



# Booktalks and Discussion Questions

2011-2012 Georgia Peach Book Award Nominees

## ***Almost Perfect* by Brian Katcher**

Sage Hendricks isn't like any other girl I've ever known. She's maybe six feet tall, wears a curly crown of rust-colored hair, is covered up in freckles, has little smile-lines radiating out from the corners of her green eyes. She's cute, not centerfold-beautiful. Her voice is deep but sexy, in a 1-900 way. She laughs a lot, and she's loud. Which, OK, maybe you're thinking, "So what? Logan, you must not know many girls if this is all it takes to set one apart from the crowd." So, I'll continue.

She dresses weird: Some of her stuff seems homemade, and the first time I saw her, she was wearing a *beret*. In *Missouri*. And this is going to sound egotistical, but she is very into me, and the feeling is mutual. She's one of the few people I want to trust, and she trusts me. Yet, from the moment Sage and I met, there seemed to be something pulling us together at the same time that it was pushing us apart.

Sage Hendricks isn't like any other girl I've ever known. You really want to know why? Not one minute after the first time we kissed, you know what she told me?

That she's not a girl.

That she's a boy.

And me? I'm confused.

## Discussion Questions

- 1) The Logan at the beginning of the novel is different from the Logan at the end of the novel. In what ways did he grow as the novel progressed?
- 2) Was it dishonest of Sage to delay telling Logan her secret until after they kissed? Also, if you were in Logan's position, how do you think you would have reacted?
- 3) Very early in the novel, Logan says that everyone has one line they will never cross – one thing they will never do – and that Sage Hendricks was his line. In what sense was Sage his line?
- 4) By the end of the novel, Logan considers Sage to be a girl, not a boy. What do you consider Sage to be, and why?

5) Logan ends his story by saying that the next girl in his life will have a hard time measuring up to Sage. What does he mean by this?

### ***Beautiful Creatures* by Kami Garcia & Margaret Stohl**

Ethan Wate is your average teen stuck in a small Georgia town, counting the days until he can escape to a place where everyone doesn't know his name. That is until he meets Lena, a beautiful girl who not only makes him question his desire to leave Gatlin but everything he believes is real. As their relationship begins to grow so does the danger that surrounds them. Will Ethan and Lena survive her family curse or will they find a new path, one that defies everything that has come before? In *Beautiful Creatures* we learn that love can stretch for generations and sometimes it takes the future to change the past.

Discussion Questions (from [www.beautifulcreaturesthebook.com](http://www.beautifulcreaturesthebook.com))

1. A quote from Martin Luther King Jr. appears on the page preceding the first chapter. How do you see his statement connecting to this story?
2. Why did Ethan want to leave Gatlin? Can you relate to his feelings?
3. Was Lena's disciplinary meeting fair? Explain. Why did the meeting happen? What did Marian Ashcroft mean when she quoted Martin Luther King Jr. during the meeting: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to Justice everywhere" (p.401)? Marian also quoted Voltaire: "It is difficult to free fools from chains they revere" (p. 401). What does the quote have to do with this story?
4. What do you think happened to Ethan's mother? What makes you think this?
5. Is Macon good or evil? Ethan says that Macon Ravenwood doesn't do anything to help Lena (p. 446). Do you agree? Is Ridley good or evil? What makes someone evil?
6. Were Ethan and Lena in charge of their own fate? Do you believe that people are in control of their destinies or not? Explain.

### ***Birthmarked* by Caragh M. O'Brien**

"Those marked with a code will determine the future. One marred by a scar will unravel the past." Along the dried banks of Unlake Michigan in a poor shanty town just outside the walled, wealthy Enclave lives Gaia Stone. Gaia, sixteen and scarred by a burn suffered as a small child, is training to follow in her mother's footsteps as a midwife. As such, the first three babies born every month are tattooed with freckles and delivered to the gates of the Enclave. Until one faithful day, when Gaia comes home to find a guard from the Enclave waiting for her and discovers her parents have been arrested for crimes against the government. Gaia must figure out where she stands and what she believes in in a world she never knew she existed as she struggles to save her family, faces ugly truths and lessons, discovers the power of friendship and love and starts a revolution.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What do you think of the concept of advancing babies? Would you be able to give up your baby if it was required by the government? How would you feel about having to do this?
- 2) Why does the government require babies to be advanced? Do you feel this is right or wrong?
- 3) What impact does Gaia's scar have on her development as an individual? Is it a hindrance or a blessing? What do you think of she became scarred and the story her parents told her about how she was burned?
- 4) Communicating in code is often necessary when relaying sensitive information. Is this the case in the book? Was communicating in code necessary or significant? Were you able to decipher the code? If so, how did you do it?
- 5) The author seems to have carefully chosen the names of many of the characters in the book. What does Gaia mean? Why do you think she named the main character this? What about some of the other names - Sergeant Grey, Masister Kohl, Orion, etc.?

- 6) What is the significance of the “freckles” that Gaia’s mother tattoos on the babies they birth?
- 7) What do you think of the TVAltar? What do you think the author is saying about today’s society?
- 8) Why are the women in prison? Is their imprisonment justified? What does Gaia learn from these women?
- 9) What is the basis of Gaia’s relationship with Sergeant Grey? Why does he help Gaia?
- 10) Gaia asks Sergeant Grey, “If you are really so superior and civilized, shouldn’t you feel an obligation to be even more generous and compassionate to us.” What do you think of what Gaia asks? Do you agree with her thoughts? Why?
- 11) What fears must Gaia face? Do you think she overcomes her fears? Explain your answer.

See also <http://montycores.wikispaces.com/Birthmarked> for more discussion questions.

### **Black Hole Sun by David Macinnis Gill**

Take one evil queen, a race of bloodthirsty and cannibalistic Draeu, and a group of provincial miners and their families. Send in a band of mercenaries to protect the miners: sixteen-year-old Durango, who’s as quick on the draw as he is with his piercing wit; his loyal lieutenant (and would-be love interest, perhaps, if they could stop shooting up bad guys long enough to admit their mutual attraction), Vienne; and several not-so-reliable subordinates. Pair Durango with the clever, wise, and oh-so-sarcastic Mimi, formerly his boss and now a nano-implant in his brain. Put them all on a Mars that has become the Earth’s planetary garbage heap. Sprinkle liberally with flying shrapnel, explosive detonations, bone-crunching fistfights, betrayals, rescues, desperate gunfights, witty rocket-paced repartee, and a few gallons of blood. Top it off with a hint that a sequel may be in the offing—and what have you got?

1. Durango is something of a reluctant hero, preferring to remain an anonymous Regulator, rather than drawing attention to himself. What does this trait say about his ability to act as Chief to his Regulators and as leader of the miners? Why do you think he decided to accept the job to fight the Draeu? What does this decision reveal about his character?
2. At the end of Chapter Three, Durango says that he “was born to become the lord and sovereign of Mars.” What expectations does Durango’s father, John Stringfellow, have for him? What steps did his father take to help his son meet his “destiny,” and how does Durango feel about them? How does his relationship with his father change how Durango makes decisions?
3. When Durango says that he listens to his “little voice,” he means it. How was Mimi, the artificial intelligence that controls his body armor, embedded in his brain? Who was Mimi in real life? Why was the relationship that Durango had with the real Mimi important to his acceptance of the AI?
4. It could be said that Ockham is an older, battle-weary version of Durango. Other than a missing eye, what traits do they share? What are the key differences in their personalities? What lessons does Durango learn—intentionally and unintentionally—from Ockham’s behavior and philosophy?
5. The Durango at the end of *Black Hole Sun* is different from the Durango at the beginning. In what ways does he change as a character? Do you think that he grows or regresses? Why? How do you think you would behave if you were put in his position? Explain.
6. Regulators are governed by a set of guiding principles called the Tenets. How do the main characters feel about the Tenets? Are there any unwritten rules that you follow in your life? Why do you think that Regulators are known only by nicknames and not their given names?

See also Harper Collins discussion guide: <http://files.harpercollins.com/PDF/TeachingGuides/0061673048.pdf>

## **Bruiser by Neil Shusterman**

Bruiser, the guy voted Most Likely to Get the Death Penalty, is dating Tennyson's twin sister, Bronte. The 16 year-old twins plus Bruiser and his little brother all take turns telling this thought-provoking story of a misunderstood loner with the special power of taking on the pain of others, both physical and emotional. Will this power turn out to be a gift or a curse? How will these four deal with this phenomenon? What affect will it have for their relationships? And more important will they be able to survive the unforeseen consequences?

Discussion Questions:

1. Give a brief description of a time you wanted to take away someone's pain. What do you think would have been the consequences? What were some of the consequences for each of the characters?
2. How do you think the family relationships help to move the story along? How did Bruiser and Cody's relationship with their uncle differ from the twins' relationship with their parents?
3. How do the different writing styles signify the voices of each character? Why do you think the author used free verse for Bruiser's chapters?
4. Which character could you most identify with as the story unfolds and why?
5. What do you think the characters of this book will be doing in five years?

## **Dirty Little Secrets by C.J. Omololu**

*From the author's website:* Everyone has secrets. Some are just bigger and dirtier than others.

For sixteen years, Lucy has kept her mother's hoarding a secret. She's had to—nobody would understand the stacks of newspapers and mounds of garbage so high they touch the ceiling and the rotting smell that she's always worried would follow her out the house. After years of keeping people at a distance, she finally has a best friend and maybe even a boyfriend if she can play it right. As long as she can make them think she's normal.

When Lucy arrives home from a sleepover to find her mother dead under a stack of National Geographics, she starts to dial 911 in a panic, but pauses before she can connect. She barely notices the filth and trash anymore, but she knows the paramedics will. First the fire trucks, and then news cameras that will surely follow. No longer will they be remembered as the nice oncology nurse with the lovely children—they'll turn into that garbage-hoarding freak family on Collier Avenue.

With a normal life finally within reach, Lucy has only minutes to make a critical decision. How far will she go to keep the family secrets safe?

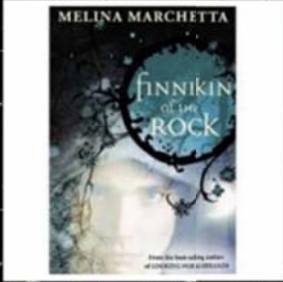

Discussion Questions:

What would you do in this situation?




Do you know anyone who is a hoarder?

There are popular reality shows about hoarding. Do these help or hurt the families?

## **Finnikin of the Rock by Melina Marchetta**



These are dark times. The royal family has been murdered! An imposter king has taken over and the land of Lumatere is under a curse that closes the borders and traps all those who did not flee during the days of the unspeakable. Ten years pass and Finnikin is focused on documenting the lives and deaths of the exiles from his homeland. But once he meets Evangeline, a young girl with an extraordinary gift, Finnikin starts to believe that he and the exiles can return to Lumatere and dispel the darkness that covers the land.



Discussion Questions from the Candlewick Press Discussion Guide:

1. What are the boyhood pledges that Balthazar, Finnikin, and Lucian make to one another? How does each fulfill his pledge?
2. During their years of exile, Sir Tophier and Finnikin “always had a plan. Never a dream” (page 26). Why didn’t they allow themselves dreams?
3. What is the *Book of Lumatere*? Why does Finnikin keep it so carefully? What does Evanjalin think of the project?
4. “There is no more ideal a prisoner,” Evanjalin says to Trevanion, “than one who is locked up in his own prison” (page 74). What is Trevanion’s inner prison? Why is imprisoning Finnikin the surest way to set his father free?
5. When Finnikin’s mother dies in childbirth, Trevanion places his newborn son under the care of Perri the Savage, a man who fully earned his nickname. Why does Trevanion choose Perri for this job?

## **Five Flavors of Dumb by Antony John**

The Challenge:

Piper has one month to get a paying gig for Dumb—the hottest new rock band in school.

The Deal:

If she does it, she’ll become manager of the band and get her share of the profits, which she desperately needs since her parents raided her college fund.

The Catch:

Managing one egomaniacal pretty boy, one talentless piece of eye candy, one crush, one silent rocker, and one angry girl who is ready to beat her up. And doing it all when she’s deaf. With growing self-confidence, an unexpected

romance, and a new understanding of her family's decision to buy a cochlear implant for her deaf baby sister, Piper just may discover her own inner rock star.

Discussion Questions:

Why did her parents raid the college fund? Was that fair?

Did this novel make you look differently at deafness?

How does Piper feel about her sister's condition? Is she angry with her parent's decision?

### ***Food, Girls, and Other Things I Can't Have* by Allen Zadoff**



Discussion Questions:

1. How are overweight students treated at your school? Do you have any friends who are overweight? If not, why do you think none of your friends are overweight?
2. Students in the Model U.N. are not as popular as football players at Andy's school. Who are the popular students at your school? Who are the unpopular students? What do you think makes the difference between being popular and unpopular?
3. How does O. Douglas use Andy? How does Andy use O. Douglas?
4. In the end, who is the person Andy wants to be? Describe Andy in his junior year.

### ***God is in the Pancakes* by Robin Epstein**

Fifteen year old Grace Manning's life has been crazy lately... ever since her father left home without an explanation her Mom spends all of her time at work and her sister Lolly is always crabby. If things aren't

confusing enough for Grace she starts having romantic feelings for her best friend Eric. After school Grace works as a candy striper at Hanover House a nursing home for seniors where she meets Mr. Sands, an 84 year old patient with Lou Gehrig's disease. Mr. Sands teaches Grace to cheat at poker and Grace gives him a new hairdo - a Mohawk.

Grace stopped praying the day her father left home and she has almost forgotten how to talk to God until Mr. Sands asks her to help him die. Grace admits that she is rusty at the "prayer thing." Grace kneels and prays while the envelope with the pills Mr. Sands gave her lie hidden behind her... buried in her book bag.

What will Grace do? What would you do?

1. Mr. Sands who suffers from Lou Gehrig's disease gives Grace 20 pills and asks her to help him die. What would you do if someone like Mr. Sands asked you to help them die? Do people suffering from terminal illnesses have the right to die?
2. When Grace's Mom finds out that her husband left her and moved in with Nancy Falton the church's prayer leader she states that she has too much pride to ever let him come back. Grace is confused because pride can be considered one of the seven deadly sins. What is the difference between pride and dignity? Is having too much pride a good or bad thing?
3. While at the drug store Grace sees her sister's boyfriend kissing a girl who is not her sister. Should Grace tell her sister Lolly about this? Why or why not?
4. Grace prays and asks God why he gave Frank Sands a horrible disease. Why do you think bad things happen to good people? Do you think God controls things like this? Why or why not?
5. Where does the title come from and what do pancakes symbolize in the book? Describe a few scenes in the book where pancakes are discussed.

### **Hate List by Jennifer Brown**

What happens when they get to you at school? The bullies; you know what I mean. When she calls you "Sister Death" because you're quiet and wear torn jeans and black nail polish. When he smashes a giant soda into your windshield because you brought your girl to the same movie theater as the in crowd. When she shoves you, yanks the MP3 player buds out of your ear and smashes it, then taunts you.

*Hate. Punches in the chest. Nicknames. Laughs. Snide comments. Being shoved into the lockers when some idiot with an attitude walked by.*

How do you deal with it all? Val opened a red notebook.

*One day I was having a really crappy day and all I wanted to do was get back at everyone who was making it that way. So I got this idea that I would write down all their names in a notebook ... By the end of third period I had half a page filled out, things like Christy Bruter and Algebra—you can't add letters and numbers together!!! and Hairspray. ...I [wrote] Mom and Dad's marriage problems in the notebook. That was an important one. I wrote it four more times.*

*I could feel [Nick] looking over my shoulder. "What's that?" he finally asked, kind of laughing.*

*"It's my Hate List," I answered, without even thinking.*

*Nick lived on one of the few low-income streets that dotted the outsides of the city like boundary lines. His clothes were ratty, sometimes too big, and never stylish. He was skinny and looked like a brooder.*

Right away [Val] was drawn to him. Neither one of them is part of the "in crowd," and neither of them wants to be. They talk about anything. They share concerts, clothes, Nick's love of Shakespeare, Val's notebook. Nick tells Val they are like Romeo and Juliet: "It's good that we have each other. It's like, you know, even if the whole world hates you, you still have someone to rely on. Just the two of you against the whole world. Just us."

Then one morning:

*I woke up in the hospital. There were police in my room and the TV was turned on to a crime scene. ... “Mom,” I said. ... “What happened?”*

*A nurse in pink scrubs fluttering around behind Mom moved to a little table and picked up a plastic cup with a straw hanging over the side of it. ... Mom ... looked over her shoulder at one of the police officers. ...*

*“You were shot.” ... “Nick Levil shot you.”*

*I frowned. Nick Levil shot me. “But that’s my boyfriend’s name,” I said.*

It’s only later that Val remembers what happened that day, remembers the moment when she realized that the private venting she put down on paper had turned into something explosive and much, much more public. The day she became “The Girl Who Hates Everyone.”

When you read a synopsis of *Hate List*, what you’ll remember is that it’s about a school shooting. But it’s also about the aftermath. It’s about what violence—from taunting and bullying to the ultimate violence—does to the students. Especially, what it does to a student who was close to the shooter. *Hate List* explores anger, fear, hope, depression, compassion, courage, grief, and guilt as Val tries to rebuild her life and find her place in after the tragedy. It’s also about the pain, anguish and awkwardness of the first steps toward healing.

#### Discussion Questions for *Hate List*

Why do you think Val and Nick became friends? What did they see in each other?

The students at Garvin High were no strangers to bullying, teasing and other forms of violence. How did Nick and Val’s reactions to bullying differ, over time?

Several characters in *Hate List* are consumed by guilt after the shootings. Name some of them, with their reason(s) for feeling guilty. How do they deal with their guilt? Do they handle it successfully?

What actions, activities, and/or decisions help Val heal from her experiences?

The students working on a memorial argue about which names should be included. What do they decide? Do you agree with their decision? Why or why not?

#### **Jane by April Lindner**

*From the author’s website:*

Forced to drop out of an esteemed East Coast college after the sudden death of her parents, Jane Moore takes a nanny job at Thornfield Park, the estate of Nico Rathburn, a world-famous rock star on the brink of a huge comeback. Practical and independent, Jane reluctantly becomes entranced by her magnetic and brooding employer and finds herself in the midst of a forbidden romance. But there’s a mystery at Thornfield, and Jane’s much-envied relationship with Nico is soon tested by an agonizing secret from his past. Torn between her feelings for Nico and his fateful secret, Jane must decide: Does being true to herself mean giving up on true love? An irresistible romance interwoven with a darkly engrossing mystery, this contemporary retelling of the beloved classic *Jane Eyre* promises to enchant a new generation of readers.

#### Discussion Questions:

*Jane* is based on the classic novel *Jane Eyre*. How are the two books similar? How are they different?

Is the relationship between Jane and Nico believable?



## **Lockdown: Escape from Furnace by Alexander Gordon Smith**

"Beneath heaven is hell. Beneath hell is Furnace." That's 14-year-old Alex's description of the underground prison a mile below the surface of the earth where he and other teen boys are incarcerated for life. Alex is caught by strange silver-eyed men as he and a buddy are in the midst of a house burglary. Resigned to jail time, Alex is shocked when he's framed by these ghostly black-suited figures who pull guns and murder his pal right in front of him. Pleas of innocence are ignored and Alex lands in Furnace. Gangs bully everyone, the food is disgusting slop, bizarre guard dogs tear inmates apart, and boys are arbitrarily dragged away late at night and return as killing automatons. When all seems lost, Alex and his savvy cellmate devise an escape plan. Last minute calamities bring the plan to the brink of disaster, and a cliffhanger ending definitely carries listeners to the next installment. Discussions about the consequence of bad choices, loyalty between friends, and prison life are among the topics that spring from this story, but male audiences will find the fast-paced survival saga most appealing. — *from School Library Journal*

### Discussion Questions

1. What did Alex buy for himself on his 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> birthday? A new bike and a top of the line computer pg. 10
2. What did the piece of graffiti say that was carved into the platform when Alex was running from the police? Keep running Alex pg.29
3. What does the guard holding the dogs say is the difference between life and death at Furnace? Obedience pg.57
4. How did Donovan save Alex and Zee from the hell hounds? He kept it open by using the toilet seat as a prop pg.110
5. When Gary took over the Skulls by defeating their leader, he appeared to be a "savior". What did he turn out to be? A psychopath pg. 169

## **The Maze Runner by James Dashner**

Thomas wakes up alone in the dark. He doesn't know where he is or how he got there. He only remembers his name. As he blindly searches the room he realizes there is no door or windows. He is in a box and then it starts to move. He feels himself being lifted up and as he looks at the ceiling he realizes there is a small dot of light. The dot slowly grows bigger and bigger until the box comes to a stop. A rope is lowered down to Thomas and he gets lifted into a new world. A world filled with danger, mystery and only boys until one day a girl arrives and then everything changes...but not necessarily for the better.

### Discussion Questions

1. What would your first instincts be if you woke up without a memory in a strange place?
2. Thomas and Teresa have a special link that they keep hidden from the others. Do you think this was a smart thing to do? Would you share a special ability in this situation?
3. When Teresa shows up everyone blames Thomas for things that go wrong or are different. Why do they do this? Do you think it is fair? How would you react to this if you were Thomas?
4. Do you think they should have solved the maze? What do you think will happen in the next book?

## **The Morgue and Me by John C. Ford**

[The Morgue and Me](#) begins: "When you're eighteen years old and you shoot somebody in a public place at two in the morning, of course you expect some attention. Especially when it's the person I shot, and especially when you're found right there on the scene with that person at your feet, gasping away in a pool of blood that seeps around your shoes. Still, I find it really embarrassing."

Christopher just needed a job to kill time the summer after high school graduation. He didn't expect it to be in the morgue. Or that he would accidentally discover a murder cover-up.

Or that his discovery would lead him to a full-blown investigation involving bribery, kidnappings, more murders . . . and his best friend. And he certainly could never have predicted that Tina—loud, insanely hot, ambitious newspaper reporter Tina—would be his partner. But all of that did happen. And Christopher's life will never be the same (*from the author's website*).

Discussion Questions:

1. What was unique about the setting of *The Morgue and Me*, and how did it enhance or take away from the mystery?
2. What specific themes did the author emphasize throughout the novel? What do you think he is trying to get across to the reader?
3. Do the characters seem real and believable? Can you relate to their predicaments? To what extent do they remind you of yourself or someone you know?
4. How does Christopher change or evolve throughout the course of the story? What events trigger such changes?
5. Did any parts of *The Morgue and Me* make you uncomfortable? If so, why did you feel that way? Did this lead to a new understanding or awareness of some aspect of your life you might not have thought about before?

### ***Nightshade* by Andrea Cremer**

*From the publisher's website:* Calla Tor has always known her destiny: After graduating from the Mountain School, she'll be the mate of sexy alpha wolf Ren Laroche and fight with him, side by side, ruling their pack and guarding sacred sites for the Keepers. But when she violates her masters' laws by saving a beautiful human boy out for a hike, Calla begins to question her fate, her existence, and the very essence of the world she has known. By following her heart, she might lose everything—including her own life. Is forbidden love worth the ultimate sacrifice?

Discussion Questions:

How does Calla Tor feel about her destiny? Does she resent having her whole life mapped out for her?

Why does Calla risk everything by helping Shay?

Who would be a better mate for Calla? Ren or Shay?

### ***Shift* by Jennifer Bradbury**

When Chris Collins and Winston Coggans take off on a post-graduation cross-country bike trek, Chris's hopes are high. He's looking forward to seeing the country, dodging a dull summer at a minimum wage job, and having one final adventure with his oldest friend. The journey from Hurricane, West Virginia to the coast of Washington state delivers all those things... and more.

So much more that when Chris returns home without Win at the end of the summer, he's certain their 10 year friendship is all but over. But when an FBI agent begins asking questions—and raising suspicions about Chris—he learns that saying goodbye to a friend like Win is never as simple as riding away. *Shift* offers an adventure story and a missing person's tale spinning around a single question: What happens when you outgrow your best friend? (*from the author's website*)

Discussion Questions:

1. *Shift* uses chapters alternating between flashbacks and current action. How does this structure allow readers to see the changes the trip brought about in Chris? In Win?
2. How do the events in the flashbacks complement the action in the present day chapters? Vice versa?

3. Chris and Win are in large part defined by their relationships with their fathers. Compare and contrast the two men and their influences on their sons.
4. Chris and Win encounter a number of adventures and strange moments out on the road. Pick a favorite and discuss how it contributes to what you think is one of the books themes.
5. After being friends for years, Chris and Win experience a dramatic change in that friendship that leads Chris to some startling realizations about what it means to discover who he truly is. Have you had experiences where you held on too long to a friendship or relationship without meaning to?

### **Ship Breaker by Paolo Bacigalupi**

*From the publisher's Educator Guide:* In a desperate world centuries after climatic disasters forever altered Earth's physical landscape and the human communities that shaped it, young Nailer Lopez and his comrades on the light crew eke out an existence stripping wire and fittings from the decaying hulks of cargo and oil tankers beached on the American Gulf Coast. Fearful of his murderous father and an uncertain future, Nailer dreams of finding a "Lucky Strike" that will allow him to escape Bright Sands Beach to the open ocean on one of the swift clippers that haul cargo to ports around the world. The course of Nailer's life changes when a hurricane beaches the wreck of a clipper, and he finds the wealthy daughter of one of the world's great shipping magnates. In order to capitalize on his Lucky Strike, he alternatively relies upon and jeopardizes his own strength and wits, his ability to trust friends and strangers, and the benevolence of the Fates. From the toxic wreck yards of the Gulf Coast, to the ramshackle slums of the port of the Orleans, to the towering waves of the high seas, Nailer and his friends struggle to preserve their lives, their humanity, and the true meaning of family.

#### Discussion Questions

- Compare & contrast the importance of interpersonal relationships and property for Nailer, Pima, Richard, and the people of Bright Sands Beach to that for Nita Choudhury, Pyce, Lawson & Carlson, and the "swanks".
- Using the phrase, "In this story, loyalty means...", discuss the issue of loyalty in *Ship Breaker*. Explain your choices.
- Discuss the role that religion plays in the lives of the characters: is it a source of hope? Of meaning for life? For some level of salvation? Of understanding their world better? Explain your responses.
- Compare the parent/child relationships in the story: Nailer and Richard, Pima and Sadna, Nita and her father, Moon Girl and her mother, Pearly and his parents. To what extent are the relationships of these characters shaped by the world around them? To what extent do their relationships shape that world?
- "But perhaps you will benefit from my wisdom," Tool tells Nailer in an effort to convince him that the half-man will be a good asset as he and Nita make a run for the Orleans. Discuss Tool's role in the story within the context of this quote. To what extent does it apply to the other half-men, such as Knot, Vine, or those hunting Nailer and Nita in the Orleans?
- The story takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where climate change has completely altered the processes of civilization. Discuss the importance of the setting to the events of the story.
- Sadna opens the last chapter of the book by reminding Nailer that "killing always costs." Elaborate on this quote for characters such as Nailer, Sloth, Richard Lopez, Sadna, Lucky Strike, and Tool.

### **Split by Swati Avasthi**

Nineteen hours after sixteen year old Jace Witherspoon flees Chicago and arrives in Albuquerque he begins to wonder if the brother he hasn't seen in five years will be there when he knocks on the door. Jace is running out of options... he has \$3.84 in his pocket, a face that is bruised and battered and a devastating secret. Jace wants to forget the past and move on . . . but the past haunts him with relentless fury. What will Jace do to survive and reclaim his life?

## Discussion Questions

1. When Jace arrives at his brother's house after not seeing him for five years how is he received? Were you surprised at the way that Christian acted? Why or why not?
2. When did the violence begin in the Witherspoon home?
3. How did Christian escape the Witherspoon home? When Christian left home what happened to Jace?
4. Although Jace tries to re-create his life in Albuquerque what holds him back?
5. Why does Jace encourage his former girlfriend to press charges against him? What does Jace's father do once he finds out that there is a warrant out for Jace's arrest?
6. Describe something positive that Christian does to deal with his stress and anger? How does Jace manage his anger?
7. What would you do if a friend or sibling was in an abusive relationship?

## ***The Things a Brother Knows* by Dana Reinhardt**

Levi's older brother, Boaz, has returned from a three year stint serving overseas as a U.S. Marine. Boaz was a high school star who gave up college and a hot girlfriend to fight in faraway war. Levi is hoping for some normalcy now that Boaz is back, but soon learns that something is terribly wrong. Levi tries to cope with understanding why Boaz has become a recluse who seldom speaks and refuses to come out of his room even to speak with his former girlfriend. Levi has fumbled his way through high school with the help of his two best friends, Pearl and Zim, but now it is up to him to figure out how to help his brother. Then Boaz takes off again, and this time Levi forces himself to follow, determined to understand what has happened to his brother and to try to return things back to normal. Accompany these two brothers on a far-reaching adventure as they take a long hike towards finally discovering what each other has become.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Boaz decided to join the marines even though he could have gone to prestigious college and lived what seemed like a charmed life?
2. How did the brothers' high school careers differ? How was each of the brothers viewed by their peers? Teachers? Parents?
3. How does the interaction between Levi and his best friends affect his relationship with his brother?
4. What are the different reactions towards Boaz's problems? How could they have been handled differently?
5. Where do you think these characters will be in five years? How do you think Boaz's experiences will have impacted each of them?