

# Ms Carmyn's Wide Reading Log

[Just part of one week's worth because I read kinda non-stop!]

## **Yassmin's Story by Yassmin Abdul-Magied (seven reading stars)**

Yassmin was one of the most inspiring speakers during writer's week and is a role model, not just for "brown" and Muslim girls, but for all Australian women. I loved reading the details of the events she describes in her speeches (Being a brown Muslim chick in a White Christian high school, being a chick on an oil rig, starting an international aid organisation at age 16...) but I'm not sure the structure of the book (really a series of essays rather than a biography) worked for me.

Recommended to teens and adults, especially women and to anyone who would like to know more about being Muslim than what they hear on the news. I give it 5/5 stars

## **Creative Spinning by Alison Daykin (three reading stars)**

This is a great ideas book with all kind of inspirational colours and textures of wool, cotton, silk and other fibres. Apart from giving instructions about how to spin and 'recipes' for making the different yarns, it includes sumptuous description of the natural environments that inspired each project and photographs of how the fibres look before they are spun, after they are spun into thread and after they are knitted into a garment.

I read this because I bought it for Ms Wark, but it's inspired me to go get out my spinning wheel and start spinning again – even if it makes my wrists sore. I had forgotten how much I miss that hobby. 5/5 stars.

## **Mistletoe and Murder by Robin Stevens (four reading stars)**

This is the fifth book in the *Murder Most Unladylike* Series. I used to collect school stories from the 1920s and 1930's so I'm enjoying this series of Agatha-Christie-type murder mysteries for girls. The author has made sure that nothing happens that a pair of schoolgirls couldn't actually do if they were solving a real life murder, which makes it feel very realistic. She has also done excellent research into life in 1930s England., including Cambridge university, which is the setting for this book. I especially like the fact that the main character is an intelligent young woman from Hong Kong and the author includes some of the ways racism operated at that time in history.

I recommend this book for students in yrs 5-8 who enjoy a good mystery with out too much blood and guts. 5/5 stars.

### **Symphony for the city of the Dead by M T Anderson (seven reading stars)**

This is a true story of a symphony written by Russia's most famous C20th classical composer. The symphony was written during the worst part WWII, when the German army surrounded the city of Leningrad and terrible atrocities were committed all round. Music was one of the things (along with literature, especially poetry) which kept people feeling like they were still part of civilisation even when they were starving and freezing to death all over the streets and no one had energy to do anything but leave them there. The author uses the symphony to analyse the disaster of USSR's Stalinist period and to reveal some of the historical and political reasons why more people were killed in WWII in Russia than the rest of WWII put together (or, as the author puts it more than have been killed in every single war in US history). I recommend this book to older teens and adults who are interested in Russian history or classical music because, while it is very well written, it is filled with graphic violence (because that was the reality at that time). 5/5 stars.

### **All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven (five reading stars)**

This is a beautifully written romance that is shared between two quirky characters in the style of *Fault in Our Stars*, but is actually about mental illness. It was fascinating to see into the mind of someone with bipolar disorder and someone with PTSD – and can be read as a very big lesson in why we should all learn more about mental illness (because lots of people are not aware that they suffer from mental illnesses). However, it does feel like it's a little what-you-should-do-about-it toward the end, which detracts from the rhythm of the storyline. While the target age group is teens, I feel that this is a valuable for anyone who may have friends, family or work colleagues with a mental illness. 4/5 stars.

### **Clariel by Garth Nix (five reading stars)**

This is book 4 of the Old Kingdom fantasy/horror series about the Abhorsens who send monsters back into death using seven bells (one for each gate of death). This story is actually about someone which is a villain in book three; it tries to explain how she became evil. I loved the first three books with their gutsy heroines and detailed world-building but this book fell short of my expectations. Clariel could have been an interesting character but she keeps just having things happen to her rather than taking charge of her own life. Even her outstanding survival skills seem useless in the context of this story – she has to be constantly rescued by men with magical powers.

I recommend this book (grudgingly) to anyone who is curious about the Old Kingdom's past (in the times before the dead started terrorising everyone), but even then the world-building is nowhere near as strong as the earlier books. 3/5 stars.

**Whale Rider by Whiti Ihimaera (picture book – two reading stars)**

I bought this book from the author at the writer's festival for my adopted niece. It is a poetically-written short-story version on the novel/film with realistic illustrations. Being a fan of the novel and the movie, I feel that the illustrator could have used more symbolism and a better variety of camera angles in the illustrations, but the story is so good that this doesn't really matter, especially to the target audience (4-7 year old girls). My niece, Safi will love it – especially the little mermaid the author drew for her on the title page, next to the whale. 4/5 stars.