

Middle Grade Books

Late 5th Grade through 8th Grade

One for the Murphys by Lynda Mullaly Hunt follows a girl placed in foster care who struggles with attachment and her new, loving environment. Despite her resistance, the Murphys eventually show her what it feels like to belong--until her mother wants her back and Carley has to decide where and how to live. She's not really a Murphy, but the gifts they've given her have opened up a new future.

Heaven by Angela Johnson is about a 14yo Marley discovering she was adopted, and when the truth comes down with the rain one afternoon, it changes everything. It turns Momma and Pops into liars. It makes her brother a stranger and Uncle Jack an even bigger mystery. All of a sudden, she doesn't know who she is anymore and can only turn to those she no longer trusts to find out. Truth often brings change. Sometimes that change is for the good. Sometimes it isn't.

Kimchi & Calamari by Rose Kent focuses on Joseph Calderaro who has a serious problem. His teacher has given him an impossible assignment: an essay about ancestors. Joseph was adopted, but the only sure thing he knows about his birth family is that they shipped his diapered butt on a plane from Korea and he landed in New Jersey. How do you write about a family you've never known and at the same time manage all the other hassles that middle school mixes in the pot?

In **Counting by 7s** by Holly Goldberg Sloan, Willow is a 12yo genius, obsessed with nature and diagnosing medical conditions, who finds it comforting to count by 7s. It has never been easy for her to connect with anyone other than her adoptive parents, but that hasn't kept her from leading a happy life, until now. Her world is tragically changed when her parents both die in a car crash. This odd, but extraordinarily endearing, girl manages to push through her grief. Her journey finding a diverse and fully believable surrogate family is a joy.

The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson follows 11yo Gilly having been stuck in more foster families than she can remember, and she's hated them all. Her reputation for being brash, brilliant, and completely unmanageable, is the way she likes it. So when she's sent to live with the Trotters—by far the strangest family yet—she knows it's only a temporary problem. Gilly decides to put her sharp mind to work and get out of there fast. She's determined to no longer be a foster kid. Before long she's devised an elaborate scheme to get her real mother to come rescue her. Unfortunately, the plan doesn't work out quite as she hoped.

In **Three Little Words** by Ashley Rhodes-Courter, she shares about 9 years of her life in 14 different foster homes. As her mother spirals out of control, she is left clinging to an unpredictable, dissolving relationship, while getting pulled deeper into the foster care system. In this inspiring, unforgettable memoir, she finds the courage to succeed—and in doing so, discovers the power of speaking out.

In **Orbiting Jupiter** by Gary D. Schmidt, after Joseph spent time in a juvenile facility, he's placed with a foster family on a farm in rural Maine. Here Joseph, damaged and withdrawn, meets twelve-year-old Jack, who narrates the account of the troubled, passionate teen who wants to find his baby at any cost. What Jack doesn't know, at first, is how desperate Joseph is to find his baby girl. Or how urgently he, Jack, will want to help. But the past can't be shaken off. Even as new bonds form, old wounds reopen. The search for Jupiter demands more from Jack than he can imagine.

Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hunt: Ally has been smart enough to fool a lot of smart people. Every time she lands in a new school, she is able to hide her inability to read by creating clever yet disruptive distractions. She is afraid to ask for help; after all, how can you cure dumb? However, her newest teacher Mr. Daniels sees the bright, creative kid underneath the trouble maker. With his help, Ally learns not to be so hard on herself and that dyslexia is nothing to be ashamed of. As her confidence grows, Ally feels free to be herself and the world starts opening up with possibilities. She discovers that there's a lot more to her—and to everyone—than a label, and that great minds don't always think alike.

Rules by Cynthia Lord: 12yo Catherine just wants a normal life, which is near impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability. She's spent years trying to teach David the rules from "a peach is not a funny-looking apple" to "keep your pants on in public" in order to head off his embarrassing behaviors. But the summer Catherine meets Jason, a surprising, new friend, and Kristi, the next-door friend she's always wanted, it's her own shocking behavior that turns everything upside down and forces her to ask: What is normal?

Wish by Barbara O'Connor follows 11yo Charlie Reese making the same secret wish every day since 4th grade. She even has a list of all the ways there are to make the wish, such as cutting off the pointed end of a slice of pie and wishing on it as she takes the last bite. But when she is sent to the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina to live with family she barely knows, it seems unlikely that her wish will ever come true. That is until she meets Wishbone, a skinny stray dog, and Howard, a boy who is surprising in lots of ways. Suddenly Charlie is in serious danger of discovering that what she thought she wanted may not be what she needs at all.

The Thing About Jellyfish by Ali Benjamin: After her best friend dies in a drowning accident, Suzy is convinced that the true cause of the tragedy must have been a rare jellyfish sting—things don't just happen for no reason. Retreating into a silent world of imagination, she crafts a plan to prove her theory, even if it means traveling the globe, alone. Suzy's achingly heartfelt journey explores life, death, the astonishing wonder of the universe...and the potential for love and hope right next door.

In Piecing Me Together by Renée Watson, Jade believes she must get out of her poor neighborhood to succeed. Her mother tells her to take advantage of every opportunity that comes her way. But some opportunities she doesn't really welcome, like an invitation to join a mentorship program for "at-risk" girls. Just because her mentor is Black and graduated from the same high school doesn't mean she understands where Jade is coming from. Jade wants to speak, to create, to express her joys and sorrows, her pain and her hope. Maybe there are some things she could show other women about understanding the world and finding ways to be real, to make a difference.

The Thing I'm Most Afraid Of by Kristin Levine: Most 12yo would be excited to fly to Austria to see their dad for the summer but then Becca is not like most. Suffering from severe anxiety, she fears that the metal detectors at the airport will give her cancer and the long international flight will leave her with blood clots. Luckily, she's packed her Doomsday Journal. By writing down her fears and what to do if the worst happens, Becca can get by without (many) panic attacks. Routines and plans help, but living in a new country is full of the unexpected. As Becca explores Vienna, she soon learns what matters most is what you do when facing your fear.

Almost Flying by Erin Entrada Kelly: The would-be amusement park aficionado Dalia only has two items on her summer bucket list: finally ride a roller coaster and figure out how to make a new best friend. But dad announces that he's engaged, Dalia's plans come to a screeching halt. With Dalia's future stepsister Alexa joining her trip along with Rani, the new girl from her swim team, maybe she can have the perfect summer after all. But what starts out as a week of fun, goes off the rails when Dalia discovers that Alexa's girlfriend is joining the trip. And keeping Alexa's secret makes Dalia realize one of her own: She might have more-than-friend feelings for Rani.

The Benefits of Being an Octopus by Ann Braden: 7th-grader Zoey has her hands full as she takes care of her much younger siblings after school every day while her mom works her shift at the pizza parlor. Not that her mom seems to appreciate it. At school, Zoey tries to stay under the radar. Her only friend Fuchsia has her own issues, and since they're in an entirely different world than the rich kids, it's best if no one notices them. Zoey thinks how much easier everything would be if she were an octopus: eight arms to do eight things at once. Incredible camouflage ability and steady, unblinking vision. Powerful protective defenses. Even though Zoey resists participating, debate ultimately leads her to see things in a new way: her mom's relationship with Lenny, Fuchsia's situation, and her own place. Can Zoey find the courage to speak up, even if it means risking the most stable home she's ever had?