring it out. I mean, I'm still just figuring it out, but, like, this is the beginning of figuring it out and having agency to make decisions about how I treat the people in my class, how I treat the people I don't like, how I treat myself.

00;02;23;12 - 00;02;25;20

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And all of those things are just the beginning.

00;02;27;01 - 00;02;56;26

Chris

[CHRIS] And they also go to their parents like, YA, those parents are gone. You hear about them in rumor, maybe in some sentences but like they'll go to their parents about the problem sometimes or just something is said. And as an adult we're like, I need an adult. It's like, Yeah, you ever stop meeting your parents? So why not having them like this all around the middle grade?

00;02;56;27 - 00;03;00;21

Chris

[CHRIS] They're more independent, but still talk to their parents.

00;03;01;23 - 00;03;23;08

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I recently read Misadventures of Lightning Girl. I don't know why, but the cover really just spoke to me from a couple of years ago and I was doing some book recommendations for a teen and I came across it. I was like, Wait a minute, I want to read this book. It's not like a lightning bolt on the cover and it's like bright orange.

00;03;23;27 - 00;03;52;10

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I showed it to a colleague and I explained the book is about a girl who gets struck by lightning. Actually, the lightning strike doesn't actually happen in the book. It's just her back story. But her lightning strike made her really good at math stuff. Numbers come supernatural to her. It's called

acquired savant syndrome. And then she was homeschooled for a period of time, and now she's back at school.

00;03;52;10 - 00;04;12;23

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Even though she already did all of the math stuff, she is way ahead of everyone else. She's already graduated from high school in her home schooling, but as parents do. Her grandmother says, no, you need to, like, figure out how to be with other people. You have to go to school. And she's like, okay, that's not fair. And she goes back to school and she doesn't want anyone to know that she's different.

00;04;13;07 - 00;04;29;28

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And I don't know. For some reason, this book spoke to me. I don't know, math stuff. They're like math jokes in it. And I'm like, Oh, I'm going to have to look this up. But it's just the idea that she's got this thing that's different, that she wants to hide from people. And how does that go for her?

00;04;30;06 - 00;04;58;07

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Does hiding make her feel safe or does she have to reveal something about herself to make the kinds of relationships that she's been tasked with doing by going to middle school? So for me, the things about middle grade that are compelling are figuring out who I am, figuring out how to navigate relationships. I very much prefer a realistic middle grade fiction.

00;04;58;14 - 00;05;14;23

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I'll do fantasy, but not my preference. So this one definitely was great for me. I told a colleague, this is what the book's about, and she's like, Okay, you could take that one because I'm not going to read that. I was like, Okay. Books are for different people. I guess.

00;05;15;06 - 00;05;38;06

Erin

[ERIN] Actually, I just thought of the adventures of Stuntboy, In The Meantime. I thought it was going to be a graphic novel when I picked it up and I started with like, Oh, this is not a graphic novel. And so it took me much longer to read it than I thought it was going to. But it was. It's a story about a kid who thinks that the apartment building he lives in is a castle and he thinks it's the coolest place.

00;05;38;06 - 00;06;04;28

Erin

[ERIN] And he loves his neighborhood and he's got his new best friend and he counts how long they've been best friends in days. So my best friend of X number of days, it's just his life in his apartment building and the kid who is a bully to them, who then they discover, you know, his life isn't quite great and actually sort of become friends with him.

00;06;05;22 - 00;06;38;23

Erin

[ERIN] And I like that one, it's representation of a nonwhite main character and in an actual realistic setting that, you know, a kid might actually be able to relate to. My reading does tend to skew more towards fantasy, but obviously because the authors of this book are amazing, just they're amazing authors and it is illustrated. So it's an illustrated novel and it's full color.

00;06;38;23 - 00;07;08;13

Erin

[ERIN] It's beautiful, but it's just a good story. I mean, it's just his life. It's not like crazy adventures, but he's it's an amazing I recommend it. And it's probably something when we get to go back into the schools that I would like to get into the hands of some of the kids around here, because I think that they would be able to relate to the characters.

00;07;08;25 - 00;07;26;12

Erin

[ERIN] It's not like some world. Not that there's anything wrong with going into a whole new world. But it's also nice to be able to see yourself represented in the pages of a book. And that's something I'm glad we're seeing more often these days than in the past.

00;07;26;26 - 00;07;30;26

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yeah, absolutely. So it's a full color illustration.

00;07;31;18 - 00;07;34;14

Erin

[ERIN] It's full color, but it's a full on novel, too.

00;07;34;21 - 00;07;36;11

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Wow. So awesome.

00;07;37;00 - 00;07;37;10

Erin

[ERIN] Yeah.

00;07;37;29 - 00;07;55;06

Kristen

[KRISTEN] So we talked a little bit about themes, about what we like about middle grade. Are there any themes that are your absolute favorite? I know, Chris is like, I don't have to see a love triangle. That's awesome. I love it. But are there other things about middle grade that are as an adult that reads middle grade, like, why do I do it?

00;07;55;07 - 00;08;01;09

Kristen

[KRISTEN] That's kind of the question that I want to get at. Other than that, I need to recommend books to people of that age.

00;08;01;27 - 00;08;23;24

Erin

[ERIN] I think along the same lines as Chris, it is kind of refreshing to read something and not have to be bombarded with the stuff that ends up being and a lot of adult and teen books these days like there can be, there are, there are romance stories like early on, but it's not.

00;08;25;12 - 00;08;26;05

Chris

[CHRIS] Graphic.

00;08;26;05 - 00;08;28;10

Erin

[ERIN] Yeah.

00;08;28;10 - 00;08;31;04

Chris

[CHRIS] YA is getting a little graphic. I don't know what's going on for romance.

00;08;31;05 - 00;08;36;07

Erin

[ERIN] And I don't want to read about that necessarily, you know, so.

00;08;37;00 - 00;08;55;24

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Or like if I want to read about it, I want to know that that's what I'm reading about. It doesn't just sneak into a book, though, like, I thought this book was like a mystery thriller book and then like, Surprise, no, this is happening. And you're like, okay, I am too far in to get out of this. Yeah, yeah.

00;08;56;04 - 00;09;23;18

Chris

[CHRIS] I've had a couple of books recently where I was like, Oh I can't put this in the middle school, it's like a little violent. And it's like the last few pages I'm like, Oh my God, no, I'm glad I read that! I was like, blindsided. I was like, nobody put this in the reviews. You said it was okay for 13 year olds, What 13 year olds have you met, middle grade, definitely, right.

00;09;23;24 - 00;10;05;01

Chris

[CHRIS] It's for kids, like, one theme I really like is friendship especially in high school and middle school, you date for like a week and a half, you hold hands in the hallway and then you break up. I've had friends since middle school that I still talk to, like those are your friends for life. I've seen these friendships form, and know these characters that I could be moving across the country and not see each

other for years, to in the future and it's like, remember when we did this insane nonsense in middle school, and still talk about that. And feel like, this is what we're doing now, like, great, great.

00;10;06;09 - 00;10;08;13

Erin

[ERIN] But I forgot what the question was.

00;10;09;00 - 00;10;33;26

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Your favorite middle grade themes. When I think about it, I think about in most middle grade books, it resolves. The thing that you came here for gets tied neatly in a bow, and then you go off on your way. But you read this book that whether it was dealing with friendship or whether it was dealing with loss or whatever it is at the end, there's like a resolution that feels.

00;10;34;13 - 00;10;45;27

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I feel content. Yeah. Sometimes when I finish an adult book or a YA book, I'm like, Oh, there's like so much left that I don't like. All the loose ends get tied up for me with middle grade.

00;10;46;17 - 00;10;59;06

Erin

[ERIN] Yes, I have the things that I tend to read towards the LGBT skew. I don't know why. Probably because my Broadway. I love Broadway. And I'm like.

00;10;59;13 - 00;11;00;26

Chris

[CHRIS] Oh.

00;11;00;26 - 00;11;26;18

Erin

[ERIN] Now that's it's becoming more and more representational, which is awesome. Just in the past few years, I'm seeing more and more books coming out that represent those kids and that they can. I don't get asked for it a lot here, but I have been asked for it and it's nice to know that I can say yes, I have this book that you can see yourself in.

00;11;26;18 - 00;12;28;21

Erin

[ERIN] I think that's what I like the most, is that we're getting such good representation for a whole spectrum, whether it be gender or race or disability. It's just such a wide world and the mix of the genres, even so, you can have a fantasy that's also bringing in what it's like, say, the Percy Jackson books. You have the whole spectrum, you've got race involved, you've got differently abled people, and that that's something like that. Especially like one kid can grab something from there and another kid can take, and still they're reading the same story, but they're taking many different things from or lessons.

00;12;30;05 - 00;12;59;07

Chris

[CHRIS] We talked about it being a trend in YA as well that you don't have one little box you fit into. Now it can be messy. You can be black and queer or a different religion and something else. And you have layers, like I checked one diversity box, you get to stay only there. And the stories only about that. Yeah.

00;12;59;18 - 00;13;34;08

Chris

[CHRIS] Hello. I have layers and I have to go solve a problem that there's nothing to do with any of this. It's just who I am and part of the story, which is really cool because like I remember it just being this is about being a different religion and that's all this is and it's like, that's a character trait, and where we're going and it's really better where you have a culture and you have more going on story and have good representation because you're part of the culture.

00;13;34;21 - 00;13;53;12

Chris

[CHRIS] You're like, Yes, I know. Can you show me someone that's like me doing something cool, like Harry Potter or Rick Variety or anything? No. No. Yes. Go. Solve mysteries, explore other worlds, bring that into perspective.

00;13;54;00 - 00;14;25;07

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And it's more realistic, right? So like we don't exist in that box of just one character trait. Like I am not just the one thing. And so we're all multiple traits all layered on each other. And then there are a lot of different things you got to do in your day. So like it's way more realistic to the lives that people are living because it's not saying that you are one or this character is one thing, and this book is about one thing.

00;14;25;07 - 00;14;57;00

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Books can be about a lot of different things and people are about a lot of different things. Yeah, I really appreciate that. That has been, I think, a direction for both middle grade books, but also Y.A. books and adult books as well, to say like, this is not a book about just race or this is not a book about just sexuality because we are multiple things all added up.

00;14;58;14 - 00;15;32;26

Erin

[ERIN] And it also lets children be exposed to things that they may not see. Like one of the books that I brought to talk about is a kind of a spark. It's about a neurodivergent girl and you get to see how she experiences the world. And that's something that I can't ever experience because that's not an issue that is a part of my life.

00;15;32;26 - 00;15;55;21

Erin

[ERIN] But I can better appreciate somebody who does have to deal with those issues and how the world affects them. And I can better understand and help or just embrace them knowing how the world treats them.

00;15;56;15 - 00;16;02;03

Kristen

[KRISTEN] We've been talking about things that we are glad that we see. Are there other things that we're still kind of missing?

00;16;03;06 - 00;16;39;25

Erin

[ERIN] I think we're doing pretty good. The things that we're talking about are just inconsequential parts of the story. It's not any of what there is, so there is a lot of that coming out. But where a person's race or their gender identity or their religion, it's just sort of in there. But that has no effect on the story. It's just a an inconsequential thing that happens to be a part of that person's character.

00;16;40;11 - 00;16;53;27

Erin

[ERIN] But, you know, the fact that they are black or Asian doesn't matter to the story. It's just they live their life.

00;16;54;22 - 00;17;23;14

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Just because it's come up a few times, for me, I would like more scary stories that are not like, so we've got R.L. Stine, like, those scary stories are covered, but like something that's between Goosebumps and a Y, a horror because I often get the middle grade aged reader that wants something scary and there aren't as many of those books.

00;17;23;29 - 00;17;51;24

Kristen

[KRISTEN} One of my go to's is the Ghost Hunters Daughter, and that's Dan Poblocki, yes. Yes, because you need something that's relatable but still has like some scary edge. That's one of the areas, especially with stranger things and content like that, that these aged kids want more of. Like I would love to be able to give them more scary books.

00;17;52;05 - 00;17;57;21

Kristen

[KRISTEN] They're just aren't as many that stay in the middle grade range.

00;17;58;05 - 00;17;59;27

Chris

[CHRIS] Yeah, it's just very quickly.

00;18;01;00 - 00;18;21;10

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yeah. And I remember as a reader when I was in third and fourth grade, I wanted something scary because my mom read Stephen King and so she just like handed it to me. And I don't know that that was the best idea, but that's what happened because I, you know, I read all the goosebumps and I read all the fear street and then I'm like, okay, well, what now?

00;18;21;18 - 00;18;28;18

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And she's like, Here you go have this book. And I was like, I don't know that I should have read that,

00;18;28;18 - 00;18;28;29

Erin

[ERIN] Yeah.

00;18;28;29 - 00;18;38;21

Kristen

[KRISTEN] But there wasn't another place to go. I'm glad that there are more places to go for those that like the horror genre, but there's not as many that stay in middle grade.

00;18;39;07 - 00;19;03;14

Erin

[ERIN] Yeah, I think it's something that there are some authors are, because for good horror. You have to be a really good storyteller. And that can be hard. You have to be a good author. I've seen some that are claiming to be horror, but they're not great. But then you got like small spaces.

00;19;03;14 - 00;19;05;10

Chris

[CHRIS] I was going to say small spaces I loved that one.

00;19;05;10 - 00;19;09;18

Erin

[ERIN] That was great. Scary stories for small foxes.

00;19;09;18 - 00;19;09;29

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yeah.

00;19;10;07 - 00;19;15;02

Erin

[ERIN] Which interestingly, it's all animal, but it's scary.

00;19;16;24 - 00;19;32;02

Chris

[CHRIS] I like Mary Downing Hahn. She reminds me of that run, run. Right from when I was a kid. It's creepy. It's a little atmospheric, but it's still closer to R.L. Stine than it is Stephen King. Yeah, yeah.

00;19;32;19 - 00;19;37;26

Erin

[ERIN] Yeah. R.L. Stine never did - I found it too predictable.

00;19;38;15 - 00;19;39;15

Kristen

[KRISTEN} Very.

00;19;39;15 - 00;19;42;23

Chris

[CHRIS] He grew some in three months, like is that for real?

00;19;43;20 - 00;20;03;28

Erin

[ERIN] I mean, when I was a kid, I leaned more towards the Christopher Pike books. So but that's also more teen than middle grade. And then of course, classic scary stories to tell in the dark. And it'd be awesome if we could get more books of short stories like those. There are a few.

00;20;03;28 - 00;20;18;22

Chris

[CHRIS] There's a few. And why? There is His Hideous Heart, which is retellings of Edgar Allan Poe. And they were dark. So those stories were real, real dark. I enjoyed it. I can't see that in middle school. But, it's great.

00;20;19;24 - 00;20;49;19

Erin

Yeah, there was an anthology, but some of them are more funny. I think it's called Half Minute Horrors or something. It's it's a older book, but yeah. Is one that I'm going to kind of spoil the whole thing. But it's about a baby sitter who gets called and the parents are like, you know, just make sure you check on the baby.

00;20;50;11 - 00;21;26;04

Erin

[ERIN] And they left him a dinner of lasagna and he's hanging out eating the lasanga, chatting with his friends. And then the parents come back and he's like, they're like, how was the baby? He like, oh he was great, didn't make a sound, and they're like, that's not true, he wouldn't stop crying. And basically it comes out that they had to stop the baby from crying and kind of baked him into the lasagna!

00;21;26;04 - 00;21;27;07

Kristen

[KRISTEN] As happens.

00;21;28;13 - 00;21;45;08

Erin

[ERIN] But like stuff like that. Kids, it's just shocking enough, but it's no worse than some of the scary stories they tell in the dark. Yeah, I agree. There needs to be more, more...

00;21;45;08 - 00;21;46;26

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I also got, sorry, go ahead.

00;21;47;16 - 00;22;15;11

Chris

[CHRIS] I got a lot of requests for fantasy with a male protagonist, which middle grade has more than YA, but like since Harry Potter, it kind of shifted into a lot of female presences, that sort protagonist. So it's a little hard to find ones that, like, it's just a male protagonist. No women do required and. Yeah. Or of a spell.

00;22;15;11 - 00;22;15;23

Kristen

Yeah.

00;22;16;02 - 00;22;18;25

Erin

[ERIN] Some of the required in presents

00;22;18;25 - 00;22;19;16

Chris

Yeah, required in presents.

00;22;19;25 - 00;22;23;11

Chris

[CHRIS] But beyond that, I'm like, oh, good question.

00;22;24;21 - 00;22;54;13

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I also think like I personally, because when I get requests for historical fiction, usually they do want World War Two era historical fiction. But I personally like other times of historical fiction. It's YA, but the Fever 1793, loved it! I was like, I need more of this because then I'll learn about other stuff because at World War Two, historical fiction is fabulous.

00;22;54;27 - 00;23;34;01

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And I think historical fiction is a great in to like caring about history and so when I find something that has like a historical fiction that's not World War Two, I get really excited. It's sort of historical fiction, but, *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel*, was one of my favorite books of two or three years ago, and it's set during the Persian Gulf War, and it's not a war story, but it's about a person that lives in the U.S. that has Iranian background, and they're dealing with being in the United States at a time where the United States is at war with the country that they came from.

00;23;34;11 - 00;24;01;00

Kristen

[KRISTEN] To me, it like there's so much more. I do like the mixture, *Dactyl Hill Squad*, it's like a mixture of post civil war, reconstruction, time period. But also there are dinosaurs, so it's like a mix of historical fiction and fantasy that is fabulous as well. But more I want more. I want more times in the real history made into fiction.

00;24;01;15 - 00;24;20;08

Chris

[CHRIS] I love the *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales*. Yes, they're hysterical. They're historically accurate, and like, something obviously added. I used to give middle school kids the *Donner Dinner Party* all the time. They didn't know about it!

00;24;20;11 - 00;24;22;09

Kristen

[KRISTEN] No, they didn't like I mean.

00;24;23;04 - 00;24;24;29

Kristen

[KRISTEN] There's so many things in time.

00;24;25;16 - 00;24;49;04

Kristen

[KRISTEN] There are so many points in history that happened, right? But, like, if you weren't alive at the right time. You don't know, like, you can't relate to it. And so, like hearing those stories, like the *Donner Dinner Party* is a fabulous book. But also there are a ton of things that, like, you don't know about until someone's like, Hey, makes a reference and you're like, What did you mean?

00;24;49;16 - 00;25;05;24

Chris

[CHRIS] So I feel like they stopped referencing the *Donnor Party* in cartoons sometime after the 90's. It was all the time we all knew about it. It just like stopped being referenced now, like uh, it's real?

00;25;06;01 - 00;25;28;06

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yeah. Like these things that happened. Like, because I feel like historical fiction ends up being an in because I'm not someone that will pick up a history book unless I am already compelled to learn

about that thing. So once I read a historical fiction, then I'm so much more likely to pick up a nonfiction book and actually learn about whether it's a time period or an event that happened.

00;25;28;18 - 00;25;35;27

Kristen

[KRISTEN] That brings me in in ways that I don't necessarily know that I would automatically seek out.

00;25;35;27 - 00;25;36;08

Erin

[ERIN] Yeah.

00;25;36;28 - 00;26;21;06

Erin

[ERIN] And the I Survived are a good. I have not read any of them, but I know they're super popular and I think it's mostly because it's like a disaster and they're short little books. And so that also something a lot of kids are looking for. They don't want to necessarily read a tome of a book. And Dan Gutman, a different direction has his Fashbacks Four when it's along the lines of like the Match Treehouse where it's more funny going back into time to different eras.

00;26;21;18 - 00;26;29;11

Erin

[Erin] I would like to see some different things like because it's always like Gettysburg, Titanic.

00;26;29;24 - 00;26;30;04

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yeah.

00;26;30;17 - 00;27;09;01

Erin

[ERIN] Pompei I mean, I guess the disasters, but it's also interesting to read just a, it's takes place in the past. So it's technically historical fiction, but it's not necessarily about, It's not so much, I guess it is about the time, but it's a lot of that kind of stuff tends to be that civil rights are 50's, 60s. Like, like I think we are sort of leaning towards like the founding fathers because of Hamilton coming around.

00;27;09;17 - 00;27;37;19

Erin

[ERIN] So people are starting to write more in that time period, the Revolutionary War time period. But it's also interesting to just read a book that's set just in a different time and you're like, Whoa, that's so different than our life. And kids. I find if it's a good, well-written story and the kid likes to read, they'll probably go for it.

00;27;38;08 - 00;27;43;09

Erin

[ERIN] It's the ones that aren't necessarily into reading that you need to find that niche.

00;27;43;24 - 00;27;44;01

Chris

Yeah.

00;27;44;13 - 00;27;56;29

Erin

[ERIN] I think that's one of the I Survival books are pulling kids into reading because they'll read those and then they'll want other things following those.

00;27;56;29 - 00;28;02;04

Chris

[CHRIS] Have you started to get the trend of like historical fiction being in the nineties is over yet?

00;28;02;11 - 00;28;02;23

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Not gonna talk about it!

00;28;03;06 - 00;28;12;18

Chris

[CHRIS] Cause in YA, it's like hello historical fiction, the nineties, you remember the eighties.

00;28;12;19 - 00;28;16;13

Kristen

[KRISTEN] That hurts me. It's like a personal attack.

00;28;16;21 - 00;28;18;25

Chris

[CHRIS] Oh, uh, okay.

00;28;19;07 - 00;28;23;04

Kristen

Like, but it's real. It's it is so real, you know, like you.

00;28;23;04 - 00;28;36;26

Chris

[CHRIS] They don't have technology, or these kids are useless, or used to it. like, oh, how do I do you think it's a cell phone? And like for the middle grade, they've just grown up with it. So they just I think in the nineties it's a whole different thing.

00;28;37;07 - 00;29;02;01

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I think it's also a thing that for middle grade but also in YA that thriller writers really need to, I guess, grapple with. Like if I said something in the nineties, then there are no cell phones to go solve the

problem really easily by calling someone. So like that is a good way to solve a problem that has been created by technology.

00;29;02;01 - 00;29;24;00

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Because I can use my technology to find out if I call the person that I think is the killer or whatever, then their phone is going to ring and I'm going to know where they are. Like as an author, I would need a way to take the technology away from my protagonist, because if they have it, then they could try to resolve this book before my pages are done right.

00;29;24;14 - 00;29;37;23

Kristen

But like a 1990s or 1980s historical fiction, it gets around some of those issues. But also it is upsetting that that is historical time period of the 1990s.

00;29;38;19 - 00;29;54;11

Chris

[CHRIS] Systems that are packed hits I think eighties because it was following the Stranger Things nostalgia trend. And so, I know, there's that one, and I was like has there been as many for middle grade because I haven't noticed as much.

00;29;54;11 - 00;30;17;05

Erin

[ERIN] There have been books where I'm reading and I'm like, It doesn't necessarily say when it's taking place, but I'm like like I feel like this is not taking place in modern times. I'm like, this feels like my childhood. And then something they talk about, like a TV show or something. I'm like, Oh yeah, definitely not modern times.

00;30;17;14 - 00;30;26;18

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Right? Are there middle grade books that have come out now or since you were, you know, middle schooler that you wish that you had when you were in middle school.

00;30;28;06 - 00;30;53;18

Chris

[CHRIS] All of the required in present. I loved any of the things with like Greek mythology, Egyptian gods, any of them, I read all of them. I read all of the fairy tale retellings. So it required in presents would have been right up my alley. Tell me about other cultures theology. What's going on? I want to learn about it. I want to read all of them.

00;30;54;27 - 00;31;45;15

Erin

[ERIN] I don't remember what I was into it because it was so long ago. The only thing I can really remember reading when I was 10, 11. I remember reading The Giver when it came out, and I've read it

subsequently many times through school and just personally, and every time I read it, as I got older, I understood things that I didn't, it just went straight over my head. I literally I don't know what I was reading as I read the Baby-Sitters Club. And then I feel like I went straight into like reading more adult books because there wasn't a lot of tween it, like you have the Baby-Sitters Club or then you had,

00:31:45:15 - 00:31:47:24

Chris

[CHRIS] It's true.

00:31:47:24 - 00:32:03:26

Erin

[ERIN] there's such a plethora of stuff that's come out now as opposed to when I was a kid, I know I was reading, it just clearly it wasn't very memorable. I can't remember what it was that I was reading.

00:32:04:19 - 00:32:36:15

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Other than R.L. Stine and A Wrinkle in Time, I don't have a lot of memories of the things that I was reading in middle school, but for my current, me thinks that if I could send books back to middle school me they would be appreciated. So like there's a recent title, Starfish by Lisa Phipps. It's a novel in verse, and it's about a girl that's struggling with her weight, but also it's compounded by the way that her family treats her weight.

00:32:36:15 - 00:33:04:22

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And so I think that that current me would like to give past me that book or Raina Telegemeier's Guts, things that would have been I don't even know if middle school me would want to read them, but my current me is like, man, if I had that in middle school I would feel seen and I would feel like there's other people that are like me or feel like me or act like me.

00:33:05:04 - 00:33:21:15

Kristen

[KRISTEN] It's very possible that Current Me would give those books to middle school and middle school with me would be like, Nah, I'm good. But those are a lot of books that like come to mind when I think about a middle school version of me and what she might have benefited from. But it's possible. I'd just be like, No, I'm good.

00:33:22:17 - 00:33:26:06

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Go away, lady.

00:33:26:06 - 00:34:05:19

Erin

[ERIN] I would probably give myself Better Nate Than Ever, because that was when I was starting to discover theater. And I think I would have been like, Yes, this kid, he was in Pennsylvania, I was in Texas.

Most of the kids that I was growing up with didn't know anything about theatre, didn't know Broadway. So it would have been something that I could have been like, yes, this would be the kind of kid I would want to be friends with because he has the same crazy, weird obsession that I have.

00;34;06;16 - 00;34;36;21

Erin

[ERIN] You know, besides my family, I didn't really have people to talk to about Broadway and my weird listening to cast recordings and watching the Tonys. And, you know, once I hit high school, it was a little bit better. But I think I might have been that weird kid in my middle school that I could have related to Nate and his world.

00;34;37;22 - 00;35;09;09

Erin

[ERIN] Because the minute in sixth grade, when my mom took me to see Jesus Christ Superstar, I was like, Oh, yes, this is this is the thing. And obviously, I remember those things more than other things. Like I remember my dad coming up and saying, you want to go see this tonight? Okay. And had no idea. And just the spectacle and, you know, that's still my life now.

00;35;09;16 - 00;35;24;16

Erin

[ERIN] I walk into a theater and it's like, oh, my God, yes, I am whole. So, yes, I think I probably would have loved to have met Nate in Middle school or late elementary school.

00;35;25;16 - 00;35;36;13

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And Erin, you talked about rereading The Giver. Are there other middle grade books that you reread? Are you a re reader and what do you go back to?

00;35;37;01 - 00;36;11;18

Erin

[ERIN] When I say reread. I tend to listen more and lately I tend to revisit The Wrestling Game at least once a year. It's funny and it's, you know, the mystery, but it's not super scary and as I get older, I keep forgetting what happens. And so it's like the mystery is all new again, but that's one that yeah, I tend to and I try to give to the kids today and I and I, I'm glad that the books like this still stay in print.

00;36;11;18 - 00;36;22;20

Erin

[ERIN] And because there have been books that I adored that are no longer in print, I'm like, I wish I could give this to kids, but it's just not there.

00;36;22;29 - 00;36;23;06

Chris

[CHRIS] No.

00:36;24;05 - 00:36;46;01

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I reread A Wrinkle in Time and I'll relisten to the Harry Potter books every so often just because every time you reread a book, you're going to find something new, but you're also in a different place than you were. So the book hasn't changed, but the book has completely changed from the last time that you read it.

00:36;46;14 - 00:37;07;18

Kristen

[KRISTEN] There are very few books that I will reread on purpose. Often I will find out I am rereading a book about halfway through, but that's different. I did do it on purpose and there are some that just sometimes you'll feel the feelings that you felt the first time you read it, or The Mixed-up Files of Miss Basil E. Frankweiler.

00:37;07;18 - 00:37;14;10

Kristen

[KRISTEN] For some reason I just like go back to that book and I'm like, This is, weird and fun. Yeah.

00:37;14;25 - 00:37;42;27

Erin

[ERIN] Going back to those characters that you loved as a child, it's like going home. It's comforting. And I, it is something in my personality that I will rewatch movies over and over and over again. I'm currently obsessed with a particular show on Netflix that I have watched five or six times through, and it's only been out for a week or so.

00:37;44;10 - 00:38;18;25

Erin

[ERIN] But the same thing with books. I go back and I'll revisit books. Even if there's other things that I should be reading, I'm like, No, I need to come back to this for the comfort of it. And, you know, it warms you and can be kind of centering and you know, the world can be whack-a-doodle, and you come back to a book or a movie or a song and it brings you back.

00:38;20;04 - 00:38;21;20

Erin

[ERIN] It's like a good baseline.

00:38;22;15 - 00:38;24;02

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Chris, do you do any rereading?

00:38;24;15 - 00:38;58;20

Chris

[CHRIS] I reread the Outsiders like every couple years. I cry every time, like in sixth grade obtained the school copy of the book and just read it over and over. Loved it, still love it to this day, it is my all time

favorite book. And every time I'm like, I know what happens, this is a short book, it's real fast reading, like a day, and I like, cry.

00;39;00;17 - 00;39;08;15

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Those are fabulous recommendations. Did you read the sequels to The War That Saved My Life? There's like a sequel.

00;39;08;26 - 00;39;11;09

Chris

[CHRIS] I read the sequel, I didn't like it as much.

00;39;11;11 - 00;39;35;21

Kristen

[KRISTEN] See, that's why I was afraid. So I didn't do it. But The War That Saved My Life was one of our book club books a couple of years ago for kids at the LBI branch, and they still talk about it. So their parents will still message and be like, just so you know, this was like a really good book for them to read because they still talk about that book and how powerful it was.

00;39;35;21 - 00;39;51;21

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I think it opened other doors for books that they were willing to try because sometimes it's hard. You're looking for a book and you look at the covers and nothing speaks to you and you're like, No, I don't want to try that now. I'm good, I'm good. And this one wasn't necessarily something they would have picked up on their own.

00;39;51;28 - 00;40;02;20

Kristen

[KRISTEN] But then reading it, they're like, okay, give me other recommendations. Yeah, fabulous. Yeah. Well, I think we're kind of at the end.

00;40;02;20 - 00;40;03;05

Erin

[ERIN] Of a scene.

00;40;03;05 - 00;40;05;20

Chris

[CHRIS] Well, it's not a fantasy.

00;40;06;18 - 00;40;23;11

Kristen

[KRISTEN] All right. So we're sort of wrapping up, but I want to ask if you have any best middle grade reads that you've encountered currently or just in general, like the best that you found best for you, I guess.

00;40;23;11 - 00;40;30;28

Erin

[ERIN] I had mentioned it before and A Kind of a Spark. I actually highly suggest doing the audiobook.

00;40;31;16 - 00;40;57;25

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I really enjoyed. Stand Up, Yumi Chung. It's Jessica Kim and it's about a girl that is shy. She's got, like, all these shy girl problems, but she also really likes comedy and she wants to be like a stand up comedian. So she's going to enroll in, like a standup class with one of her favorite YouTubers. And the first day she gets there, they think she's someone else and she never corrects them.

00;40;58;16 - 00;41;17;01

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Cause she shy like she could? You know, if someone was like they called me by a different name, if it was the first time I met, I might not like as a shy person, like I might not correct them and then they would think my name was Austin. People think that even though my name is Kristen, they'll think it's Christian.

00;41;17;09 - 00;41;39;06

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And I'll just be like, whatever, that's fine. You can call me that. But that wouldn't be who I was, you know? So she doesn't correct them. So there's this mistaken identity situation that's like going through the whole book. But also she's trying out her comedy and it's something that she really wants to do. So I appreciated it because she's funny, but she's shy.

00;41;39;17 - 00;42;01;15

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And also there's like the development of new friendships and the mistaken identity. Like, you know, that that's coming back, right? Like she's not corrected anyone, but like it's going to be a thing people are going to find out some time in the book. So it's a little bit predictable that like some stuff's going to fall apart. But the way that she puts it back together, like those are the pieces that are important.

00;42;01;15 - 00;42;32;00

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And I liked it because it's funny and it was fun and I can totally relate. Yeah, I think that one, right now, is one of the books that I would recommend, New Kid by Jerry Craft, was the Newbery winner a few years ago, and I 100% recommend both that book and the Class Act, I think it's the second in that series, and that one travels with a student who wants to go to art school.

00;42;32;00 - 00;42;58;24

Kristen

[KRISTEN] But his parents, they want to send him to a private school. And so he is from the inner city and he's a black youth and he goes to this bussed private school. And it's about him navigating what it means to be myself, but also fit in. And which one do I choose at different times? And how do I find the people that are my people in both places, both at home and at school?

00;42;59;02 - 00;43;26;09

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And I appreciated that both the first book *New Kid* but also then *Class Act* follows a different student in the school. So you get to see not necessarily the same situation from different perspectives, but you get to see the same kinds of interactions from a different perspective. And so more like a 360 view of what it's like to be at that school.

00;43;27;02 - 00;44;04;02

Chris

[CHRIS] I love *The War That Saved My Life* by Kimberly Bradley. I am still mad. It didn't get *Newberry* so bitter. It was so good. *World War Two* about the trains, with the kids and the countries around the city. She has disabilities, I guess drugs, her mom's abusive so it's the first time she's treated decently by an adult there's just so many layers like, oh, it's so good.

00;44;04;24 - 00;44;34;13

Chris

[CHRIS] I love that. And then *Blended* by Sharon Draper, loved that. I just loved the character where the protagonist is mixed-race, and her parents are divorced. So you see the interactions between her parents and also how things are different for her depending on which parent she's with. She's mixed. This is with her white mom and they're like, *Where's your parent?*

00;44;34;13 - 00;45;10;06

Chris

[CHRIS] and, she's like the woman standing next to me. This is with her dad. She gets side-eyed for that as well. And she's just like, *Where do I fit?* The answer is none of the above. Both. Like her trying to find her space and make that space for her, like I'm both the answer is both. It's not one of the other and coming to that realization and getting both her parents to see that as well because of course they are fighting all the time.

00;45;10;07 - 00;45;14;04

Chris

[CHRIS] She's like, don't put me in middle. Like I'm done. I'll be here.

00;45;14;21 - 00;45;35;09

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Thanks for joining us today. Be sure to check out the Ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and our website's calendar of events page. All titles mentioned in today's episode can be found through the Ocean County Library. Free with your library card. If you have any reader advisory questions you would like to be featured on our future episodes.

00;45;35;13 - 00;45;44;25

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Please email us at WavesofYA@gmail.com. Until next time. Happy reading.