

# Decisiveness

Character... It starts with me!

ROBIN'S READING LIST

## Vs. Procrastination

### I WILL:

- Not look back
- Do what I say
- Make the right decision and stick to it
- Look at things from more than one point of view before making up my mind
- Not give in to peer pressure

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## Processing information and finalizing difficult decisions

Picture books can be used at any grade level, even high school!! Two are listed below.

### Little Beauty by Anthony Browne

Once there was a very special gorilla who had almost everything he needed. There was only one thing he didn't have: a friend. With no other gorillas at the zoo, the keepers try something new. Will the gigantic ape strike a bond with another sort of creature, one as tiny and innocent as a kitten? Sparked by the story of a real gorilla who learned to sign, *Little Beauty* is a celebration of a most surprising friendship.

### Henry's Freedom Box by Ellen Levine

Henry Brown doesn't know how old he is. Nobody keeps records of slaves' birthdays. All the time he dreams about freedom, but that dream seems farther away than ever when he is torn from his family and put to work in a warehouse. Henry grows up and marries, but he is again devastated when his family is sold at the slave market. Then one day, as he lifts a crate at the warehouse, he knows exactly what he must do: He will mail himself to the North. After an arduous journey in the crate, Henry finally has a birthday -- his first day of freedom.

### Grades Pre – 3:

### Lilly's Big Day by Kevin Henkes

Lilly's heart leaps when her adored teacher, Mr. Slinger, reveals to his class of mice that he is going to marry Ms. Shotwell, the school nurse. "It will be the biggest day of my life," she tells herself, confident that she will be his flower girl. In her bedroom, she practices holding her head high, smiling brightly, walking very, very slowly, and humming "Here Comes the Bride." "Did Mr. Slinger ask you?" asks Lilly's mother. "Not yet," Lilly says, unfazed. Just in case her teacher hasn't figured out her heart's desire, she draws a portrait of herself as the "World's Best and Most Famous Flower Girl." Poor Mr. Slinger has to break it to her that his own niece, Ginger, will be taking on the official job, though he kindly offers Lilly the chance to be her assistant. On the big day, when the music swells, Ginger gets stage fright and freezes, "still as a stone." Lilly's quick thinking saves the wedding.

### The Case of the Gasping Garbage by Michele Torrey

Meet Doyle and Fossey, science detectives, in their first lively collaboration, a series of four pithy science mysteries. Fifth grader Drake Doyle, scientific genius, and his nature-loving lab partner, Nell Fossey, take on four tough cases. There's the "huge-giant-bloodsucking-monster" in a classmate's garbage can, a save-the-frogs campaign, a truck wedged tight under a bridge, and the problem of who is sending love notes to soft-spoken fifth grader, Lilly Crump.

For each case, the two sleuths observe, formulate a hypothesis, analyze their data, and come up with a simple, elegant solution. At the back of the book is a stimulating series of easy-to-perform science experiments related to each story, including baking bread with yeast, sending an invisible message, and analyzing ink using chromatography. All of the books in the Doyle & Fossey Science Detectives series, including *The Case of the Graveyard Ghost* and *The Case of the Mossy Lake Monster* are easy to read independently for mystery and science fans, and perfect to read aloud a chapter at a sitting.



# Robin's Reading List



## **Stink: The Incredible Shrinking Kid** by Megan McDonald

Fans of the Judy Moody series about an outspoken and assertive third grade girl have been glad to see a whole new spin-off series about her younger brother, Stink, just as Beezus fans love books about her little sister, Ramona, in Beverly Cleary's classic series. Shortest in his family and the shortest second-grader in Class 2D, Stink is appalled when Judy measures him before bed and gives him the bad news: he's one quarter inch shorter now than he was that morning. Judy gives him hair gel to make his hair stick straight up so he looks taller. Unfortunately, it turns his hair orange. "I look like a carrot!" he says. In other hilarious chapters, Stink is chosen to bring home the class newt, Newton, with disastrous results, and he does a report on his favorite president, the shortest one, James Madison, for Presidents' Day. Interspersed throughout this breezy, easy-to-read chapter book are Stink's own comic book pages, "The Adventures of Stink." Kids love to write and illustrate new cartoon panels based on their own lives, adventures, and imaginations. Set them loose on the rest of the series, and ZOOM, they're reading and loving it!

## **Say What?** by Margaret Peterson Haddix

Meet six-year-old Sukie as she runs through the living room with big plastic tubs of glitter in each hand. "No running in the house. This isn't a playground." That's what her parents would say if they saw her. And, "You have to ask before you use glitter. And only at the kitchen table." Except Sukie's in a hurry, so she doesn't have time to ask permission. Oh, no! There's Dad. Busted! She waits for him to yell. Instead, he says, "So if your friend jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?" Huh? She tries to hold her hands steady, but the tubs of glitter spill all over the carpet. He looks her straight in the eye and says, "Don't pick your nose," and walks out of the room. What is wrong with Dad? Sukie calls an all-kid meeting with her older brothers, Brian and Reed who agree that both Mom and Dad are acting weird. Actually, Mom and Dad have been reading those psychology books again and are trying out a little behavior mod with their kids to make them listen. And their reverse psychology is about to backfire bigtime into war with their kids who decide to act bad on purpose, just to see what Mom and Dad will say.

## **Justin Case: School, Drool, and Other Daily Disasters** by Rachel Vail

His name is Justin Krzeszewski. Not so easy to pronounce. So he's called Justin K. Until some kids give him a nickname: Justin Case. He doesn't like that name, but it suits him. He's a kid who worries – all the time – about everything.

Spend third grade with Justin in this day-by-day chronicle: from the disappointment of not getting the teacher he wants – the one all his friends have -- to the stress of Saturdays at soccer (in Fall) and baseball (in Spring), to wanting a dog, getting the dog, and then being afraid of the dog, to losing his favorite stuffed toy (even though he's too old for stuffed animals). Justin tells it all in his own honest, vulnerable, funny voice. Lucky readers will feel they've made a real friend.

## **Grades 4 – 8:**

### **The Lost Songs** by Caroline B. Cooney

For the first time in her life, sixteen-year-old Lutie Painter decides to cut school. She's received a phone call that she can't tell her aunt and uncle about, and the only thing she can do is take the bus to the very wrong part of town where danger may be awaiting her. A few blocks away, Train Green burns with anger. He's trying hard to live up the reputation of his criminal brother, but it's not as easy as he thought it would be. In the nicer section of town, Kelvin Hartley gets ready for a typical day at school, where he considers everyone his friend, and rarely tries any harder than absolutely necessary to get things done. Doria Bell, who has just moved to South Carolina from Connecticut, waits by the bus stop hoping that today will be the day that one of her classmates will finally notice her. These four lives intertwine in unexpected ways as Lutie explores her family ties, and her connection to a batch of gospel songs called the Laundry List that were passed down to her by her great-great grandmother. The songs are an important piece of American history, and represent faith and hope to those in need. Changes are in store for Lutie, Train, Kelvin, and Doria, as their paths cross and merge in ways they never could have imagined.

### **Playground** by 50 Cents

Thirteen-year old Butterball has it rough. His parents are divorced, and his mom has moved him out of the city he loves into a Long Island suburb. He misses his dad--and hates his mom's new "friend", Evelyn, who always seems to be hanging around. To make matters worse, he is forced to go talk to some therapist named Liz. Liz tries to get to the bottom of an incident that led Butterball into therapy, and another kid into the hospital. While Butterball refuses to participate in therapy, eventually, readers begin to understand what made him the bully he is today. Somewhat inspired by hip hop artist 50 Cent's own childhood, and written with his own eighth grader in mind, *Playground* is a story of redemption, understanding, and hope.

# Robin's Reading List



## **Diary of a Wimpy Kid** by Jeff Kinney

In this first book in the *Wimpy Kid* series, underweight, immature Greg enters middle school and struggles to fit in with his peers. In his quest for popularity, he finds plenty of mischief, embarrasses himself in front of pretty girls, and gets caught by the school bullies. When Greg and his friend, Rowley, get into a fight, he realizes that friendship is more important than popularity.

## **Elijah of Buxton** by Christopher Paul Curtis

It's 1860 and eleven-year-old Elijah is the first freeborn child in Buxton, a small settlement of runaway slaves in Canada. A fearful and sensitive boy, Elijah knows little of slavery or what his parents have had to endure. That all changes when he bravely joins his friend in pursuit of the town's corrupt and colorful preacher, who has stolen money meant to buy freedom for a family of slaves. This adventure, both hilarious and heart-breaking, takes the friends across the border to America, where slavery has not yet been abolished.

## **Al Capone Shines My Shoes** by Gennifer Choldenko

In this sequel to the award winning *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, twelve-year-old Moose continues to live on Alcatraz Island with his family, a handful of friends, and no shortage of famous inmates. When he is not playing baseball with his friend Annie, Moose explores the island and interacts with its inhabitants, most notably the Warden's beautiful but mean daughter, Piper. Moose suspects that Al Capone has pulled some strings from behind his bars to get Moose's autistic sister Natalie into a special school in San Francisco. Now it looks like Capone wants payback. Moose would do anything to help his sister, but how far should he go to repay a debt, especially when the debtor is the most famous criminal in the world?

## **Grades 9 – 12:**

## **Notes From the Midnight Driver** by Jordan Sonnenblick

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," sixteen-year-old Alex states in the first sentence of his retrospective narrative. Furious about his parents' separation and recent divorce, and especially at his father who is dating Alex's former third grade teacher, the teen describes his original idea to drive to his dad's house and confront him. "The plan had a certain elegant simplicity, too. I would drink one more pint of Dad's old vodka, grab Mom's spare car keys, jump into the Dodge, and fire that sucker up." Unfortunately, never having gotten drunk before, Alex didn't realize how difficult it would be to drive. The next thing he knew, he had crashed his mother's car on a neighbor's front lawn, decapitating a lawn gnome, and thrown up all over the well-polished shoes of the responding police officer. After being arrested and booked at the police station for drunk driving, he wakes up in the hospital, his parents arguing by his bedside, an IV in his arm, with alcohol poisoning, a concussion, and stitches in his forehead. In court, the judge sentences him to 100 hours of community service, ten hours a week, volunteering at the Egbert P. Johnson Memorial Home for the Aged. He is assigned to work with Mr. Solomon Lewis, a cantankerous, acerbic old guy with emphysema, who insults Alex in something called "Yiddish," yet, Mr. Lewis barks, "Sit up in that chair, you little *pisher* . . . My last volunteer was such *aschmendrick*, he needed Velcro shirts because he couldn't do buttons . . . In the meantime, why are you here irritating defenseless old men when you should be in school, learning to hold a pencil or something?" Flummoxed, Alex writes a letter to Judge Trent, explaining that Mr. Lewis is abusive, and suggests, "The home should replace me with a psychiatrist/linguist/paramedic/saint, and the court should find me a new assignment that will be less traumatic for my sensitive adolescent mind." The judge is amused but unmoved. How Alex learns to relate to Sol, becomes a better guitarist, reconciles with his dad, and becomes more than pals with his best (and only) friend, Laurie Flynn, is recounted in Alex's breezy, sometimes self-aware, sometimes clueless, fast-moving narrative that will keep readers chortling.

## **Lie** by Caroline Bock

This novel is a smart, topical story about a racially motivated hate crime, its far-ranging consequences, and the community determined to keep it under wraps. Skylar Thompson, a sensitive and complex loner, is deeply reliant on her boyfriend, Jimmy Seeger, a cocky, clean-cut jock. Shortly before their high school graduation, Jimmy and his best friend Sean are arrested for the vicious beating of Arturo Cortez, a young El Salvadoran mason, who subsequently dies of his injuries. Charismatic but cruel, Jimmy has been leading a gang that goes "beaner-hopping" on Saturday nights, assaulting Latinos for sick thrills. Skylar, who witnessed Jimmy's unprovoked attack on Arturo, suffers a crisis of conscience over whether to cover for her boyfriend; the lies Skylar and others are pressured to tell cut through the town like the Long Island Expressway the title plays on. Avoiding preachiness, Bock handles the novel's multiple viewpoints exceptionally well, rotating among the painfully believable voices of high school students and adults. Her characters may keep the truth inside, but their story reads like a confessional.

# Robin's Reading List

**Chew on This: Everything You Don't Want to Know About Fast Food** by Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson

Some teens may not want to read this book, as it might make them regret ever visiting their favorite burger joint! This version of Schlosser's famous Fast Food Nation published for teens reveals the myriad ways the fast food industries take advantage of consumers, particularly children and teens, whose lifestyles and pocketbooks lead them to poor eating habits. These habits have lifetime repercussions. From Coca Cola infiltration of small Alaskan villages where dental care is scarce to fast food chains' predatory locations near schools, the hazards of fast food and a sedentary lifestyle are well documented. Photographs compare healthy bodies to unhealthy bodies, with poor eating habits blamed on the difference. The living conditions of animals that become fast food are examined, as is the use of artificial ingredients that may add flavor but may also add health risks. Without being excessively preachy, Schlosser allows the facts and numbers to speak for themselves.

