

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green color. It features several faint, stylized leaf motifs scattered across the surface. Each motif consists of a short stem with two leaves pointing in opposite directions. The leaves are a slightly darker shade of green than the background. The motifs are positioned at various angles and locations, including the top left, top center, middle right, bottom right, and bottom left.

MORE RIP-ROARING READS FOR RELUCTANT TEEN READERS

Bette D. Ammon, Gale W. Sherman

The logo for Greenwood Publishing Group, featuring a stylized leaf motif to the left of the text.

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**More Rip-Roaring Reads
for Reluctant Teen Readers**

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More Rip-Roaring Reads for Reluctant Teen Readers

Bette D. Ammon

Gale W. Sherman

1999
Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
Englewood, Colorado

*For Steve Sherman and Randy Ammon: patient, supportive,
and helpful . . . rip-roaring husbands!*

*Thanks to Stan Steiner, Harriet Whittelsey, Jill Walton, Nancy Spaulding, and
Ashley Sherman for assistance and advice.*

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"P. J. Compson"

*The book you gave me is way too long.
The print is too small
And I don't understand some of the longer words.
The story is boring.
I don't care if she refuses his love for two hundred
pages.
If he's so horny let him find someone else.
I don't care if she has to wear an A on her chest.
Everyone fools around these days.
I don't care if the daughter is illegitimate.
Nobody cares about that anymore.
Reading is like swimming through molasses, man.
Where's the rape? The murder? The action?
I gotta go, man.
The teacher's showing a video in my next class.*

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Introduction

For many teenagers, “Reading *is* like swimming through molasses,” and most parents, teachers, and librarians are eager and willing to transform this experience. In Mel Glenn’s poem, high school student P. J. Compson represents scores of reluctant readers—those who can read but choose not to for a variety of reasons. These aliterate individuals pose a particular challenge for educators who know that passing on the reading “bug” is critically important. Books have to be really special to capture a reluctant reader’s attention.

Literacy among young people is a serious issue. Research indicates that up to fifty percent of third and fourth graders are reading below grade level, and many of these children will stop reading altogether by the time they reach middle school. We know that skill in reading is essential for success in school and in life. Also, we know that for readers, books offer a world of magic, information, and ongoing learning.

So, how do we “sell” this rapture to reluctant readers? How do we convince them that reading is not only fundamental but fun, meaningful, and well worth the investment of time and energy? The competition is fierce. Can we make books seem better than (or at least equal to) videos, interactive computer games, television, and the Internet?

The answer is a resounding YES! We begin by introducing nonreaders to exciting books that are impossible to put down. We offer students a choice—a variety of alternatives—fiction, nonfiction, adventure, mystery, the supernatural, and more. Reading accountability is not a dreaded chore. We allow and encourage consequential and interesting activities, related in some manner to the book and the student’s life and concerns. We keep readers reading with ongoing lists of books related to student interest. We start with *More Rip-Roaring Reads for Reluctant Teen Readers*, which offers forty suggested titles plus a mountain of other information.

The purpose of this book (and its predecessor, *Rip-Roaring Reads for Reluctant Teen Readers*, 1993) is to bring together books and readers. By selecting forty contemporary, spellbinding books written by forty outstanding authors, we hope to make the matching process between student and book easier and more successful. Included are twenty rip-roaring reads for middle schoolers (grades 5 through 8) and twenty rip-roaring reads for high school students (grades 9 through 12). Interest and reading levels vary within each list, and many teachers, parents, and librarians will find books from both lists appropriate for their individual student or class. (Note: The selected titles are highly recommended for all readers, not just reluctant readers.)

Deciding upon these forty titles was a particularly difficult task, and because no one list pleases everybody all of the time, it is inevitable that a “favorite” title has been omitted. Currently, the abundance of reading material for children is remarkable and overwhelming, and recommended lists are ever-changing. In order to be included in *More Rip-Roaring Reads*, the books had to have the following characteristics:

1. Recent publication date. Just like adult readers, young adults are attracted to new materials. Older “mustn’t miss” titles for teen readers are included as further reading suggestions (see bookmark explanations on p. xii).
2. Relatively short book length, preferably less than 150 and not more than 175 pages, because thick books are sometimes daunting. We kept in mind, however, that “thinness” is not necessarily an overriding criterion. Research shows that a highly motivated reader may be able to jump ahead at least two years in his or her reading level.
3. Appealing format. Typeface and font size are attractive with consideration given to page layout, paragraph length, amount of dialogue, and an attention-grabbing beginning. We avoided books with the traditional high/low look—a stigmatizing format with too-large print, poor-quality illustrations, overly wide margins, and so forth. Many of the books selected are available in paperback, which many teens prefer.
4. Eye-catching book jacket or cover with characters’ ages accurately reflected.
5. High-interest, meaningful subject matters. Issues covered are topical, relevant, and captivating.

6. Appropriate reading levels. Most of the books selected were calculated at reading levels between fourth and seventh grade. Again, remember that high interest will frequently attract and motivate a reader even though the text may be somewhat difficult.
7. Notable authors. Many of the authors selected are current teen favorites and are regularly included on recommended lists.
8. Excellent writing, vivid and realistic characters, authentic dialogue, and gripping plots.

Using This Book

The layout of the forty book entries allows the reader to scan the information quickly, to view the books from various perspectives, and to consider using the work in a variety of ways. The bibliographic data that begin each entry are not only useful for ordering but contain other valuable information, such as the number of pages.

If the book is available in an audio version, that information is included. Books on audiocassette, compact disc, or video cannot replace reading experiences but can certainly capture interest and provide contact with authors and stories.

Genres and Themes

Just as teens have favorite musicians and television shows, they also have distinct preferences when it comes to material they will consider reading. Therefore, the genre selections for both age divisions are balanced and varied to help successfully match students with books. Popular genres such as contemporary realistic fiction, mystery, and adventure are included, but so are biographies, informational books, and graphic novels. Every reader (reluctant or not) can find something rip-roaring to read.

Books fit into specific genres because of certain literary characteristics, whereas themes unify the plot, setting, and characters. More often than not, most stories can be categorized into two or more genres and have multiple underlying themes. Multiple genre and theme notations encourage looking at each book from as wide a perspective as possible. This increases the opportunities for use in the classroom as well as the opportunities for matching books with potential readers. Themes for each title are listed in order of importance.

Readability and Interest Levels

Because readability evaluations are subjective, results often vary. Two separate readability factors were calculated for each book using the Fry Readability Scale. The results give approximate reading levels that need to be viewed in conjunction with the book's content, language style, and interest value.

Interest and readability levels frequently do not match. These rip-roaring reads were selected because they combined low readability levels with high interest levels. However, titles should not necessarily be dismissed if the reading level appears too high for your student or class. These may be perfect books to read aloud.

Choices should not be limited. Even poor readers will attempt to read material above their reading levels if they are intensely interested in the subject. Also, there is a fine line between providing books that are easy and those that are too easy, and therefore insulting. The more challenging book may be *the* book that changes a student from a reluctant reader to a ravenous reader.

Reviews

Citations are listed for reviews appearing in the major journals that evaluate children's literature and are the professional periodicals most readily accessible to librarians and teachers. These are *The Book Report*, *Booklist*, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, *Horn Book*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Kliatt Paperback and Audio Book Guide*, *School Library Journal*, and *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*.

The differing viewpoints expressed by reviewers often provide diverse opinions about the same work. If a book was starred or recommended in these journal reviews, that information is included. These ratings are self-explanatory except for *VOYA*. The books reviewed in *VOYA* are rated for quality and popularity. They range from #1 ("Hard to understand how it got published" and "No young adult will read unless forced to for assignments") to #5 ("Hard to imagine it being better written" and "Every young adult [who reads] was dying to read it yesterday"). In addition, *VOYA* publishes reviews from teens as well as librarians and teachers.

Author Information

Many students are intrigued by details about authors' lives. For instance, a reluctant reader who is intrigued by aliens will love William Sleator's claim that "They" made him write his abduction adventure, *The Night the Heads Came*. And nonathletes who are avid sports fans will appreciate Dan Gutman's confession that he writes about sports even though he is a "terrible athlete" himself. If specific biographical information about the writing of any of these books was available, it is included.

Some authors have Internet home pages or e-mail addresses and want to correspond with readers. If those are available, they are provided here.

Plot Summary

Plot details are kept to a minimum. However, because most students prefer books with protagonists their own age or slightly older, the ages of the main characters are always stated or implied. Keep in mind that many teenagers prefer nonfiction books that may have no characters at all. Additional plot, setting, and character information can be gleaned from the themes, reviews, booktalks, and literature extensions/alternative book reports notations.

Introducing the Book

The hints in this section are intended to aid adults in sharing these books with individuals or groups of students. Some of the titles are good read-aloud candidates, and obviously they are all good selections for independent reading by both reluctant and avid teen readers. We often recommend reading aloud a particular passage or specific chapter and note that in this section. These selections, ranging from a few paragraphs to twelve or fifteen pages, are singled out to grab the interest of potential readers.

Some books are not appropriate to read aloud because of sensitive and personal subject matter, whereas others are especially suited to share at certain times of the year (Women's History Month) or within particular curricula (Civil War studies). This information is also included in this section.

Booktalks

Booktalking is a terrific way to sell books to potential readers. These talks should catch the listeners' attention the way "coming attractions" do at the movies. They are short and sweet and not the same as critical book reviews, reports, or analyses. The "On the Spot" booktalks are spontaneous sells, suitable for use when grabbing a book off the shelf or doing many quick booktalks together. Tantalizing information is given, but few specific details are included. "On the Spot" booktalks can be printed onto bookmarks and placed in the matching book.

Using excerpts from the text is the best way to give the true flavor of a book in a more prepared or traditional booktalk. "With the Author's Words" are booktalks that include a high-interest, quoted section from the book. When students see you read a selection from a book, they receive the nonverbal message that reading is pleasurable and that the pleasure comes from the book. Expect to sell books when booktalking! Do not disappoint students by not having the books available when you are finished. The canned, brief booktalks in *More Rip-Roaring Reads* may be used in presentations or duplicated and used in book displays or on bulletin boards.

Literature Extensions/Alternative Book Report Activities

The use of whole language and literature-based curricula makes using "real" books an integral and welcome part of classroom activities. But, please, forget the dreaded boring book report as an accountability method. Instead, encourage students to look at alternative activities such as the ones listed in this book. Do not, however, think of these ideas as the only ones! Use these as a springboard to help you, your colleagues, and your students formulate other activities.

Another suggestion is to approach reading accountability backwards. Students can take a look at the alternative ideas and select a book to read based on an activity that holds interest for them.

As use of the Internet and all its treasures becomes more and more a part of our lives, it is logical to link reading projects to appropriate sites on the World Wide Web. We have provided numerous suggestions, all up and running when accessed August 1, 1998.

Do not be discouraged if your library does not have all the books recommended for further research and reading. In this day of limited budgets, no library will have them all, and that is why numerous choices are listed. To expand your materials collection, use interlibrary loan services that most public libraries offer. Remember, unless a student is particularly interested in a specific project, they should not be spending more time on the activity than they did reading the book!

Bookmarks

Because the primary reason for *More Rip-Roaring Reads* is to create lifelong readers, we want students to ask for more when they finish reading a book. These reproducible bookmarks will help match books with readers at a variety of reading levels and, most important, hook them on books and keep them reading.

Each list includes books that extend reading experiences by listing other books by that particular author or by listing other outstanding titles in a particular genre, theme, series, or topic area. The bookmarks include appropriate books for all readers at a variety of reading levels.

Adapt these to your own individual needs. Add additional titles from your library and mark the titles you have in your collection or the titles available from another library in your area. These bookmarks do not need to be used only in connection with each specific entry. Each entry in this book has been listed on its appropriate bookmark, so you can use them anytime for all kinds of readers!

Indexes

There are two indexes in this book. The first index cross-references every title and author listed throughout the book. Forty different books and authors are featured in the main entries, but more than 1,500 additional titles and authors are also listed in the literature extensions, alternative book report activities, or on the 120 bookmarks.

The second index combines genres, themes, and extension activities. These indexes help librarians, teachers, and other adults make connections with books and assist them in matching readers with appropriate materials.

Popular young adult mystery writer Joan Lowery Nixon says that she often receives letters from students who had never completed an entire book before they cruised through one of her mysteries. One ninth-grade girl wrote that she had always hated reading until she read one of Nixon's books. She wrote to Nixon: "Thank you for the gift of reading."

Good luck with your endeavors. Just one person can make a difference in a reluctant reader's life and give that gift of reading. Maybe that person is you. When book and reader meet, anything is possible. So, introduce a few!

**More Rip-Roaring Reads
for Middle School Students**

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Balgassi, Haemi

Tae's Sonata

LC 96-29081. 1997. 128p. \$14.00 (ISBN 0-395-84314-6).
Clarion Books.

Genres: Contemporary realistic fiction, romance, multicultural

Themes: Korean Americans, friendship, school life, family life, acceptance, cliques, prejudice, racism, vandals, immigrants, homesickness, cultures, heritage, music—piano, crushes, boy-girl relationships, cruelty, rumors, reports, compassion, peer relationships

Reading level: Fifth grade

Interest level: Sixth through ninth grade

Reviews:

Booklist. 94(4):404 October 15, 1997.

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books.

51(3):80 November 1997. (Recommended)

Publishers Weekly. 244(26):76 June 30, 1997.

School Library Journal. 43(9):210 September 1997.

Author Information

Haemi Balgassi was born in South Korea and immigrated to the United States when she was seven. She knew from age nine that she wanted to be a writer and began her career in her mid-twenties. She tries to write some every day, but when she gets caught up in a story she writes for stretches as long as twenty hours. This happened when she began *Tae's Sonata* on January 1, 1996; she finished the book on January 31. Readers can send Balgassi e-mail at peacebound@juno.com and visit her Website at <http://home.sprynet.com/sprynet/balgassi/>, through which she has met children "online from all over the world." Balgassi lives with her husband and daughter in the city she grew up in—Westfield, Massachusetts.

Plot Summary

Not only is eighth-grader Taeyoung Kim struggling to fit in with her peers, she is also striving to reconcile her Korean heritage with her new American culture. When popular Josh Morgan chooses Tae as a partner for a history project about South Korea, she wonders if he is just using her to improve his grade.

Introducing the Book

The short length and lower reading level of this book make it ideal for independent reading. Because the tension of the story starts immediately, reading aloud the first chapter will grab the attention of potential readers.

Booktalks

On the Spot

Tae feels out of place and just wants to blend in with her American classmates. Being assigned South Korea (her country of birth) for her geography project isn't going to help. Potential boyfriends and rumors make Tae's life even more complicated!

With the Author's Words

Tae is almost asleep when she hears her mother ask,

"Taeyoung? Are you happy we moved here?". . . I keep my eyes closed, even though I'm wide awake now. A part of me wants to cry out that no, I'm not glad. I want to tell her how much I miss our old house in Seoul . . . how much I want to run through the field of wild cosmos where my friends and I used to play . . . how I ache for the school where I fit in without ever having to try. (pp. 82–83)

Tae's fears about eighth grade and making friends are pretty typical, but her struggle is harder because she's torn between her Korean heritage and the appeal of American ways. Read *Tae's Sonata* to find out how her conflict is resolved.

Literature Extensions/Alternative Book Report Activities

Social Issues/Current Events/Human Rights/Racial Conflict/Korean Americans—Tae’s parents remove the hardened egg yolk from their store sign in quiet defiance of the racist action. Eve Bunting’s picture book *Smoky Night* (Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1994), illustrated by David Diaz, is based on the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and also features racial tension between Korean American merchants and other minorities. The simmering hostilities between many Korean immigrant merchants and other minority groups, especially impoverished customers, has been the focus of racial conflicts in many of our country’s inner cities.

Students can find out more about this topic, including specific information about boycotts of Korean-owned grocery stores. Invite a representative from your local human rights group to speak about this and other related topics. How do students think they can help protect each other’s rights and existence? Are there opportunities for students to become involved locally?

Social Skills/Self-Esteem—Regardless of culture or ethnic origin, many middle school students are like Tae and need assistance developing social skills and dealing with the roller coaster aspects of adolescence. Provide students with the following self-help books: *Straight Up!: A Teenager’s Guide to Taking Charge of Your Life* by Elizabeth Taylor-Gerdes and Cortrell J. Harris (Lindsey Publishing, 1995); *Finding Our Way: The Teen Girls’ Survival Guide* by Allison Abner and Linda Villarosa (HarperPerennial Library, 1996); *Bodypride: An Action Plan for Teens: Seeking Self-Esteem and Building Better Bodies* by Cynthia Stamper Graff, et al. (Griffin Publishers, 1997); *How to Survive As a Teen: When No One Understands* by Stevan E. Atanasoff (Herald, 1989); and *Smart Moves: How to Succeed in School, Sports, Career, and Life* by Dick DeVenzio (Prometheus Books, 1989).

Social Studies/Countries/South Korea/Internet—Students can do more interesting studies about countries than the written report Tae and Josh produced. More active learning could include the following: 1) Interviewing first-generation immigrants like Tae’s parents to collect firsthand information; 2) preparing and sampling traditional foods (kimchee, fried mondu, rice, sweet potato fritters, fried tofu, and spicy bean sprout soup would be appropriate food for a study of Korea); 3) visiting major Internet sites for the selected country. Students studying Korea may begin by looking at “Korea.com” at <http://www.korea.com/> and “Korea Info” at <http://204.94.70.10/korea/korea.htm>.

Social Studies/Immigration—Balgassi writes convincingly about immigrants who often struggle to balance and maintain their traditions alongside an overwhelming American culture. Min Paek’s *Aekyung’s Dream* (Children’s Book Press, 1988) also features a young Korean immigrant learning to adapt to her new American life. Various members of these families respond differently, but typical problems include dealing with isolation, homesickness, language barriers, acceptance, and the like.

Most studies about immigrants focus on the past waves of immigration. Help students become more aware and sensitive to the struggles of new immigrants. Be sure to connect any study to your community by taking advantage of any local speakers, helping with a service project sponsored by a local organization, and so on. Launch a study by reading Eve Bunting’s picture book for older readers *How Many Days to America? A Thanksgiving Story*, illustrated by Beth Peck (Clarion Books, 1990).

Music



- Balgassi, Haemi. *Tae's Sonata*
Clément, Claude. *The Voice of the Wood*
Fenner, Carol. *Yolonda's Genius*
Handel, George Frideric. *Messiah: The Wordbook for the Oratorio*.
Illus. by Barry Moser
Hurwitz, Johanna. *Leonard Bernstein: A Passion for Music*
Krull, Kathleen. *Lives of the Musicians: Good Times, Bad Times (And What the Neighbors Thought)*
MacLachlan, Patricia. *The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt*
Monceaux, Morgan. *Jazz: My Music, My People*
Namioka, Lensey. *Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear*
Nichol, Barbara. *Beethoven Lives Upstairs*
Raschka, Chris. *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop*
Weik, Mary Hays. *The Jazz Man*
Wolff, Virginia Euwer. *Mozart Season*

Asian American Fiction

- American Dragons: Twenty-Five Asian American Voices*. Edited by Laurence Yep
American Eyes: New Asian-American Short Stories for Young Adults. Edited by Lori M. Carlson
Balgassi, Haemi. *Tae's Sonata*
Chin, Fran. *Donald Duck*
Crew, Linda. *Children of the River*
Irwin, Hadley. *Kim/Kimi*
Jen, Gish. *Typical American*
Lee, Gus. *China Boy*
Lee, Marie G. *Finding My Voice*
Lee, Marie G. *If It Hadn't Been for Yoon Jun*
Lee, Marie G. *Necessary Roughness*
Lord, Bette Bao. *The Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*
Namioka, Lensey. *Yang the Second and Her Secret Admirers*
Yee, Paul. *Breakaway*
Yee, Paul. *Tales from Gold Mountain: Stories of the Chinese in the New World*

Cliques/Fitting In

- Auch, Mary Jane. *Glass Slippers Give You Blisters*
Balgassi, Haemi. *Tae's Sonata*
Keller, Beverly. *Desdemona* series
Mills, Claudia. *Hannah on Her Way*
Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *Alice* series
Okimoto, Jean Davies. *Take a Chance, Gramps!*
Peters, Julie Anne. *Revenge of the Snob Squad*
Shreve, Susan. *The Gift of the Girl Who Couldn't Hear*
Shura, Mary Francis. *Polly Panic*
Vail, Rachel. *Wonder*
Wallace, Bill. *Beauty*

