

## 2019-20 Battle of the Books Synopses

(amazon.com)

### ***A Handful of Stars*** by Cynthia Lord—Realistic Fiction

When Lily's blind dog, Lucky, slips his collar and runs away across the wide-open blueberry barrens of eastern Maine, it's Salma Santiago who manages to catch him. Salma, the daughter of migrant workers, is in the small town with her family for the blueberry-picking season.

After their initial chance meeting, Salma and Lily bond over painting bee boxes for Lily's grandfather, and Salma's friendship transforms Lily's summer. But when Salma decides to run in the upcoming Blueberry Queen pageant, they'll have to face some tough truths about friendship and belonging. Should an outsider like Salma really participate in the pageant -- and possibly win?

Set amongst the blueberry barrens and by the sea, this is a gorgeous new novel by Newbery Honor author Cynthia Lord that tackles themes of prejudice and friendship, loss and love.

### ***Al Capone Does My Shirts*** by Gennifer Choldenko—Historical Fiction

Today I moved to Alcatraz, a twelve-acre rock covered with cement, topped with bird turd and surrounded by water. I'm not the only kid who lives here. There are twenty-three other kids who live on the island because their dads work as guards or cooks or doctors or electricians for the prison, like my dad does. And then there are a ton of murderers, rapists, hit men, con men, stickup men, embezzlers, connivers, burglars, kidnappers and maybe even an innocent man or two, though I doubt it. The convicts we have are the kind other prisons don't want. I never knew prisons could be picky, but I guess they can. You get to Alcatraz by being the worst of the worst. Unless you're me. I came here because my mother said I had to.

### ***Not If I Save You First*** by Ally Carter—Romance/Adventure

Maddie thought she and Logan would be friends forever. But when your dad is a Secret Service agent and your best friend is the president's son, sometimes life has other plans. Before she knows it, Maddie's dad is dragging her to a cabin in the middle of the Alaskan wilderness. No phone. No Internet. And not a single word from Logan. Maddie tells herself it's okay. After all, she's the most popular girl for twenty miles in any direction. (She's also the only girl for twenty miles in any direction.) She has wood to cut and weapons to bedazzle. Her life is full. Until Logan shows up six years later . . . And Maddie wants to kill him. But before that can happen, an assailant appears out of nowhere, knocking Maddie off a cliff and dragging Logan to some unknown fate. Maddie knows she could turn back- and get help. But the weather is turning and the terrain will only get more treacherous, the animals more deadly. Maddie still really wants to kill Logan. But she has to save him first. ***The Watsons Go to Birmingham*** by Christopher Paul Curtis—Historical Fiction

### ***City of Ember*** by Jeanne DuPrau—Science Fiction/Dystopia

The city of Ember was built as a last refuge for the human race. Two hundred years later, the great lamps that light the city are beginning to flicker. When Lina finds part of an ancient message, she's sure it holds a secret that will save the city. She and her friend Doon must race to figure out the clues before the lights go out on Ember forever!

***The Devil's Arithmetic*** by Jane Yolen—Historical Fiction

Hannah is tired of holiday gatherings—all her family ever talks about is the past. In fact, it seems to her that's what they do every Jewish holiday. But this year's Passover Seder will be different—Hannah will be mysteriously transported into the past . . . and only she knows the unspeakable horrors that await.

***Firegirl*** by Tony Abbott—Realistic Fiction

From the moment Jessica arrives, life is never quite the same for Tom and his seventh-grade classmates. Jessica was badly burned in a fire, and will be attending St. Catherine's while getting medical treatments.

Despite Jessica's shocking appearance and the fear she evokes in him and most of the class, Tom slowly develops a tentative friendship with Jessica that changes his life in just a short amount of time.

*Firegirl* is a powerful book that will show readers that even the smallest of gestures can have a profound impact on someone's life.

***Hattie Big Sky*** by Kirby Larson—Historical Fiction

For most of her life, sixteen-year-old Hattie Brooks has been shuttled from one distant relative to another. Tired of being Hattie Here-and-There, she summons the courage to leave Iowa and move all by herself to Vida, Montana, to prove up on her late uncle's homestead claim.

Under the big sky, Hattie braves hard weather, hard times, a cantankerous cow, and her own hopeless hand at the cookstove. Her quest to make a home is championed by new neighbors Perilee Mueller, her German husband, and their children. For the first time in her life, Hattie feels part of a family, finding the strength to stand up against Traft Martin's schemes to buy her out and against increasing pressure to be a "loyal" American at a time when anything—or anyone—German is suspect. Despite daily trials, Hattie continues to work her uncle's claim until an unforeseen tragedy causes her to search her soul for the real meaning of home.

This young pioneer's story is lovingly stitched together from Kirby Larson's own family history and the sights, sounds, and scents of homesteading life.

***Heat*** by Mike Lupica—Sports/Realistic Fiction

Michael Arroyo has a pitching arm that throws serious heat along with aspirations of leading his team all the way to the Little League World Series. But his firepower is nothing compared to the heat Michael faces in his day-to-day life. Newly orphaned after his father led the family's escape from Cuba, Michael's only family is his seventeen-year-old brother Carlos. If Social Services hears of their situation, they will be separated in the foster-care system—or worse, sent back to Cuba. Together, the boys carry on alone, dodging bills and anyone who asks too many questions. But then someone wonders how a twelve-year-old boy could possibly throw with as much power as Michael Arroyo throws. With no way to prove his age, no birth certificate, and no parent to fight for his cause, Michael's secret world is blown wide open, and he discovers that family can come from the most unexpected sources.

***Kira-Kira*** by Cynthia Kadohata—Historical Fiction

*kira-kira* (*kee ra kee ra*): *glittering; shining* Glittering. That's how Katie Takeshima's sister, Lynn, makes everything seem. The sky is *kira-kira* because its color is deep but see-through at the same time. The sea is *kira-kira* for the same reason. And so are people's eyes. When Katie and her family move from a Japanese community in Iowa to the Deep South of Georgia, it's Lynn who explains to her why people stop on the street to stare. And it's Lynn who, with her special way of viewing the world, teaches Katie to look beyond tomorrow. But when Lynn becomes desperately ill, and the whole family begins to fall apart, it is up to Katie to find a way to remind them all that there is always something glittering -- *kira-kira* -- in the future.

***Keeper of the Lost Cities*** by Shannon Messenger—Fantasy/Adventure

Twelve-year-old Sophie has never quite fit into her life. She's skipped multiple grades and doesn't really connect with the older kids at school, but she's not comfortable with her family, either. The reason? Sophie's a Telepath, someone who can read minds. No one knows her secret—at least, that's what she thinks...

But the day Sophie meets Fitz, a mysterious (and adorable) boy, she learns she's not alone. He's a Telepath too, and it turns out the reason she has never felt at home is that, well...she isn't. Fitz opens Sophie's eyes to a shocking truth, and she is forced to leave behind her family for a new life in a place that is vastly different from what she has ever known.

But Sophie still has secrets, and they're buried deep in her memory for good reason: The answers are dangerous and in high-demand. What is her true identity, and why was she hidden among humans? The truth could mean life or death—and time is running out.

***Serafina and the Black Cloak*** by Robert Beaty—Fantasy/Suspense

*"Never go into the forest, for there are many dangers there, and they will ensnare your soul."*

Serafina has never had a reason to disobey her pa and venture beyond the grounds of Biltmore Estate. There's plenty to explore in Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt's vast and opulent home, but she must take care to never be seen. None of the rich folk upstairs know that Serafina exists; she and her pa have lived in the basement for as long as Serafina can remember. She has learned to prowl through the darkened corridors at night, to sneak and hide, using the mansion's hidden doors and secret passageways.

But when children at the estate start disappearing, only Serafina knows the clues to follow. A mysterious man in a black cloak stalks Biltmore's corridors at night. Following her own harrowing escape, Serafina risks everything by joining forces with Braeden Vanderbilt, the young nephew of Biltmore's owners. Braeden and Serafina must uncover the Man in the Black Cloak's true identity before all of the children vanish one by one.

Serafina's hunt leads her into the very forest that she has been taught to fear, where she discovers a forgotten legacy of magic. In order to save the children of Biltmore, Serafina must not only face her darkest enemy, but delve into the strange mystery of her own identity.

**Project Mulberry** by Linda Sue Park—Realistic Fiction

Julia Song and her friend Patrick would love to win a blue ribbon, maybe even two, at the state fair. They've always done projects together, and they work well as a team. This time, though, they're having trouble coming up with just the right project. Then Julia's mother offers a suggestion: They can raise silkworms, as she did when she was a girl in Korea.

Patrick thinks it's a great idea. Of course there are obstacles—for example, where will they get mulberry leaves, the only thing silkworms eat?—but nothing they can't handle.

Julia isn't so sure. The club where kids do their projects is all about traditional American stuff, and raising silkworms just doesn't fit in. Moreover, the author, Ms. Park, seems determined to make Julia's life as complicated as possible, no matter how hard Julia tries to talk her out of it.

In this contemporary novel, Linda Sue Park delivers a funny, lively story that illuminates both the process of writing a novel and the meaning of growing up American.

**Restart** by Gordon Korman—Realistic Fiction

Chase's memory just went out the window.

Chase doesn't remember falling off the roof. He doesn't remember hitting his head. He doesn't, in fact, remember *anything*. He wakes up in a hospital room and suddenly has to learn his whole life all over again . . . starting with his own name.

He knows he's Chase. But who *is* Chase? When he gets back to school, he sees that different kids have very different reactions to his return.

Some kids treat him like a hero. Some kids are clearly afraid of him.

One girl in particular is so angry with him that she pours her frozen yogurt on his head the first chance she gets.

Pretty soon, it's not only a question of who Chase is--it's a question of who he *was* . . . and who he's going to be.

As Satchel and his unique teammates barnstorm toward a national baseball tournament, Nick wonders if he can really overcome what seems like the impossible and pitch again.

***The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*** by Avi—Historical Fiction

Thirteen-year-old Charlotte Doyle is excited to return home from her school in England to her family in Rhode Island in the summer of 1832.

But when the two families she was supposed to travel with mysteriously cancel their trips, Charlotte finds herself the lone passenger on a long sea voyage with a cruel captain and a mutinous crew. Worse yet, soon after stepping aboard the ship, she becomes enmeshed in a conflict between them! What begins as an eagerly anticipated ocean crossing turns into a harrowing journey, where Charlotte gains a villainous enemy... and is put on trial for murder!

***Touching Spirit Bear*** by Ben Mikaelson—Realistic Fiction/Adventure

After severely injuring Peter Driscoll in an empty parking lot, mischief-maker Cole Matthews is in major trouble. But instead of jail time, Cole is given another option: attend Circle Justice, an alternative program that sends juvenile offenders to a remote Alaskan Island to focus on changing their ways. Desperate to avoid prison, Cole fakes humility and agrees to go.

While there, Cole is mauled by a mysterious white bear and left for dead. Thoughts of his abusive parents, helpless Peter, and his own anger cause him to examine his actions and seek redemption—from the spirit bear that attacked him, from his victims, and from himself.

***Wednesday Wars*** by Gary D. Schmidt—Historical Fiction

Meet Holling Hoodhood, a seventh-grader at Camillo Junior High, who must spend Wednesday afternoons with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, while the rest of the class has religious instruction. Mrs. Baker doesn't like Holling—he's sure of it. Why else would she make him read the plays of William Shakespeare outside class? But everyone has bigger things to worry about, like Vietnam. His father wants Holling and his sister to be on their best behavior: the success of his business depends on it. But how can Holling stay out of trouble when he has so much to contend with? A bully demanding cream puffs; angry rats; and a baseball hero signing autographs the very same night Holling has to appear in a play in yellow tights! As fate sneaks up on him again and again, Holling finds Motivation—the Big M—in the most unexpected places and musters up the courage to embrace his destiny, in spite of himself.

***Wolf Brother*** by Michelle Paver—Fantasy/Adventure

Six thousand years ago. Powerful mages stalk the land, threatening to destroy all the forest clans. According to legend, only twelve-year-old Torak and his wolf-cub companion can defeat them. Their journey together takes them through perilous terrain and into dangers they never imagined. Torak and Wolf are terrified of their mission. But if they do not battle to save their world, who will?

***New Kid*** by Daniel James Brown—Graphic Novel/Realistic Fiction

Seventh grader Jordan Banks loves nothing more than drawing cartoons about his life. But instead of sending him to the art school of his dreams, his parents enroll him in a prestigious private school known for its academics, where Jordan is one of the few kids of color in his entire grade.

As he makes the daily trip from his Washington Heights apartment to the upscale Riverdale Academy Day School, Jordan soon finds himself torn between two worlds—and not really fitting into either one. Can Jordan learn to navigate his new school culture while keeping his neighborhood friends and staying true to himself?