

## Librarians Telling Tales Podcast Transcript- Episode 14

### Quick Look Booklist: Middle Grade (MG)- Young Adult (YA)

- **Section 1: Reader's Advisory with Hidden Gems & Collection Management**
  - *Oksi* by Mari Ahokoivu (YA)
- **Section 2: Hidden Gems Pt. 1**
  - *Verona Comics* by Jennifer Dugan (YA)
  - *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
  - *Briarheart* by Mercedes Lackey (YA)
  - *The Screaming Staircase* by Jonathan Stroud (YA)
- **Section 3: Hidden Gems Pt. 2- Gems with Difficult Topics**
  - *How To Become a Planet* by Nicole Melleby (MG)
  - *Playing for the Commandant* by Suzy Zail (YA)
  - *Efrén Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros (MG)
  - *Each Tiny Spark* by Pablo Cartaya (MG)
  - *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls (MG)
  - *Old Yeller* by Fred Gipson (MG)
  - *The Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson (MG)
  - *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden* by Heather Smith (Picture)
  - *Ground Zero* by Alan Gratz (MG)
- **Section 4: Hidden Gems Pt. 3- Even more Gems!**
  - *The Great Mouse Detective* series by Eve Titus
  - *Sophie Mouse* series by Poppy Green
  - *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata
  - *Saucy* by Cynthia Kadohata
  - *Fake It Till You Break It* by Jenn P. Nguyen
  - *Kissing Booth* by Beth Reekles

### Transcript:

**Musical Intro:** "Uplifting 2463" by Twisterium from pixabay.com

*(Description) Upbeat, piano and percussion. Music fades and plays under.*

**Amy:** Hey Bookworms, welcome to Librarians Telling Tales, where we introduce you to all the things we love about libraries, books, people, and making connections. I'm Amy.

**Blair:** I'm Blair.

**Jennifer:** I'm Jennifer.

**(0:35) Music fades out**

**Blair:** In today's episode, we're going to chat about hidden gems—authors and books that get lost amongst the popular, but deserve a chance to be read and loved. Also, we're gonna talk about what happens when those book gems don't find a reader.

**Music Transition:** “Ascending-marimba-notification” by Alexander from Orangefreesounds.com

*(Description) Bright marimba scale.*

## **Section 1: Reader’s Advisory with Hidden Gems & Collection Management**

**Jennifer:** So let's just start off by saying we order a lot of books. We...

**Amy:** Yes, we do.

**Blair:** Yes.

**Jennifer:** We just, we're always looking at professional journals. We're reading review sites, we're listening to our patrons. <affirmative> And we order a lot of books. And some of those books just don't move. Right?

**Amy:** They don't find an audience, unfortunately.

**Blair:** It's tough, but it is true.

**Jennifer:** So what do we do when we are looking at these books that aren't moving? We have to make some decisions. <affirmative> And sometimes when I see those books that, that have not moved, I think: Oh my goodness, this is a beautiful book. It's a book I've read, and I feel like it needs to find a reader and I need to find someone. So we talk about those books and how we can rescue them.

**Amy:** Right! Give them a second chance, absolutely.

**Blair:** Well, and I think part of the reason it's so difficult these days is because when we had the pandemic, we were closed for part of that. And so much of the collection circulates better when you can see them, when you can hold them, when you can flip through the pages. So our circulation stats are a little bit different than they used to be and it's harder to decide what should stay and what should go. Because maybe it also only came out in 2020 or 2021. When did it have a chance? It's trying to find those books for me and rescue them and however I can match them with a reader.

**Amy:** Absolutely. I think too, I mean during the pandemic, but also just in my own reading life, like I have turned to my Kindle more just because I can load a whole bunch of books before I go on vacation and then read them. And so I'm not always checking out the physical item, which then that affects its circulation, right? So, it's statistics on how well it's circulating. If it checked out in the last couple of years, all of that might be skewed from the pandemic, from a lot of us using eBooks and eAudiobooks and things of that nature. So that does have an impact.

**Jennifer:** And another reason I think books don't always move is because our young readers get stuck in their genres. <affirmative> They love the Percy Jacksons and the Harry Potters and they love those worlds and they're hesitant to leave those worlds. <affirmative> And that makes it difficult for other books to have a chance. So, it's up to us to rescue those books and display them and talk them up with

our school groups, with many patrons that come through and visit our desk and ask us questions. <affirmative> To share with them those other books that aren't moving but are so worthy of being read.

**Amy:** Absolutely.

**Blair:** I just did that sneakily with a school group the other week. There was a really beautiful graphic novel that we ordered because it was an award winner, but it was translated from another language and it was Finnish folklore. The title is *Oksi* and I'm gonna butcher her last name. It is Mari Ahokoivu. Anyway, <laugh>, it's a really gorgeous, it's illustrated in a pastel style. The colors alternate between almost black and white and total vibrancy. And it wasn't getting attention. It wasn't getting any notice. It had not circulated hardly at all. And it's a pretty new book. But we had a older school group come through and I had grabbed a little selection of books from the Teen Zone and books from our collection down here and I was talking 'em up. That book went out and checked out. And I'm hoping that more than one kid's gonna wanna read it from that 'cause I think that book is beautiful.

**Jennifer:** I think that's why so many authors in their acknowledgements at the end of the books thank booksellers and librarians because of what you just did. <affirmative> We have to really hand sell some of these books and give them a chance because the kids aren't going to know about them. So, yay you for doing that. I think this underscores why librarians are so important.

**Amy and Blair:** Yes!

**Blair:** Absolutely.

**Jennifer:** And why we love reader's advisory. It's such a great part of our job as youth librarians. But the truth is there are so many books being published and we see books coming constantly. So there's a real competition for an author to get his or her book read.

**Blair:** And we can't possibly shelve them all, well there's not space. And realistically some reads don't necessarily fit the interests of our community. I mean, not every kid around here wants to read about a big city story with all of these crime detective kind of things. Like, not everybody wants to read those. They take a very specific audience and sometimes we don't have them.

**Jennifer:** One of the issues I've had to overcome and learn early on is something that one of my librarian colleagues years ago told me, we're not a repository. <affirmative> Because I'm a book collector. I have so many books at home, but the library has to move books through. We do not store books. We're not a museum. We have to have books that are fresh, that are current, that are wanted, beloved. And so we do have to make decisions and move those books through. I think that's actually a little bit sad for those books that I love and want to share those hidden gems that we're going to be talking about because the media drives the popularity and the trends and those other books get lost.

**Amy:** All right. So then what happens to those books if they don't check out and they sit and languish on the shelves? What happens to them?

**Blair:** So realistically, once we pull a book, if we determine that it's not fit for our shelves anymore, for whatever reason, it gets discarded. And those discarded books go a variety of places, but they are no longer part of the library.

**Jennifer:** And many kids that come to do service at the library ask us about those discarded books and they wanna know where those books are going. Well, the books can go to the book sale and community members can buy them for a really inexpensive price. Some of those books go to our juvenile detention schools.

**Blair:** Yes!

**Jennifer:** We help to build those libraries out there because they don't have the budget or the means of getting books. Sometimes those books will go to a company called Better World Books where they're recycled and put to use.

**(6:14) Music Transition:** "Ascending-marimba-notification" by Alexander from Orangefreesounds.com

*(Description) Bright marimba scale.*

## **Section 2: Hidden Gems Pt. 1**

**Jennifer:** So what are some of those hidden gems that you'd like to discuss?

**Blair:** What I have a tendency to do that's naughty is that when we're going through and we're looking at potentially having to weed things from the collection, I start being like: Well maybe I wanna read that one. Well, this book has merit. I'm gonna keep this one, and then I end up with this huge pile. Okay, it's not as huge as the piles of when I take things from the new shelf. <laugh> Um, 'cause when we turn things from new shelf to regular collection, I'll go home with like 10 books. But, it is a fair number of books. And one that I read that I thought: Why is this not circulating? And it's like, oh, nobody found out about it. It came out during the pandemic, that's why! It's *Verona Comics* by Jennifer Dugan and it is a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* (William Shakespeare), which I know they're always done, but this one is so cute. It's done with these warring comic book empires. So our Juliet, her mother is the owner of a small indie comic book store and they have this one specific, extraordinarily popular series that is like the indie bestseller. And then at a big ComiCon, she meets this dashing, mysterious boy who happens to be the kicked around, not real loved son of the mega boss of the competing corporation who's been trying to buy out her mom's company. So it really gets a little interesting and there's a lot of uh, family dynamics in there. There's some mental health issues in there. I think it kind of expands the potential of what a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* can be because it's also really grounded and kind of a more of a reality. I'm hoping I can find the right teen to put that in the hands of 'cause it's really fun.

**Jennifer:** Do you think that would be a good book to recommend to the sixth-seventh grade group that comes to our library?

**Blair:** Definitely could be.

**Amy:** Is it in the teen area or the kid area?

**Blair:** It is. It's in the teen area.

**Amy:** That's the area that I drew a lot of my hidden gems from.

**Blair:** I do too.

**Amy:** I just feel like when I walk in the teen area and I see where the big gaps on the shelf are because someone's just grabbed all of the books by X author and then everything that's hanging out nearby that you see every time you walk by and it just goes: Oh, you're so sad! But also there was a book that I recommended we purchase after I read it from, I think Prescott Valley owned it, and I thought it was fun! It was *Briarheart* by Mercedes Lackey. And I walked in the teen area and I walked by the new shelf and it's there, and I thought: I wonder if that's been checking out. So I just pulled up a quick circ [circulation] stat on that thing and it has one checkout. One! And we bought it back in July. And I thought: I need to talk this book up more 'cause that was a really fun retelling of *Sleeping Beauty*. <affirmative> And it's like, girl power, and magic and fantasy, and fun and like sister love, and really strong friendships. It has all the check boxes, right? But it's not circling [circulating] and it just, it's like why? I don't know, do books go to the teen area and just if you're not the big trending Netflix, you know, or Amazon Prime version of a show coming out and things just don't move? I don't know. But it was really sad to see that one hanging out up there and literally it has circled [circulated] one time.

**Jennifer:** So what are some things we can do to get those teen books to move? So that's the question that we need to think about.

**Amy:** Definitely.

**Blair:** I mean 'cause we've been doing displays. I think it's so tricky because if there was a collection we could potentially genre-ify it would be that one. At least put genre stickers on them so that we can increase shelf searchability.

**Amy:** I think too, we're not up there to sit by those books and so that when we see a teen that we might know or that we see is struggling to find something and they come over and they kind of make that side-eye glance at us and we offer our help. Then you can have that moment where you share about a book. To promote them! To share our collection and what we know of it.

**Jennifer:** So meanwhile, why don't we do a teen display down here?

**Blair:** I think that's a really great idea, yeah.

**Jennifer:** Because we, we hand sell books all the time down here. I was just going to say that *The Screaming Staircase* (Jonathan Stroud). It's an old series and I read it several years ago and I loved it so much I just kept talking about it and then I put it in a book club and now it is constantly checking out. It takes effort. <affirmative> And it takes the right teenagers. But once the teens glom onto a book and they love it, then they recommend it and then it's like a tidal wave and those books will start checking out. But it's a lot of work.

**(10:30) Music Transition:** "Ascending-marimba-notification" by Alexander from OrangeFreesounds.com  
(Description) Bright marimba scale.

### **Section 3: Hidden Gems Pt. 2- Gems with Difficult Topics**

**Blair:** One of the things that I struggle with is that some of the books that I super-duper love, particularly in the middle grade section, these very important awesome well-written books, they have really heavy content. Heavy content books are hard to recommend 'cause you have to really know who you're recommending them to. But they're not stuff that kids find easily on their own, even if they need them.

One of the books that I read in the last year that was shocking to me how low of its circulations were, was *How To Become a Planet* by Nicole Melleby. And it's down here in our youth fiction section, and it deals with a young girl who's in sixth grade. She has severe feelings of depression, she can't get out of bed. And this is not something that is a unique situation. This is a situation where there are kids who need to have books like this in their hands, who need to know that sometimes this is what they're feeling and this is why. And they may never have connected those dots on their own. And so I feel like this book is really important, but how do you recommend that to somebody? How do you get it out there in a way that kids who need to have access to it will find it? That's the tricky part. Sorry, I brought us all down. <laugh>

**Jennifer:** No, I agree 'cause when I looked at the books that I really enjoy and want to recommend and are not circulating, it's because their content is difficult or the writing is just at a higher level than what a lot of the kids that come through here want to read. They want something easy, fast paced, adventurous. So, finding the right person to recommend the book to and when you were talking made me think of the book that I really enjoy. It's called *Playing for the Commandant* by Suzy Zail. I love that. But it's a hard book too. It's about the Holocaust and about a 15-year-old girl who was a piano genius, a prodigy living in Hungary, getting ready to go to conservatory. The Nazis came, took her 'cause her family's Jewish, and they put her in Auschwitz. And she played for the Commandant when the Commandant of this particular camp knew her talent and she had to make the hard decision to play for him so she could provide for her sister and her mother at the expense of being ridiculed and ostracized by the other camp mates. They thought she was a traitor. It's a lovely story but it's hard content and it's not one I can always recommend to people, but it's a good book. It's one of those I have in my back pocket waiting for the right moment when a reader comes through and is looking for it. I haven't had the opportunity lately <laugh> to recommend it. <laugh> What about you, Amy? What are your hidden gems, what kind of content do they have?

**Amy:** Well, a lot of books that I read and did check the circs and they have low checkout rates also had difficult topics, things that are very much in the news right now. I'm thinking of *Efrén Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros. I just read *Each Tiny Spark* as an audiobook, read by the author Pablo Cartaya. I really enjoyed it. But those are really heavy books and they're showing that kids have a voice and a choice. But if you're reading for school, for a project, or for a book report or if you're reading for pleasure, I don't know that those are the things that the kids are gonna pick. And so it's on us to talk about them but then it's like, well I don't know you well enough to know if you're ready for this really strong emotional stretching novel. 'Cause I stretched when I read *Efrén Divided*. I had to really think about some things, how I would handle a situation. And there's some tough things that kids go through that are not in my personal experience, but I don't know how to recommend them all the time. That's a hard part of kids' reader's advisory.

**Blair:** That is the struggle with realistic fiction, right? Like whether it's historical fiction or whether it's modern realistic fiction. These are books about kids who have experiences that kids are, or have, experienced. So yes, they're not pretty books as far as like what's happening in them isn't roses and sunshine and unicorns. But these are books that express real things that happen to real kids, and they're very valuable books...

**Amy:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**Blair:** ...but it's really hard because parents want to have this like, "I don't want anything bad to ever happen to you, so if you don't read about anything bad that ever happens to a kid, then you won't think

that bad things happen to kids.” But the problem is bad things do happen to kids and the best way for them to get exposure to some of those is to read them in a book that has done the work of taking some of the pain out of it. These books are not written in a graphic way that the books in the adult zone or even some of the books for the older teens are written. These are written specifically for this audience. So even the things that occur in them are things that are occurring in a way that has already been thought of for their brains and for their emotions and for their mind.

**Jennifer:** I would say in addition to that, the writing has to be good. For me, when I want to recommend a hidden gem, it's because I also truly believe in the craftsmanship of the author. It's a beautiful written book. <affirmative> I was thinking about *Where the Red Fern Grows* (Wilson Rawls), *Old Yeller* (Fred Gipson), and *The Bridge to Terabithia* (Katherine Paterson), all difficult books, but so beautifully written. And that's what I think makes those books stand out and able to be recommended to families or remind them why these books are classics. Because they're heavy but they're beautiful. And that's how I feel about some of the hidden gems. When I'm looking at these books I'm thinking not just content, but how well written they are. I love a well written book. *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden* by Heather Smith based on the true story of the tsunami that hit Japan in 2011 and about a man dealing with grief. Well in particular in this book, a child loses his father and so a neighbor builds a phone booth so that the community can come and pick up the phone and talk to their lost ones that died in that tragedy. It's a lovely book. I cried when I read it, but I haven't found the right audience for it yet. And I'm so afraid it's going to get low circulation and get lost. So, I'm waiting for an opportunity.

**Amy:** I think that reading about historical fiction where bad things happened to kids, there's something more palatable about that than bad things are happening to kids.

**Blair:** Yeah.

**Jennifer:** Alan Gratz is really gaining traction with the kids. He writes those historical fiction books. He pushes the envelope just a little bit, but not too much by helping them see what's happening to other kids in other countries. And he wrote *Ground Zero*, which for kids today is historical, but September 11th it really seems like yesterday to me. <affirmative> But he gives them these wonderful characters in these historical settings that are very appealing. Those books are starting to become more popular with the kids and I think it's because we recommend them as well.

**Amy:** I think that honestly you are a hundred percent responsible for Alan Gratz's popularity in our library and in our community. I think you had it in Teen Battle of the Books competition. You read one for a book club, and I think because of you talking about Alan Gratz so much Steve read an Alan Gratz and then he brought it into book club. I think that you're truly responsible and those would have been hidden gems, because those are heavy books and those all live in Kids, in our collection down here. I think too on the line of recommending and even discovering a hidden gem—because it's all about what the kids don't know about yet, right?—is knowing more what does not circ and what has low circulations. But unless we know what those books are, to know that they are hidden gems, because as soon as we read them and like them and we talk about them and because they are well written, they stop being hidden gems. But, like, pull a list and let's see what has super low circs. Have I read that? Should I read that? Why did we add it in the first place to our collection? Maybe they're bomb books just hiding that we don't even know about because we know the books that we're drawn to, and we know the books that the kids talk about that we read to talk with them and to do book fan parties and connect with them and maybe sneak in another like recommendation of a read-a-like or something that might push them a little further in a different direction. Things like that.

**Blair:** You can only read so many books in a year.

**Jennifer:** But Amy, I think that's a great challenge. We should challenge our ourselves to do that. I think I will, I'll pull a list and we should look at it.

**Amy:** Yeah, low circs...

**Jennifer:** And that will help us determine whether the book stays and we promote it or: Mm, this one needs to go.

**Amy:** Mm-hmm.

**(18:20) Music Transition:** "Ascending-marimba-notification" by Alexander from Orangefreesounds.com

*(Description) Bright marimba scale.*

#### **Section 4: Hidden Gems Pt. 3- Even more Gems!**

**Jennifer:** I have one hidden gem. There is a book series, it's called *The Great Mouse Detective* by Eve Titus. They're mysteries. It's Basil Mouse, he's a detective, and he has a friend named Dr. Dawson. And they're such fun books, but I don't think very many kids know about it.

**Blair:** Well now I have a new series to recommend to those finishing *Sophie Mouse* (series by Poppy Green).

**Jennifer:** The kids are always asking about mouse books.

**Blair:** Mm-hmm, yeah.

**Jennifer:** And this is one more hidden gem that you can add to your collection when you're talking about mouse stories.

**Amy:** Another that I wanted to share that's a hidden gem, well, hidden gem author, I guess, is Cynthia Kadohata. She won the Newberry for *Kira-Kira*, and that book hasn't checked out very much in a long time, and the other one though that I read in thinking about book club and having an animal centric story was *Saucy*. *Saucy* is about a girl who, her and her family are going somewhere, and they encounter these <pig noises> sounds and smells and things and they open the bush, and they find a little piglet. And they rescue it and they raise it in the house, so there's messes and there's destruction and the family kind of bonds over this pig. And then toward the end they're gonna send the pig off to this animal sanctuary somewhere. And as they're making this big decision for their family, they discover that that pig had been a runaway from a pig factory.

**Blair:** Oh my goodness!

**Amy:** And the kids determine that they're gonna go shine a light on this, and they do. They actually raise awareness in their town that this is happening and that these poor pigs are being raised to slaughter. Which is a natural thing, right, in our market economy and such, but not in the way that they were being treated. The animals were not being treated in a humane way. And so the kids shine a light on that and it's a really sweet family story.



**Jennifer:** So where did you find this book and where is it at on the shelf right now?

**Amy:** It's in the children's area on the shelf and it's by Cynthia Kadohata.

**Blair:** I just finished a really cute YA romance that I feel like it just came in a glut of YA romances and that's why it hadn't been read and it's *Fake It Till You Break It* by Jenn P. Nguyen. And it's very much in the vein of like *Kissing Booth* (Beth Reekles) and all those other just sweet, adorable little hate-to-love romance. And it's nice to always have another one of those in your back pocket.

**Amy:** We hope this episode inspires you to try a new book or author you hadn't considered before and encourages you to ask your librarian for their hidden gem recommendations on your next library visit.

**(20:39) Music Transition:** "Ascending-marimba-notification" by Alexander from Orangefreesounds.com

*(Description) Bright marimba scale.*

**Blair:** This month, there were no Reader Raves called into us. But if you want to be a part of Reader's Rave in the future, call us at (928) 777-1490 and leave a message with your first name, your age, a book you love, and what you love about it. We can't wait to hear from you.

**Amy:** Thank you for joining us today on Librarians Telling Tales. For a full list of the books shared in this episode, check the link in our podcast bio.

**Blair:** Don't forget to subscribe to catch our next episode where we'll talk about books and libraries with a special guest as well as highlighting some of what we're reading right now.

**(21:15) Musical Outro:** "Uplifting 2463" by Twisterium from pixabay.com

*(Description) Upbeat, piano and percussion. Music fades in and plays under.*

**Jennifer:** This podcast is supported by the Arizona State Library Archives and Public Records, a division of the Secretary of State with federal funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We would also like to thank the city of Prescott, friends of the Prescott Public Library, and all our fabulous coworkers at Prescott Public Library.

**Amy:** Be sure to like and subscribe to Librarians Telling Tales. And until next time, we'll see you in the library.

**(Total Run Time 21:46)**