

Foreword

Each volume of the *Literary Newsmakers for Students* series provides scholarly examinations of recent books—fiction, nonfiction, and poetry—that have made the headlines. Of the tens of thousands of new titles published every year, what makes a certain book newsworthy? The awards it wins? The sales it achieves? The subject it portrays? Many factors can bring a book attention. A book need not be revolutionary, academic, lofty, or timeless to be newsworthy. This volume includes a selection of titles that people were talking about—for whatever reason—in the last few years.

In some cases, a book starts making news before it is even published. After her debut novel caused a literary sensation, Donna Tartt made fans and critics wait a decade for her follow-up: *The Little Friend*. Simply arriving in bookstores cause headlines for the admired author's much-anticipated second novel. In other cases, a slim, modest volume may vault its author to historic and rarified status. *Delights & Shadows* won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry just as its author, Ted Kooser, was named the Poet Laureate of the United States. That confluence of recognitions ensure the work will be part of generations of Americans' literature studies—and that makes it newsworthy.

Some books create a media frenzy as controversy swirls around them. *Freakonomics*—a non-fiction book about what economics can reveal about the world—became a bestseller with one

or two ideas that shocked and titillated curious readers. James Frey caused the literary scandal of 2006 when it came to light that his "memoir" *A Million Little Pieces*, which had rung so true to so many fervent supporters, was more a product of the author's imagination than his experience. On the other hand, not all notoriety is sensational. The popularity of book clubs has surged in recent years, often resulting in widespread buzz around those groups' favorite books. *Life of Pi*, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, and *The Nanny Diaries* are three such novels that have spurred recreational readers into discussion.

It may be literature's noblest purpose to inform and intrigue readers into stretching their intellectual worlds. Current fiction may become newsworthy when it prompts people to look at ideas—new or old—with fresh eyes. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* makes the value of certain easily taken-for-granted human rights as vivid as the strength of the people a world away struggling to exercise those rights. *My Sister's Keeper* addresses a dilemma of medical ethics that is less a hypothetical exercise than a modern inevitability. A novel may encourage readers to examine cracks in civilization's mortar, as does *Vernon God Little* with its comedy about the tragedies of modern America. Others may present a familiar topic in a new way, whether a dark history (like slavery in *The Known World*) or a classic fantasy (like *Dracula* in *The Historian*).

Literature's power to entertain is every bit as important as its power to enlighten, however, and many successful writers are appreciated for their consistent ability to do just that. Some authors are so popular and prolific that any addition to their body of work is news. Michael Connelly continued his long-running Harry Bosch series with *The Closers*, and Bosch's followers made it a bestseller. Carl Hiaasen, beloved for his many racy comedies about degenerate adults, made news when he reached out to younger readers with the kid-friendly adventure *Hoot*. James Patterson, a writer with a string of hit mystery thrillers to his credit, also made news going in a new direction: his first romance is *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*. Readers that discover and enjoy any one of the works by Connelly, Hiaasen, or Patterson have stumbled upon a plentiful source of page-turning pleasure.

There are a few authors who both define and fill their own literary niche. Fans of Haruki Murakami devour every new work by the master surrealist, whose style is unlike any other. His *Kafka on the Shore* is challenging and rewarding, clearly written for people who love to read. An entire generation of children are discovering that

love of reading for themselves, courtesy of J. K. Rowling's gift to the world: *Harry Potter*. The arrival of each new *Harry Potter* book is an international event the like of which the publishing world has never seen. Through the gateway of Hogwarts lies more than the magic of Harry's wizardry; millions of young people enter and find themselves transformed into insatiable readers.

Of course, newspapers and news shows cover matters of earth-shattering gravity. They also provide practical information, amusing curiosities, and personal vignettes; the literary newsmakers presented in this volume do the same. *Literary Newsmakers for Students* explores the books that made people talk; that alone makes them newsworthy. However, the discussion is not over as long as new readers join the conversation. Readers of the books presented here will examine uncommon truths about their world. They will see different worlds from fresh perspectives. They will escape into different worlds with different possibilities. When they return, they will find their own world has grown to make room for the characters—both on the page and in the world—that reading welcomes.

Margaret Brantley
Brantley is a literature critic and a literary reference editor.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of *Literary Newsmakers for Students (LNfS)* is to provide readers with an overview of contemporary literary works that have captured the public's attention in recent years. The popularity of these titles commends them to be adopted for classroom study, and these volumes provide literary and critical information that is often limited for newer titles. *LNfS* gives students easy access to information about these works.

Each work is treated with a separate entry. The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the work and its author; a list of characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the work as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the work; a plot summary, to help readers understand the action and story of the work; an analysis of important themes addressed in the work; an examination of style elements used by the author; and a section on important historical and cultural events that shaped both the author and the work, as well as events that affect the plot or characters.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the work itself, students are also provided with a critical overview that provides information about how the work has been received. Accompanying the critical overview is an excerpt from a previously published critical

essay, as well as an essay commissioned by *LNfS* specifically for student audiences. For further analysis and enjoyment, a list of media adaptations is also included, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include topics for discussion, which include ideas for research papers, and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the work.

Selection Criteria

The titles for *LNfS* were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as from educators from various areas. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for this volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry is Organized

Each entry heading includes the author's name, the title of the work being discussed, and the year it was published. The following sections are included in the discussion of each entry:

Introduction: a brief overview of the work which provides information about its publication,

its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.

Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the work in question.

Plot Summary: a factual description of the events that occur within the work. The plot summary is broken down by subheadings, usually by chapter or section.

Characters: an alphabetic listing of major characters in the work. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the work, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivations.

Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Lord Voldemort" would appear in the character section for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and also listed in a separate cross-reference would be Voldemort's other identity in the novel, "Tom Riddle."

Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the work. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead.

Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, and symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might belong, such as science fiction, historical, or nonfiction. Literary terms are explained within the entry but can also be found in the Glossary.

Historical Context: this section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the work was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the work is a historical one, information regarding the time in which the work is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.

Critical Overview: this section contains background on the critical reputation of the work, such as how it has been received by reviewers, critics, and the general public. Any bannings or controversy surrounding the work is included in this section. Direct quotes from reviews may also be included.

Criticism: an essay commissioned by *LNfS* that specifically deals with the work and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available.)

Sources: an alphabetical list of sources used in compiling the entry, including bibliographic information.

Further Reading: a list of texts that point students towards more in-depth information about topics, themes, or time periods discussed in the works. Bibliographic information is included.

In addition, each entry includes the following sections, set apart from the rest of the text as sidebars:

Media Adaptations: a list of important film, television, stage adaptations, audio versions, or other forms of media related to the work. Source information is included.

Topics for Discussion: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the work. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.

What Do I Read Next?: a list of titles that might complement the featured work or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

Each entry may have several illustrations, including photos of the author, key elements of the plot, stills from film adaptations, and/or historical photos relating to the setting of the work.

Citing Literary Newsmakers for Students

When writing papers, student who quote directly from any volume of *Literary Newsmakers for Students* may use the following general forms.

These examples are based on MLA style. Teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed.

When citing text from *LNfS* that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes or Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“*Kafka on the Shore*.” *Literary Newsmakers for Students*. Ed. XXX. Vol. 2. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007. xxx-xx.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from *LNfS* (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Petrusso, Annette. Critical essay on *Delights & Shadows*. *Literary Newsmakers for Students*. Ed. XXXXX. Vol. 2. Detroit: Gale, 2007. xxx-xx.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of *LNfS*, the following form may be used:

Nafisi, Azar, “Fiction: Open Space in a Closed Society,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer 2005), 12–14; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Newsmakers for*

Students, Vol. 2, Ed. XXX (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), pp. xxx-xx.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of *LNfS*, the following form may be used:

Magistrale, Anthony, “The Shape Evil Takes: Hawthorne’s Woods Revisited,” in *Modern Critical Views: Stephen King*, Ed. Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House Publishers, 1998), 77–86; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Vol. 1, Ed. XXX (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), pp. xxx-xx.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editorial staff of *LNfS* welcomes your comments, ideas, and suggestions. Readers who wish to suggest themes and works to appear in future volumes, or who have any other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may do so via email at ForStudentsEditors@thomson.com or via mail at:

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