

ELMLE presents

Tips for Teachers

March 2008



Spring is bustin' out all over, at least around the elite editorial offices of the **Tips for Teachers** staff in remotest East Anglian North Norfolk of Her Majesty's United Kingdom, so it may be even harder to get our middle school students interested in completing their reading assignments than it was in, say, dewy September. Librarian *Joan Dyer-Westacott* comes to the rescue, however, with a timely list of remarkable books designed to pique the interest of even the most hardened non-reader. Joan's article forms the core, not to say the corps, of this issue of **Tips**. Read on, faithful reader (the singular used advisedly.)

Paris, city of romance, cuisine, and art, will be home to the 2009 conference of the European League for Middle Level Education. It is not too early to offer your expertise as a workshop leader, a job-alike coordinator, or speaker. Save the last weekend in January, 2009, for this powerful event. Check out the energised ELMLE website for details: www.elmle.org. David Lynn of the American School of Paris (conference host school) is conference chair. He is sitting by the phone this very minute, waiting for your call. Better yet, email him -- dlynn@asparis.fr to let him know that you're ready, willing, and available!

Renee Spots a Winner . . .



Tip of the ELMLE hat to observant reader *Renee McCormack M.S., RN-C, ANP* of the American International School of Vienna for spotting the deliberate mistake in the February edition of **Tips for Teachers. She writes *...it was a wonderful conference and the pictures are great. I have one comment...In the pictures of the conference, the "guy winning the door prize" is not "Mike" but actually Dave Straffon, Middle School Principal, AISV. Thanks, Renee, for setting us straight, and apologies to Dave. And to Mike.***

Ten Titles for Reluctant Readers

by Joan Dyer-Westacott of The American School in London

Reluctant readers. You've seen them hiding behind laptop screens when you assign the book report. Mention a trip to the library to select a novel and they're out the door getting a drink of water or heading to the nurse complaining of headaches. Putting a book into a reluctant reader's hand is akin to putting a leash on your cat and

reader's hand is akin to putting a leash on your cat and taking it for a walk. You can do it, it's not pretty, and the end result is questionable. Most reluctant readers are too busy playing computer games, listening to their iPods, networking on Facebook or watching television to find the time to, gasp, read something. But read they must, and so you should be prepared to take your best shot at recommending a riveting read.

Here are some of my favourite suggestions for reluctant readers:

1. **Revenge of the Witch** (Book one in The Last Apprentice series) by Joseph Delaney. In the first title of this series, 12-year-old Tom Ward is apprenticed to the Spook - that shadowy person who keeps ghosts, goblins, witches, boggarts and, well, other Spooks from the English countryside. Why Tom you might well ask? Tom is the seventh son of a seventh son of a seventh son of a seventh son so his career path was pretty much determined from birth. One librarian described this book as a cross between Harry Potter and Sweeney Todd. What middle school student wouldn't go for that?

2. **Groosham Grange** by Anthony Horowitz.

The main character, David Eliot, is the seventh son of a seventh son who ends up in a boarding school (seven times) funnier than Hogwarts. There are other books set at Groosham Grange, so if the reluctant reader likes this one, there's more to come!

3. **The Secret Life of Sparrow Delaney** by Suzanne Harper. Sparrow Delaney is the seventh daughter of a Psychic, so she herself is psychic. She sees dead people (!!!) and then has to convince other people of her powers. This particular novel is best for 8th grade and above. The Mediator series by Meg Cabot also involves a main character with psychic powers, so if you find this book to be popular with your students, they'll also enjoy Cabot's series.

Cabot's series.

4. **The Lightning Thief** by Rick Riordan (Book one in the Percy Jackson and the Olympians series)

In the Lightning Thief, 12-year-old Perseus Jackson (who is definitely not the seventh son of a seventh son...)

makes the startling discovery that he is a demigod.

Fortunately, Riordan is a middle school teacher himself, so he knows how to take this somewhat heavy storyline and make it appeal to the middle school

mind. Percy is the sort of character that a reluctant reader loves: he's been kicked out of six schools in as many years, he also suffers from ADHD and is dyslexic.

Within the first few pages of the novel, Percy manages accidentally to vaporize his Pre-Algebra teacher. Riordan is on a roll here and the rest of the book is just as zany.

5. **The Extraordinary Adventures of Alfred Kropp**

by Rick Yancey .Alfred Kropp is an unlikely hero - quite the loser really, who ends up having to save the world...

He stands a chance of doing so because he is the last descendant of Sir Lancelot. A very fast paced

adventure very much like the Alex Rider series by Anthony Horowitz.

6. **Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian** by Sherman Alexie. (For the sophisticated 8th grade boy)

This book won the National Book Award for Young Adult Literature. Of course, if you give this information to a reluctant reader, they'll run screaming from the room. This is a semiautobiographical chronicle of Arnold Spirit, aka Junior, a Spokane Indian from Wellpinit, WA. Junior was born with water on the brain but defied the odds and reached his teenage years with extraordinary intelligence and insight into life. His diary is littered with cartoon drawings. He says, "I think the world is a series of broken dams and floods, and my cartoons are tiny little lifeboats." He expects disaster, and disaster he gets when he transfers from the reservation school to the rich, white school some 22 miles away. A very funny yet poignant

read

school some 22 miles away. A very funny yet poignant read.

7. Twilight by Stephenie Meyer (yes, she spells her name with an e) - for 8th grade girls and above. This is the ultimate in vampire books. What young girl doesn't dream about the most gorgeous young man in school? Pity he turns out to be a vampire. When Edward the vampire spurns Isabella, she turns to her best friend. And he turns out to be a werewolf. This series is so popular that when the third novel came out last August, it knocked the final installment of Harry Potter off the top of the New York Times Bestseller list for a few weeks.

8. The White Giraffe by Lauren St. John. After a fire kills her parents, eleven-year-old Martine leaves England for South Africa to live with the grandmother she didn't even know she had. Her life is pretty miserable in South Africa because she misses her parents, hates her new school, and isn't allowed near the game reserve. However, the mythical white giraffe pays her nightly visits and eventually she finds a way to escape the prison of her grandmother's house, only to discover some dark family secrets, the truth of some ancient myths and her own supernatural destiny. (There are two more books in this series: *The Dolphin Song* and *The Last Leopard*)

9. No Limit by Pete Hautman. (For older middle school students...) Told by Denn, this fast-moving story quickly draws readers in. Denn, a 15 year old, has a thriving lawn mowing business, is doing well in school and enjoys the company of his girlfriend. All is well. Then he discovers poker. Kids just can't put this book down until they've read it cover to cover. -and there's a sequel as well: *All In*.

10. Rules of Survival by Nancy Werlin. (For 8th grade and above.) This is a heartbreaking story of abuse and love. 17-year-old Matthew rescues himself and his

and above.) This is a heartbreaking story of abuse and love, 17-year-old Matthew rescues himself and his younger sisters from a dangerously unstable mother. One of Matt's early memories involves getting up during the night to sneak a cookie back to bed and being caught by his mother. Giggling and yelling Cookie thief, she holds a knife to his throat, cutting him just a little bit to teach him not to steal. And that's one of his good memories...

For additional suggestions, ask your middle school librarian!



Your ELMLE steering committee meets in Frankfurt the first weekend of March to solidify plans for the Paris conference 2009. Send your ideas for speakers, presenters, performances, tours, and cultural experiences to conference chair David Lynn of the American School of Paris, dlynn@asparis.fr



Tips for Teachers is a monthly term-time publication of the European League for Middle Level Education, an affiliate of the National Middle School Association in the USA. Feel free to contribute your own tips, assuring yourself a fragment of fame in the Middle School panoply. It's easy: send your lesson plan, idea, drawing, tip, or signed blank cheque to Tips Editor Alan, at alan_heath@asl.org.