

Book Slam 3.0

Der Book Slam geht in die dritte Runde! Nachdem bereits zwei Klassen der Sekundarstufe I mit viel Freude an dem Leseprojekt teilgenommen haben, sind in diesem Jahr Schüler und Schülerinnen aus der Q2 zu Rezensenten von Jugendbüchern geworden und haben diese auf ihre „Bibliothekstauglichkeit“ getestet.

Der Cambridge Advanced Kurs bedankt sich herzlich für die gelungene Zusammenarbeit mit der Humboldt Bibliothek und der Tegeler Bücherstube!

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1. Teri Terry: Slated
By Leon Plath

If you are looking for a light weight alternative to novels such as “1984” by George Orwell, this might be a hint for you. “Slated” written by Teri Terry, a Canadian globetrotter and bunny puppet owner currently living in England, is a psycho thriller set in a fictional dystopian reality and is part one of a trilogy and it was published in 2012. The story basically describes a 16 year old girl named Kyla dealing with reintegrating herself into society after getting her memories wiped out.

In year 2052 the UK or rather England is isolated and ruled by two parties, the “Central Coalition”. A financial crash in Europe in the early twenties (of the twenty first century) led to violent civil unrest and the UK closing borders. Their solution to deal with criminals or terrorists is “slating” them, which means “giving you a new chance” by deleting all your memories and controlling you with surgical implants called “Levos” monitoring your emotions until one is 21 and “reintegrated” into society. The story is written in first person perspective. As every other slated Kyla starts out at “Central London Hospital” where they relearn everything before they are sent to their new (host) families. But she is different from the others. She learns quicker, is smarter and has reappearing nightmares that seem extremely real. In her new life as a member of the Davis family she does not stay in line either and she is not too bothered about it until she sees other slateds just randomly disappearing like they have never existed...

I really enjoyed reading this book. Although, it takes time to build up its’ arc of suspense, you can read it pretty quickly. The author did not use any extraordinary language, but it would not make much sense either, because of the perspective the book is written from. In addition to that, the idea is not too original. Its’ main strength is how authentic the idea is actually implemented, which makes it very thrilling. I especially liked it because it was so easy to read even for non-native speakers like me. All in all, I would definitely recommend this book not just to dystopia fans but to everyone who searches for some tense afternoon lecture covering a longer period of his or her time and/or wants to improve his or her English.

2. Dave Eggers: The Circle
By Helena Glatthaar

3. James Dashner: The Maze Runner
By Marius Voigt

4. George R.R. Martin: Game of Thrones
By Henri Wolff

George R. R. Martin's epic fantasy novel “A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire: Book One“ was published in 1996 and is the first book of the popular book series “A Song of Ice and Fire“ that already contains five volumes. It is set in a middle-age, fantasy world and tells the stories of members of different royal families and their rivalry between each other.

The reader follows three different plot lines throughout the book, each of them having their own setting and atmosphere, but often crossing each other. The first one is about the King and most of the

high nobility of *The Seven Kingdoms*, the Southern part of the continent of *Westeros*. The families Stark, Lannister, and Baratheon rule the biggest parts of it and live in constant rivalry with each other. Most of the important characters are members of these aristocratic houses. *Westeros* is divided by *The Wall* into the South, where *The Seven Kingdoms* are located, and The North, a cold, barren and mostly uncivilized area. *The Wall* is a huge wall of ice and the only defense line between the South and the mysterious and evil creatures of The North. It is also the setting for the second plot line. A bastard from the house of the Starks lives here with a group of people that are supposed to defend *The Wall*. The third plot does not take place on *Westeros* but rather on a continent East of it called *Essos*, a land full of plains and deserts. The two last descendants of the house of the Targaryen live here. This family ruled *The Seven Kingdoms* for a long time before the Starks and Baratheons came to overthrow them. Now the two siblings search for ways to get back on *Westeros* and reclaim the throne of *The Seven Kingdoms*. The atmosphere on *Westeros* is rather dark and grim as the long summer that has been there for more than seven years is slowly turning into a long winter, a time that is feared by most of the people. This is because the creatures from the North often go South and famines break out during the winter. This is not a problem that the people of *Essos* have, but the Targaryens are starting to stir up a lot of problems here.

I personally really enjoyed reading the book as I am a big fan of fantasy novels but I cannot recommend it for everyone. The novel contains a lot of violent and sexual scenes which some people may find unsettling. The language level in the book is not too hard to understand, somebody with an average understanding of the language should not have too many problems reading it. It can also be confusing to meet all the characters at first, but after a while the reader gets sucked into this full-blown world with the help of Martin's beautiful and descriptive writing.

5. Neil Gaiman und Terry Pratchett: Good Omens By Sophie Schmidt

The novel "Good Omens – The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch" written by the late Terry Pratchett, a British writer best known for "Discworld" and Neil Gaiman, a numerously awarded English author, was published in 1990 and is a contemporary, comedic fantasy novel. It is about the end of the world and one of the most thought provoking books about the nature of good and evil that I have ever read.

In the novel the angel Aziraphale and the demon Crowley try to avert the end of the world and as a result of this decide to work together to keep an eye on the Antichrist, who should be living as the son of an American diplomat, but instead ends up as Adam Young, the seemingly perfectly normal son of a working class family living in Lower Tadfield, Oxfordshire. As the Apocalypse draws near Adam proceeds to raise Atlantis and causes aliens to land on earth, these things and more are results of his powers as the Antichrist. Furthermore, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, now bikers are preparing themselves to end the world and the very specific but unfortunately useless prophecies of Agnes Nutter, a 17th century witch, are coming true. If Aziraphale and Crowley succeed in staving off the apocalypse, is for the reader to find out.

It is set in the England of the late eighties and the early nineties and on very short occasion in other countries like the United States.

Overall the atmosphere is lighthearted and humorous, but still manages to be cohesive and holds a lot of accurate observations on human nature and thoughts on religion. The characters are amicable, very

human and flawed, which makes them relatable and really the main selling point of the novel.

The strengths of the novel include both great characters and wonderful world-building, the incorporation of preexisting myths also is well handled. The side plots are another strength of this story, which despite being seemingly random and independent actually make up a solid foundation for the main plot by providing a lot of relevant background information and support. The subplots are also used to make light of topics that might otherwise come across as very dark. While the side plots themselves are a strength, the haphazard way in which they are told is a slight weakness as they can sometimes be confusing and hard to follow, especially if the reader has not picked up the book for a few days. Also there are a few side plots and characters in there that do not really add a great deal to the story and feel like they are just there for a few cheap laughs. In the grand scheme of things these are very minor errors and do little to detract from what is well thought out, well paced and enjoyable story.

Over all the novel is wonderfully thought provoking and a lovely, comical read.

“Good Omens” was meant to be a parody of the “William” books by Richmal Crompton and is a novel that I would recommend to everyone who finds the plot intriguing or who has already read another book by either of the authors as this, to me, really is one of their best works.

Moreover, this book could be of interest to everyone who enjoys both comedy and fantasy novels. It might, however, be a bit of a tough read for someone who is easily distracted by subplots as these can at times hinder the flow of reading. Also everybody that takes Christianity a little too seriously might be appalled at times.

6. Sally Gardner: Maggot Moon

By Saskia Fischer

In the following there is going to be a review about the novel “Maggot Moon” written by the children’s book writer Sally Gardner and published in 2013. She got different awards for this dystopian novel which is mostly addressed to teenagers.

The novel is about a dyslexic boy called Standish who lives together with his grandfather in Zone 7 in a dystopian England in the 1950’s. He lost his parents to the government, is bullied in school and is not taken seriously by his teachers. Therefore, he is really happy when Hector and his parents move in next door. An important friendship between Standish and Hector developed. When they realize what the so-called Motherland really makes to be the first nation reaching the moon, the two friends want to show the world what the government makes secretly.

The story not only shows how Standish gets through life with his disabilities and how important his relationships to his grandfather and to his friend Hector really are but also the daily life in a dictatorship. People are starving and supervised. They do not know what happens outside their zone and they are forced not to question anything and just to obey. Otherwise their tongue is cut out or they are killed.

The whole story is divided into 100 chapters which sometimes consist of only one page. This makes the story seem short to read. It is narrated by the dyslexic main character Standish so it is told in a special order, a special choice of words and just a special perspective of things.

Sally Gardner wrote the story based on a ‘what would have happened if-situation’, so she took an important situation in history and thought about what would have happened if something had turned out differently. This is a great technique to present difficulties which could be created by humans in a political system.

In my opinion the novel includes plenty information about dictatorships in contrast to democracy and freedom which are important topics nowadays. It makes us think about circumstances we usually do not think about because they are sort of natural for us.

Because the story is told in a dyslexic boy’s view, it delivers insight into the thoughts and the

understanding of the world of a dyslexic teenager which is not only interesting but maybe also helps to understand them better. When read by a dyslexic or disabled student in general, the story may give them a feeling of being able to achieve a lot, not only in school, but also in their future, for the society or the whole world.

In addition, the novel is very emotional because you start to understand the main character's feelings and what he is going through. But the way he deals with his emotions shows how you can get through extreme situations like living in a dictatorship with keeping your imagination as a place where everything is how you want it to be.

Even if the author tells the story in a strange order and therefore it is sometimes hard to understand, I would totally recommend this dystopian novel. Because of all the arguments I mentioned before I think everyone from the age over 14 should read this book if he or she is interested in dystopian settings.

7. John Green: Paper Towns und John Green: Looking for Alaska

Paper Towns -Review

John Green's third novel "Paper Towns" was published in 2008. It deals with the life of Quentin "Q." Jacobson, the main protagonist, who falls in love with Margo Roth Spiegelmann, a girl living in his neighborhood, even though he had never met her alone before. The story is told from his point of view.

Paper Towns is written from protagonist's point of view. One night, Margo appears at Q's window, summoning him for an ingenious campaign of revenge (on people in life, who treated her in a bad way), and he follows. Next morning, Quentin arrives at school where he discovers that Margo disappeared. He figures out that she left hints for him and that he is the only one who is able to find her. The closer he gets to her, the less Quentin sees the girl he thought he knew - who is the real Margo?

John Green based the story on the life of young people. This helped me to identify myself with the main character Quentin and lead me into the novel. The fact, that I could identify myself with the protagonist caught me and I always wanted to know how the story would continue. With his style of writing he creates a mysterious atmosphere and keeps the audience reading. Furthermore, he illustrates the feelings of the protagonist very well, so that the reader is able to get into the story.

All in all, I highly recommend the novel of John Green for every teenager, as it deals with the problems of our society and our youth lifestyle.

8. Isabel Allende: Ripper

Isabel Allende, a Chilean living in California since 1988, began her career as a writer with works of Magic Realism in the 1980s. Since then she has written 21 successful books. In 2014 she published her first crime novel "Ripper". It deals with a series of strange murders, happening in San Francisco. As the police fail to clear up these crimes, sixteen-year-old Amanda Martín and her friends start investigations on their own.

The recent murders, catching public attention in San Francisco in 2012, seem to become more and more mysterious: Besides changing his method of killing each time, the offender shows great creativity (if one may call it so) when it comes to arranging his victim at the crime scene. Furthermore, he leaves peculiar hints which the police do not recognize – or understand.

Actually, they even cannot find a link between the cases, and the motive is more than just unclear.

Deputy chief Bob Martín proves his qualities as a police officer – persistence and meticulousness – by doing routine police work - unfortunately without making any progress. However, as a protective father he reacts negatively when his daughter Amanda shows interest in doing investigations herself.

Supported by her grandfather Blake Johnson, Amanda convinces her friends to investigate the current murders in San Francisco. Although they prefer a more creative approach, Amanda and her team soon get closer to the solution of the cases than anyone else. But what started as a game, then becomes dangerous for the girl and her family.

“Ripper” is labelled as a crime novel, but this term does not really fit. Allende plays with the rules of the genre; she leaves things unclear or misleads the reader. The focus does not lie on the crime cases; they just form the background for a large number of different plot threads and a variety of complex major and minor characters that gain the reader's sympathy soon. Moreover, the author – which is not typical for a crime novel - creates an atmosphere full of wit, lightness and amusement.

Thus, reading “Ripper” can be very entertaining, but it takes a while until tension rises and the reader easily loses track of the plot line, even after having made his way through Allende's convoluted sentences and descriptions. And although the book is probably written for entertainment, the author also expresses her opinion on topics such as the Afghanistan war by letting the protagonists speak for her.

On the one hand I found “Ripper” mostly amusing and interesting - especially the development of the teenage clique around Amanda is heart-warming. But on the other hand the book has passages which I found confusing as much as boring, for they contain a lot of redundant information distracting from the story. Therefore I would recommend it to people who appreciate the atmosphere and the composition of a book more than a coherent and logical plot.

9. Noel Streatfeild: Ballet Shoes By Freyja Grundmann

The novel “Ballet Shoes“ by Noel Streatfeild which was first published in 1936 deals with the life of three young poor girls who live in London and have to earn money to survive. In this book, Noel Streatfeild wrote about her own experiences as a child.

The story takes place in the beginning of the 20th century. Silvia Brown always called Garnie und her great uncle Matthew Brown called GUM (short for great uncle Matthew) live in a big house in London. Matthew is an archeologist and on one of his trips, he adopts a girl. On the next trip he adopts a second girl and on the third trip a third. The girls’ names are Pauline, Petrova and Posy. After bringing Posy to Silvia, Matthew goes on a trip to the Galapagos Islands. After ten years he still has not returned and there is no money left for Silvia and the three girls. In order to earn money Pauline, Petrova and Posy start to work on stage. Pauline is a great actress and Posy, who is at least six years old, is a very good ballet dancer. Only Petrova hates it to act and dance but she works on stage to help her family.

In the novel is a very happy atmosphere created because the girls never stop believing in their dreams.

The author describes the processes in a theatre in a very detailed and interesting manner. I think Noel Streatfeild’s style of writing is fascinating and thrilling because of her use of adjectives and thrilling vocabulary in general. Moreover, I was drawn into the narrative. I could not put the book

down because I wanted to know what happens next.

Personally, I like this book very much because it takes place in another time and country and you get to know much about this time and how difficult it is for poor families to survive financially. Moreover, there is no violence in the book but anyway it tells a very fascinating story about how to make your dreams come true.

In my opinion this book is very interesting for everyone who is interested in theatre and in life of people at this time.

I would not only recommend it for children but also for all people at every age because every one of us should keep his child in his heart. J.K. Rowling once said about this book: "I still read Ballet Shoes". Reading this book makes you think of your own childhood and you start to compare yourself with the three girls and you think about if you had to choose one life whether you would choose Pauline, Petrova or Posys.

10. F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Great Gasby

By Nadja Winter

The novel "*The Great Gatsby*", published in 1925, is written by F. Scott Fitzgerald and is considered as one of the greatest American fictions at its time. Fitzgerald's purpose was to reflect the American lifestyle in the 1920's, in which he was taking part, by criticising the huge social stratification between the different income groups. To illustrate his notion, he adds his personal experiences into the story and makes the characters a part of him.

Therefore, we are shown a world of money, of class and power, of drinking as well as casual love affairs. Fitzgerald himself died at a young age who sank deep into alcoholism.

The novel tells a story about a mysterious man named Jay Gatsby who is known for his extravagant parties and gigantic house in the West Egg district of Long Island, an area populated by the new rich. Right next to him lives Nick Carroway, a young man who moved from Minnesota to learn about the bond business. Not only the fact that he went to Yale, but also that he has social connections in East Egg, the fashionable and upper class of Long Island, makes him different from the other inhabitants. Soon, Nick becomes closer to Jay Gatsby and reveals some of his secrets, among others about an apparently longlost love to Nick's cousin Daisy Buchanan who lives in East Egg with her husband Tom.

All those years, Gatsby has been working hard in order to fulfill one desire to become the ideal man as Daisy wants him to be. However, he does not realize what will come with his determined actions.

Concerning the novel, the author created a rather melancholic but dramatic atmosphere to underline the failure of the characters. Whereby the characters appear unsympathetic what makes them kind of interesting, except for Nick who seems to have no opinion on something and tries to keep distance. Moreover, Fitzgerald achieves a high stylistical niveau by using a big variety of harmonic metaphors and similes. Despite the use of confusing complex sentences and detailed descriptions, the book was easy to read because of common vocabulary. Nevertheless, the book slightly irritates the reader because of all the consecutive actions. The author should have build up more tension to make it more attractive. Especially at the beginning, the reader keeps asking himself/herself who Great Gatsby finally is as he is not showing up for a while.

All in all, the novel "*The Great Gatsby*" addresses a variety of topics, especially concerning the social inequality caused by classification regarding the wages as well as the outwards appearance towards other people. Fitzgerald succeeds in capturing the image of the so-called "*JazzAge*" by criticizing the American culture, whose residents tried by all

available means to live that American dream. Furthermore, he makes his imagination conceivable for outstanding people. For that reason, it is known as one of the greatest American literatures, especially after the World War II, and is taught at many high schools and universities.

In my opinion, the book has some interesting parts because it virtually takes you back in time and lets you feel like an observer on the same state of knowledge as Nick. Referring to his character, I really think that the author made a good choice by picking Nick as the narrator of the novel, who relates the protagonist's story. Unfortunately, like already mentioned, the dramatic love story does not thrill the reader completely since there is something missing. Hence I would only recommend the book for school reading and definitely not for one's freetime.

11. Ken Kesey: One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

By Leonard Salehi

Ken Kesey's first novel "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was published in 1962. The book is about the patients in a psychiatric hospital who suffer dehumanization and are completely and utterly at the vicious nurse Ratched's mercy. The author Ken Kesey has worked himself as a night attendant in a hospital's psychiatric ward and experimented with psychoactive drugs on his own. As a result of his work and as an inspiration he wrote this novel.

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" takes place in Oregon, USA. The book is narrated by one of the psychiatric hospital patients Chief Bromden, a Columbian Indian who suffers from hallucinations. The nurse Ratched is the supervisor of the ward and rules the hospital like a totalitarian state by manipulating the patients and therefore taking away their identity. However, Randle McMurphy, a sharp-witted redhead who chose to be admitted to the hospital in order to avoid his sentence on a working farm, challenges Ratched's power and by that he initiates the transformation of the other patients and becomes a symbol of resistance. Through his actions against the nurse he motivates the others to become manly again and they start following his lead and start refusing the strict day plan of Ratched. The atmosphere throughout the entire book is tense because of the present fear of getting electroshock treatments. Nevertheless, there are sparks of humor which give the book the necessary thrill to get through.

Ken Kelsey wrote his novel, because of his work and experience with mental patients on the one hand and on the other to underline the idea of rebellion. It is supposed to be a critique to the American institution which fits in the general context of the situation in the 1960's. All together I would actually recommend this book for those who are interested in the core of the problematics during that time. Yet, I cannot imagine the book was written for my generation and therefore I think it is not the most entertaining book.

12. E L James: Fifty Shades of Grey

Veronica Roth: Divergent

"Haunting vision of the future" that is just one of many predominantly positive critics, written about the book "Divergent".

Divergent is written by Veronica Roth and was published in 2011. It is the first volume of a trilogy, that is classified in the genre of Dystopia which is currently a popular genre.

The book itself deals with the unconformity of some individuals in a futuristic society and its attempts to break out of this system.

The story takes place in Chicago which is isolated from the outside world. The society of the city lives separated in five distinct factions. The members of each faction are living according to the moral imperative their faction represents. The faction Candor, for instance, stands for honesty.

Abnegation values selflessness the most, Erudite intelligence and Amity peacefulness.

In the Age of sixteen every citizen is supposed to take a test which should help the teenagers to decide if they want to stay in their faction they are born into or to choose another faction forever.

The main character Beatrice Prior, born into the Abnegation faction, takes the test at the beginning of the story, to determine which faction her mind and personality are most suited for. Her test results are inconclusive and that means that she is something called Divergent, which is regarded as very dangerous. Finally, she chooses to switch to Dauntless, where she changes her name to Tris. In the Dauntless faction only the top ten candidates will become Dauntless members. The rest of them will fail and become faction-less.

Tris is a very small person and therefore she is not a particularly adept fighter but she manages to get by. For Tris begins a difficult time because to live as a Dauntless is not just physically demanding, it is also emotionally. Later she discovers that her society is not as harmonious as she once believed and that the government tries to manipulate and control every citizen of Chicago. She finds out that her secret to be a Divergent is the only possibility to save the society and the people she loves.

The atmosphere of this story is all in all rather bleak and the author used many fighting scenes to create a fascinating, pulse-raising story, which is hard to push down.

Dystopian stories are currently very popular and I think that is one of the main reasons this book was written. The story is not really profound and mostly predictable and the characters are not quite as interesting as they could have been. The action scenes are not all necessary for the story. There are fascinating, but the author used too many of them. The using of violence involved is not adequate.

Unfortunately the love story between Tris and one of the members of the Dauntless is not really movingly.

The idea of the factions is new but there are many explanations in the book missing, for example, the reader don't get to know why Chicago is separated from the world. Furthermore, the book promotes all the good things like bravery and self-sufficiency, friendship, love and determination, but there is nothing new. In this kind of books there is always a dystopian society and a teenager, currently more girls, who discovers that the government and the system is bad and takes her way to fight against it.

Divergent is good entertainment and also easy to read, because Roth used a simply language. If you expect an action-packed book playing in a dystopian society, so I think this will meet your expectations. Additional I would recommend this book to people, who liked „the Hunger Games“, „Delirium“ and „The Circle“ and who generally like dystopian stories.

I would not recommend „Divergent“ to people, who want not only action, but also more depth and not like the genre of Dystopia.