Half a World Away
by Cynthia Kadohata
Eleven-year-old Jaden feels like he’s an “epic fail” and understands why his adopted family wants to adopt a replacement baby. His emotions are high as he travels with his family to Kazakhstan to meet their newest family member. Full of plot turns and both funny and sad moments, readers feel great empathy for Jaden. As Rishi, 11, shares, “I liked this book because it had a lot of meaning and weight to it and explained the tough life adopted kids go through and their emotions.”

Return to Sender
by Julia Alvarez
Two worlds collide when Tyler’s family hires Mexican migrant workers to help on their failing family farm and he meets Mari. This book gives a compassionate perspective into the life of a migrant worker and raises interesting questions about the history of America. Morgan, 11, says, “I love this book and learned a lot about other people’s struggles.” This is a kid-appropriate entry to an important topic given the recent conversations in our country about race and immigration.

George
by Alex Gino
George has always felt more like a girl than a boy. She has kept this a secret for a long time, but if she wants to try out for Charlotte in the school production of Charlotte’s Web, her secret might come out. A touching realistic fiction story about a fourth grader’s journey to stand up and be herself. Jacob, 11, says, “Once you read this book you know a lot more about being transgender. I would recommend this book to anyone who loves a good character.”

Full Cicada Moon
by Marilyn Hilton
Written in free verse, this is the emotional story of 12-year-old Mimi, a half-black, half-Japanese girl who moves from California to a mostly white Vermont town in the late 1960s. She wants to be an astronaut like Neil Armstrong but faces mockery from teachers and students for having such an absurd dream. Readers feel the sting of racism and sexism as well as the sweetness and power of true friendship. Valeria recommends others read this book: “It is very inspirational to all girls to believe you can do anything in life.”

Rules
by Cynthia Lord
Catherine is a 12-year-old girl who just wants to be normal. She tries desperately to control the behavior of her autistic 8-year-old brother, David, by setting up various rules. When Catherine meets a young boy who can only communicate by pointing to pictures, she learns that “normal” has all kinds of definitions. Erin, 10, shares, “It is a heartwarming story of feeling different, finding acceptance, and learning about how siblings are affected by autism.”

Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story
by Nora Raleigh Baskin
This book weaves together the stories of four kids from different parts of the U.S. — Sergio, Will, Naheed, and Aimee — in the days leading up to the horrific events of 9/11. Each of their viewpoints spark empathy in different ways and help readers connect (in an age-appropriate way) to this tragedy that left our world forever changed. Ashlynn, 10, recommends this powerful book that “makes me proud to be an American,” while JR, 11, says, “It showed me about people who have lost a lot through disasters.”

Sugar
by Jewell Parker Rhodes
Unlikely friendships abound on a sugar plantation in post-slavery Mississippi between Sugar, a 10-year-old African American girl, Billy, the son of the white plantation owner, and Beau, a Chinese immigrant who helps with the sugar cane harvest. Makayla gives this book the highest compliment, saying, “I was so into this book, I could not put it down. If you know me, [you know] I do not like to read, but this book was so good for me.”

Walk Two Moons
by Sharon Creech
“One of my all-time favorite books! Never judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins,” raves Jennifer. In this funny and sad adventure story, readers fall in love with 13-year-old Salamanca who is proud of her Indian blood and her country roots. She goes on a cross-country road trip with her eccentric grandparents to visit her mother who left her family to “find herself.” Sal fills the trip by telling the story of her classmate, Phoebe Winterbottom. The two stories weave together and teach the important life lesson that every story has two sides.