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Review of Best Books for Middle School and Junior High Readers

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BEST BOOKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL AND JUNIOR HIGH READERS

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BEST BOOKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL AND JUNIOR HIGH READERS. John T. Gillespie and Catherine Barr. Westport, CT: *Libraries Unlimited*, 2004, 1172 pp., ISBN 1-59158-083-8.

John T. Gillespie has been writing about children's and young adult literature since the 1960s. The "Best Books for..." series is one of the best. This volume focuses on literature, both fiction and non-fiction for grades 6-9 or ages 11-16. According to the introduction, some of the titles are adult books for the older readers in this range, and there are also books that are below the 6th grade reading level to interest those at the lower end of the range. The introduction also says that this volume includes 14,196 titles. There is "slight duplication" with *Best Books for Children* and *Best Books for High School Readers* as there is overlap in the grade and interest levels of some of the selections. Some selections are included because they were included in earlier editions. No market series and no general reference titles are included. Inclusion in this volume usually requires two favorable reviews from the major children's review sources such as *Booklist*, *VOYA*, *School Library Journal*, and *Library Media Connections*. This volume focuses on books that were reviewed from September 1999 to January 2004.

The book is arranged topically with fiction first and then various non-fiction subjects follow. The Table of Contents lists these subjects in order of appearance, but there is also a listing of the major subjects arranged alphabetically. There are indexes at the end for author, title, and subject/grade level. Each entry includes author, title, grade level, publication date, publisher, price, ISBN, a brief synopsis, review citations, and Dewey Decimal classification number.

Librarians and media specialists will find this book extremely useful when working on several selection tasks: evaluating their collections, building new collections, providing reading guidance, and preparing bibliographies and reading lists. Teachers will also find *Best Books for Middle School and Junior High Readers* helpful as they work on lesson plans for curriculum integration.

In comparing this volume with Gillespie's earlier *Best Books for Young Teen Readers* which covers grades 7-10, I found that the table of contents were very similar. One important addition is for a section on graphic novels, a newer genre of interest to this age group. There is more detail in the categories for the section on historical fiction. I compared the entries for the category of sex education and sexual identity. There were 46 entries in the earlier edition and 43 in this new volume. Eighteen from the earlier edition are not included in the new work, but 16 others have been added, so just under half of the entries in the category are new. This shows that Gillespie is constantly revising to include the best of what is available and in print, not just expanding to add the newer titles.

In the fiction section, Gillespie has included some young adult classics like Freedman's *Mrs. Mike* and Beverly Cleary's novels from the 1950s and 1960s, but the majority are more contemporary. In the biography section dealing with sports figures, I was pleased to see quite a few new names and some of the ones in the basketball section are women.

This is a book that young adult, middle school, and junior high librarians will want in their professional collections, or maybe on their desk. Some librarians might want longer reviews or annotations, but the book could not include as many titles if longer annotations were included. With the review citation information given, those who want a longer review can easily find one. Highly recommended.

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