

GALS READ BOOKS – FALL 2024 (page 1 of 2)

INK GIRLS

This is a story about two eleven-year-old girls: Cinzia is a printer's apprentice in Mestra Aronne's print shop, and also crippled and walks with a cane. Elena comes from a wealthy family and is heir to the throne. Her family, especially her uncle, is embarrassed by her due to her struggles with communication and understanding other people. She longs to be familiar with her city but is restricted to her rooms and garden. The isolation weighs heavy on Elena.

Cinzia loves working in the raggedy printshop where secrets and stories are always circulating. The importance of printing the truth, no matter how hard the consequence, has been instilled by the printer Mestra Aronne. When her mentor is imprisoned for publishing accusations against the ruling family, Cinzia will do anything to prove that Mestra Aronne only told the truth. Cinzia and Elena unexpectedly meet and form an instant bond. They team up to follow a trail of clues through the city to prove Mestra Aronne's innocence.

The artwork in Ink Girls is excellent, and the characters are compelling. Try to get close to page 50, where Cinzia and Elena meet. Like all the books, be sure to read this section aloud three times before going to the school, and this one has a number of Italian words that could be difficult.

WILDFIRE

Julianna is about to begin middle school and lives happily with her family on their farm in a Western Oregon forest community. After a wildfire, started by fireworks and careless adolescent boys, destroys their home and most of their livestock, they must relocate to Portland. Julianna wants to put the disaster behind her and live a normal life but her parents and younger sister become active in climate change awareness groups. She makes friends at school who encourage her to join the school's environmental club. Then Carson, a boy from her old school who she knew was involved with the fireworks, transfers to her new school and joins her club as part of his community service.

The conservation club decides to start a project planting trees to restore the forest, and Julianna is disturbed to even think of returning to see the burned landscape. Wildfire shows readers that healing from tragedy can take many forms. It demonstrates what it means to take action in the face of climate change and how that action can be different for each of us. There is well-presented information about the environment throughout the book.

The artwork seems clunky at first but effectively renders the horror of wildfires and gracefully illustrates a young person's struggle to handle the changes born from tragedy. You should be able to get to around page 58 where she meets her new school friends and learns about the conservation club.

GALS READ BOOKS – FALL 2024 (page 2 of 2)

LIVING WITH VIOLA

Chinese-Canadian Livy (Olivia Siu Leen Tong) is the new girl in school and is having trouble fitting in and making friends. Her constant companion is “Viola”, an imaginary twin who is all her anxieties manifested. Viola is always present, lurking in the back of her mind, giving her bad advice, sabotaging her at every turn, and making sure any potentially positive experience is laced with doubt and criticism. Livy’s parents have very high expectations of her which makes her feel that she needs to be the perfect daughter. This is accentuated when she her bossy, demanding aunt visits them from China. Though she starts to make new friends and have fun at school, Viola is relentless. Only Livy can see and hear her, and this burden takes its toll over as the school year progresses. Eventually, Livy feels her life is starting to unravel and wonders if she should talk to someone about her repressed anxieties. Her parents also begin to understand that their daughter has unique challenges and adjust their expectations, giving Livy the support she needs.

It’s a good idea to read the 2nd blurb on the back of the book to familiarize the listeners with Viola, since she starts appearing right away without explanation. There’s a good picture of Viola to share at page 212. There are Chinese words and expressions throughout the book, which the author has translated and included a glossary of them at the end. There are pages where Viola is yelling at Livy and the words overlap. Other pages include lots of side conversations that don’t really matter to the story, so they can be ignored if you want. Try to get to page 83 where Livy and her friends get kicked out of the school library.

AMETHYST

Amaya is something of a troublemaker, despite being the princess of the House of Amethyst in the magical world of Gemworld where she lives. She and her little brother love to pull pranks but one of their schemes goes too far. The punishment? Amaya’s parents ground her to bland, boring Earth, where her magical powers won’t work, for a whole week. She’s accompanied by her parent’s chief mage, Citrina. But that week on Earth turns into three years, and by then she’s settled into her new home and attends middle school with her best friend Autumn. By then, Amaya and Citrina have both forgotten all about Gemworld. While enduring yet another round of detention at school, a Gemworld prince named Topaz suddenly appears, telling her she is urgently needed. She follows the Topaz through a portal back into Gemworld, and so does her best Earth-friend, Autumn. She quickly learns that her parents, the king and queen, and her brother have all vanished and Gemworld’s being attacked by giant gemstone creature named Flaw and his insect-like Flawlings.

It will be difficult to get to the best stopping place, where Prince Topaz shows up at Amaya’s school, but you should be able to get to a little beyond page 44, where she’s in middle school. After your reading, try to show Amaya’s fancy dress on page 91. A great image of Flaw can also be shared from page 116.

GUYS READ BOOKS – FALL 2024 (page 1 of 2)

ESCAPE FROM MR. LEMONCELLO'S LIBRARY

Kyle is an excellent 12-year-old gamer, though something of a troublemaker. Mr. Lemoncello is the world's greatest game maker and a bazillionaire who recently donated \$500 million to build an incredible new public library in Kyle's hometown. This library is packed with advanced technology and amazing new games. Mr. Lemoncello creates an essay contest for 12-year-olds on the subject of libraries, announcing that the top twelve essays will be rewarded with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attend an overnight lock-in at the new library. The event is expected to have movies, food, and prizes, with all twelve winners receiving a \$1,000 certificate for Lemoncello games and gear. Kyle's essay earns him a spot in the lucky group of twelve. But he and the other kids soon learn that the experience they had in mind was nothing like what is in store from Mr. Lemoncello. The real contest is finding the hidden escape route OUT of the library by the next morning, which can only be accomplished by solving a series of difficult puzzles, all while following a thorough set of contest rules.

This book is fast-paced and packed with fun puzzles. It reads almost as if Willy Wonka meets an escape room meets a reality tv show, with the entire city watching the kids competing to escape and win the contest. Hopefully you'll be able to get to page 39 where Mr. Lemoncello appears at the school assembly to announce the essay winners. On page 75 there's a good splash page showing Lemoncello's hidden Library Dessert Bar which you may want to share, along with the lively action at the Electronic Learning Center on the following page.

THE RACC PACK

The Bins family is a trio of dumpster-diving raccoons: Dusty (the brains), his sister ReRe (the muscle), and Scraps (the gadgeteer, who's actually a possum, whether he realizes it or not). The Bins are constantly searching for the tastiest garbage, often coming up short, and their day-to-day survival is getting old. When they learn that a new grocery store throws away perfectly good food every evening just because it's 'ugly', they decide to steal the store's entire garbage bin full of food and be set for the next year. However, Jeff Beans, the CEO of the grocery store, has no love for these opportunistic creatures and installs a high-tech security system with electrified fencing, razor wire, and cameras. The Bins recruit a new ally, a cat named Jelly Belly (but prefers 'JB'), who is smart, sneaky like a ninja, and has a real grudge against Jeff Beans. With the combined skills of JB and the Bins trio, a plan is hatched.

The book is described as "Ecological messaging surrounding food scarcity and community action ring true amid the humorously high-octane antics." It moves along quickly, and you should be able to get to around page 90 where the Bins and JB are developing their master plan. There is a laugh-out-loud moment involving Jeff Beans being trapped inside a decoy dumpster with a certain skunk who did NOT appreciate the CEO's treatment of him during their last encounter..

GUYS READ BOOKS – FALL 2024 (page 2 of 2)

MISFIT MANSION

The residents of Mr. Halloway's Home for Horrors are (mostly) humanoid but also horned, clawed, fanged, and multiheaded monsters (AKA "horrors"). Mr. Halloway, a paranormal investigator who studies horrors, tells them he is protecting the creatures from being hunted down by the residents of the nearby town of Dead End Springs. He does this by keeping them in his isolated manor house, locked by magic, keeping anyone from coming in OR out. This sealing spell is eventually undone by a curious boy from the town, resulting in the escape of a doll-like horror who is sure to cause nightmares for anyone she encounters. This creates an opportunity for Iris, the blue-skinned, puffy-tailed horror who has never quite felt at home at Mr. Halloway's, to venture into town and look for her housemate.

Iris gets a warm welcome in town and quickly realizes that the people of Dead End Springs seem to enjoy scary things and that the reason she has been kept in the mansion all these years may not as it seems. However, many moving parts are in play during the town's fall festival, including Mr. Halloway's former partner who, along with her nephew (the curious boy who inadvertently unlocked the mansion), are determined to capture and destroy all monsters. What's more, Mr. Halloway has kept another monster, a "dreamon" (a "horror born of human dreams"), secretly hidden in the mansion's basement. Not long after the entire household of horrors arrives at the festival, seeing for themselves that they are welcomed for who they are, the dreamon is released and the danger is real for everyone.

The book does not have page numbers, but you should be able to get a third of the way through and see Iris find the escaped fellow horror in the local toy shop.

SHADOW ISLAND

Orphaned Ollie is lonely and lives unhappily with his grandpa in the small, remote seaside village of Sueno Bay, "Home of the Supernatural." Ollie's been rejected by his relatives on the mainland and his grandpa is the last to take him in. Sueno Bay has frequent earthquakes, with rain more than 200 days a year. As such, Ollie is bored and wants to escape back to the mainland where it at least only rains 45 days annually. His getaway plans are put on hold when he and three classmates find something they shouldn't have in a trailer in the woods where they shouldn't be: Moon Creatures! A baby moon creature sneaks into Ollie's backpack and, upon discovery back in his room, they quickly become friends.

The trailer in the woods belongs to a very angry gym teacher, who sees the kids on her security cameras, and the group of friends is soon on the run. Their flight takes them across the water to a shadowy island, where dangers await. But a darkness is infecting the island along with its supernatural occupants. Ollie and his friends must find a way to stop it.

This story starts with a bang and you should be able to get to the beginning of chapter 3. To set the hook, you may want to show page 130, where Ollie is being attacked by diseased moon creatures.