

BOOKS TO GROW WITH NEWSLETTER: SEPTEMBER 2005

EDITOR'S NOTE

Because Hurricane Katrina – and its tragic aftermath – is on all of our minds, recommended books focus on natural disasters, especially hurricanes and storms. Please see my recommendations online at the Lutra Press website at <http://www.lutrapress.com/idea/>.

INTERVIEW

In this month's *Books to Grow With Newsletter*, I interview Lauren Myracle, the author of several popular middle-grade fiction books...and a believer herself in the power of books. Lauren just happened to write the seminal article on the history of bibliotherapy while she was a graduate student.

INTERVIEW WITH LAUREN MYRACLE

Introduction:

Lauren charmed readers across the nation with her tale of sexual identity, *Kissing Kate*, a funny, honest and poignant story. She followed it with *Eleven*, an authentic account of the lives of adolescent girls, including both ordinary and more challenging experiences. Her next book, *ttyl (Talk to You Later)*, is a story built entirely around IM (instant messaging) messages between three high school girls. Stepping a bit away from her previous books Myracle's *Rhymes with Witches* is both a lighter-hearted and a scary story that posits that the popular girls really are Witches.

Myracle's latest book, just released, is *The Fashion Disaster that Changed My Life*, a book that focuses on the pains and growing experiences of seventh-grade girls.

Cheryl: Hello Lauren, and welcome to the *Books to Grow With* newsletter. I'd like to start by focusing on your most recent book, *The Fashion Disaster that Changed My Life*, which I look forward to recommending in my sequel to *Books to Grow With*. Tell us about the plot.

Lauren: Well hey there, Cheryl! I'd love to tell you about *The Fashion Disaster that Changed My Life*. It's about a girl named Alli, who's always considered herself mousy and shy, but who has determined that in her 7th grade year she will no longer be invisible. But on the first day of 7th grade, she arrives late and has to go to the front of the room to pick up some handouts. Everyone starts snickering, and she gets a sinking feeling in her stomach. "What is it?" she asks. "What's so funny?" Finally, she realizes that a pair of her mom's underwear—big ol' granny panties—are stuck to the back of her pants by static cling. She's mortified. It's horrible. She's no longer invisible, but not in the way she planned.

Cheryl: How do you come up with such realistic dialogue in your books? I felt as though I knew some of these girls when I was reading the books.

Lauren: Aw, thanks. You know, writing takes work, no doubt about it, but I do feel as if individual authors have specific talents, and for whatever reason, dialogue is something I

feel I do pretty well. And it comes pretty easily. I come from a musical family, so maybe it's connected to that? To having an ear, not for music, but for language? I also make a point of listening to teenagers talk, and I keep a list of funny and goofy expressions they use. Like "confoozybobbled," that's one I just ran across. It made me smile.

Cheryl: Along with being great stories, your books offer readers a window into issues that many adolescents experience, such as first love, best friends, popular girls, divorce, and being different. How do you see as the role of your books in reassuring and empowering kids?

Lauren: Again, thanks for saying that. You're a sweetie. I guess my crusade, if I have one, is to explore the everyday issues girls have and not downplay them. The issues you mentioned ARE important, even if some would dismiss them as fluffy. Books offer a safe way to explore new experiences, a safe place to try and figure out what kind of person you want to be. That's my goal for my novels.

Cheryl: In 1995, you wrote an article that remains the most comprehensive history of bibliotherapy, titled *Molding the Minds of the Young: The History of Bibliotherapy as Applied to Children and Adolescents*. How did you come to be interested in bibliotherapy? How did you come to write the article?

Lauren: Oh good heavens. You would be surprised at how many people ask me about that article! It kind of embarrasses me, because while I do care about the topic, it's not one I'm any sort of expert in. I wrote that article in grad school, when I was studying psychology. (I later switched to English. Big surprise!) I knew I wanted to write about books and kids—hence, I landed on the topic of bibliotherapy.

Cheryl: Are there topics you think deserve a good book that you hope to write?

Lauren: What a great question! I want to write about EVERYTHING. I want to write about adoption (my husband and I just adopted a beautiful little girl); I want to write about boys (and not just as the object of affection of girls); I want to write about spirituality. Bring it on!

Cheryl: Who were your favorite authors, when you were a child and a teenager?

Lauren: Beverly Cleary, Harper Lee, Flannery O'Connor. All strong and quirky women.

Cheryl: Your books provide such rich diversity of issues and of genres. Do teachers use them to work with children? Do you provide materials for teachers to assist them?

Lauren: I hope teachers use them, but I don't know. I think some teachers are wary of them, because they do in fact portray issues realistically. But I think my books would be great to use with teenagers, because so many teens have written to tell me that FINALLY, in my books, they've found something they enjoy reading. (There are many many great books out there, far better than mine, but I think, and this is a bit of a surprise to me, that I've somehow become an author who draws in reluctant readers. Who'd have thunk it?)

Cheryl: Lauren, you are incredibly productive! What's your next book?

Lauren: *TTFN (Ta Ta for Now)*, a sequel to *TTYL*. And then *TWELVE*, a sequel to *ELEVEN*.

Cheryl: Can't wait to read them! Lauren, thank you so much for the opportunity to talk with you.

Lauren: My pleasure! This was fun!

DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE

An expanded version of the Books to Grow With course will be available this winter for undergraduate and graduate credit from accredited universities throughout the United States. For more information, please contact me at cherylcoon@lutrpress.com.

CURRICULUM KITS

New this fall, these kits will be available for educators on selected topics. Each kit includes recommended books, tips for using the books, discussion questions, and follow-up activities. For more information, contact Abby for details at alotz@lutrpress.com

2005-06 UPDATES

Updates to all topics covered in *Books to Grow With: A Guide to Using the Best Children's Fiction for Everyday Issues and Tough Challenges*, as well as the addition of new topics and books, will be available in October!

Pre-order your update in any of the following formats:

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