Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 56: Adventure Begins at Your Library

(Brief intro music)

Mary: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Mary.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Mary: Today, we have a special guest returning to our podcast for your listening pleasure—Meagan, one of our Youth Services Librarians! She is going to talk about this year's Summer Reading Challenge and its theme, "Adventure Begins at Your Library." Take it away, Meagan!

Meagan: Hi everyone, thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here again. I'll dive right into the Summer Reading Challenge. It is open to all ages and goes through Saturday, August tenth. After you register on either the Beanstack website or App your name will be added to our beautiful mural that is on the big windows in the Children's Department. After you log fifteen days of reading, you'll be able to visit the library to pick up prizes. Kiddos will be able to take home and keep a book from our prize center.

Rachel: Ooh.

Meagan: Kids and teens will take home a State Fair ticket, and there are a few other fun coupons depending on ages for everyone, all while supplies last. Come chat with one of us at a reference desk to find out more. After the main challenge is completed, participants will still be able to continue logging their reading, writing book reviews, and doing activities throughout the summer to earn more badges. We also have a lot of fun programs planned for the summer. We're going to have STEAM Labs, LEGO Club, a Video Game Club, an Art Club, Middle School programs, Family Fun, a special weekly Preschool Story Time with special guests from the city, a new Intergenerational Story Time, and all of our wonderful typical Story Times. We have bright orange flyers with all of these details, or you can always check out the Oak Creek Public Library

website. I love traveling and playing outside, so I'm loving this year's theme, "Adventure Begins at your Library" and can't wait to chat with you ladies about adventure books.

Rachel: To start us off on our journey, I'm going with the classic adventure tale "Around the World in Eighty Days" by Jules Verne. First published in 1872 when travel was a lot less simple and accessible than it is today, the novel's premise is this: "One night in the reform club, Phileas Fogg bets his companions that he can travel across the globe in just eighty days. Breaking the well-established routine of his daily life, he immediately sets off for Dover with his astonished valet Passepartout. Passing through exotic lands and dangerous locations, they seize whatever transportation is at hand…overcoming set-backs and always racing against the clock." This voyage would have been quite the feat at the time, especially considering that Fogg and his companion couldn't exactly book a plane ticket! Instead, they travel by boat, train, sleigh, ferry, and even ride an elephant. It's really only possible because Fogg is loaded. Case in point: When Fogg and company try to make their way from New York to England, they miss their boat and have to board another bound for France. "The captain…refuses [to divert course] to take them to Liverpool, whereupon Fogg consents to be taken to Bordeaux for $2,000 per passenger. He then bribes the crew to mutiny and makes course for Liverpool. Against hurricane winds and going on full steam, the boat runs out of fuel after a few days. When the coal runs out, Fogg buys the boat from the captain—

Meagan: Oh my gosh.

Rachel: (laughs) —then he has the crew burn all the wooden parts to keep up the steam." It's reminiscent of eccentric aristocrats funding archeological digs in Egypt just so they could show off a mummy to their chums. Or, you know, modern-day billionaires sinking money into private space exploration programs. Anyway, Fogg is a silly man, yes, but in a whimsical way. He and his travel companions get into all sorts of hijinks during their wild adventure. I won't spoil the ending despite the fact that this book has been out for over 150 years, but I can say that it's worth the read! A good readalike is another classic: "The Time Machine" by H.G. Wells. Published in 1895, this tale takes us through space and time. It dips deeply into the well of science fiction and was considered to be way ahead of its time.

Mary and Rachel: (in unison) Ha.

Meagan: (chuckles)

Mary: When it comes to adventure, you really can't ask for more than what Sarah J. Maas' eight-book "Throne of Glass" series gives you. An assassin fighting her way through the world, discovering who she is and what she cares about will get your blood pumpin'. Celaena Sardothian is a young woman that has made a reputation for herself as Adarlin's Assassin. The story begins with Dorian, The Prince of Adarlan himself, pulling her out of the Salt Mines of Endovier where enslaved people go to be worked and tortured to death. He's there to offer her the opportunity to get out of the mines and enter a competition to become the King's Champion—the very same king who took so much from her and her people. We follow Celeana through eight books of trials, tribulations, friendship, love, and loss. When I tell you you will see every vista the world has to offer: deserts of hot sand, forests, oceans, castles, dirt roads, caves and sewers, and opulent marble structures. I know this is a hot take and there is much debate online about the reading order, but when you read "Throne of Glass" series, please start with "Throne of Glass" and not "The Assassin's Blade." I'm a stickler for reading books in the publishing order as we would have if it were coming out today. Sarah herself has said this is her preferred reading order. Experience it as the writer intended! I'll hop off my soapbox now and give you a readalike, which is "An Ember in the Ashes" by Sabaa Tahir. "Under the Martial Empire, defiance is met with death. Those who do not vow their blood and bodies to the Emperor risk the execution of their loved ones and the destruction of all they hold dear. It is in this brutal world, inspired by ancient Rome, that Laia lives with her grandparents and older brother. The family carves out an existence in the Empire's impoverished backstreets. They do not challenge the Empire. They've seen what happens to those who do. But when Laia's brother is arrested for treason, Laia is forced to make a decision. In exchange for help from rebels who promise to rescue her brother, she will risk her life to spy for them…within the Empire's greatest military academy. There, Laia meets Elias, the school's finest soldier—and secretly, its most unwilling. Elias wants only to be free of the tyranny he's being trained to enforce. He and Laia will soon realize that their destinies are intertwined—and that their choices will change the fate of the Empire itself."

Meagan: My first recommendation is a picture book that features traveling around in a camper van, an activity that is definitely on my bucket list. It's called "Grandad's Camper" by Harry Woodgate. "Grandad has the most wonderful cottage by the sea, and every summer, his fun-loving granddaughter comes to stay with him. Grandad always tells her amazing stories of his world travels with Gramps in their camper van. But ever since Gramps died, Grandad hasn't felt like going out and adventuring anymore. Can his spunky granddaughter convince Grandad to dust off the old van and get back on the open road? This inspiring book celebrates life, love, family, and adventure!" If you're interested in another kind of quiet and moving picture book that features a trip with a grandparent and a grandchild, then you should check out "On the Trapline" written by David Robertson and illustrated by Julie Flett. In both of these books, a grandparent gets to share special memories with a grandchild on a trip. Get ready for your heart to melt at least a little bit from both of these books.

Rachel: My previous recommendation was a century and a half old…but this next one is not even a full seventy years old! You can probably tell, but I'm very popular with the kids. Truth be told, though, "On the Road" by Jack Kerouac is not what many would deem a 'family friendly' read. It was originally published in 1957, around the same time that a generation of American youth was bursting out into an entirely new lifestyle. Here is an excerpt from the blurb: "A quintessential novel of America and the Beat Generation, On the Road chronicles Jack Kerouac's years traveling the N. American continent with his friend Neal Cassady. The two roam the country in a quest for self-knowledge and experience. Kerouac's love of America, compassion for humanity, and sense of language as jazz combine to make On the Road an inspirational work of lasting importance." It's very antiestablishment, featuring a backdrop of jazz music, beat poetry, drugs, defiance—the whole counterculture scene. Remarkably, Kerouac wrote the original form of the novel while on his famous road trip across the United States, using a series of notebooks that he would later rework in a matter of just three weeks. This official 'first draft' of this manuscript was then typed onto a 120-foot sheet of taped together pieces of tracing paper that Kerouac dubbed 'the scroll'. This was written continuously, with no paragraph breaks or margins, and it makes for a rambling style of writing hitherto unpopularized. It is therefore difficult for me to sum up the plot. Really, this is one you'll just

have to read for yourself. If you would like a different perspective, try “Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg” by Carolyn Cassady. Carolyn was embroiled in a love triangle with both Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady, so she offers a unique take on both of these famous historical figures. She also paints an interesting picture of the Beat Generation from her own female experience.

Mary: My next pick is “Dragon Rider” by Cornelia Funke. Back in the day, young whippersnapper Mary was obsessed with this series.

Rachel: (chuckles)

Mary: I had it on audiobook, hardcover, and paperback. I would have it playing in the background while I was doing other stuff; analog Audible before Audible was a thing. Picture it: “A dragon. A boy. A journey. Firedrake, a brave young dragon, his loyal brownie friend Sorrel (my personal favorite due to her always having an attitude like someone else I know…) and a lonely boy called Ben are united as if by destiny. Together, they embark on a magical journey to find the legendary place where silver dragons can live in peace forever. With only a curious map and the whispered memories of an old dragon to guide them, they fly across moonlit lands and seas to reach the highest mountains in the world. Along the way, they discover extraordinary new friends in unlikely places and a courage they never knew they had. Just as well, for the greatest enemy of all is never far behind them—a heartless monster from the past who's been waiting a very long time to destroy the last dragons on earth.” A great readalike is “The Inheritance Cycle” series by Christopher Paolini. The main idea is the same: A boy and his dragon out in the world of magic, combating ancient secrets. “When Eragon finds a polished blue stone in the forest, he thinks it is the lucky discovery of a poor farm boy; perhaps it will buy his family meat for the winter. But when the stone brings a dragon hatchling, Eragon soon realizes he has stumbled [across] a legacy nearly as old as the Empire itself. Overnight his simple life is shattered, and he is thrust into a perilous new world of destiny, magic, and power. With only an ancient sword and the advice of an old storyteller for guidance, Eragon and the fledgling dragon must navigate the dangerous terrain and dark enemies of an Empire ruled by a king whose evil knows no bounds.”

Meagan: Instead of riding in a car or camper van, this time I'm going to recommend an adventure that takes place in a, wait for it…airport terminal!

Mary: Woo!

Meagan: Which sounds very anticlimactic, but adventure usually begins when something goes wrong. I am talking about the short story collection titled, "You Are Here: Connecting Flights" edited by Ellen Oh. "In a crowded Chicago airport, an incident at TSA impacts twelve young Asian Americans, all strangers to one another before this day. As events cause their journeys to intertwine, they discover the challenges of friendship, the perils of younger siblings, the power or words, and the unexpected significance of a blue Stratocaster electric guitar. Twelve virtuoso authors draw from their own experiences to explore themes of identity and belonging in the interwoven stories of young people whose family roots may extend to East and Southeast Asia, but who are themselves distinctly American." I love intertwining short stories because it's exciting to discover the unexpected connections. Another book that shares this kind of story telling is "Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks" by Jason Reynolds. You hear ten different stories of the various journeys the kids make as they leave school and head home for the day. Both of these collections of short stories have humor and humanity and prove that you don't have to physically travel far to have an adventure.

Rachel: I've covered classics. I've covered Roman à clef. Now, I want to talk about my favorite YA series of all time. "Uglies" by Scott Westerfeld is a quartet that came out during the mid-noughties. Though, the fourth book is kind of crap in comparison, so let's ignore that one for now. "The first three novels focus on the exploits of Tally Youngblood. In the post-apocalyptic future society where Tally lives, teenagers, upon reaching their sixteenth birthday, undergo a surgery to mold them into a so-called 'Pretty'. When Tally's new friend Shay runs away to the Smoke, a secret refuge for those who oppose the city's government, the future of Tally's own operation becomes uncertain. Dr. Cable, the head of the mysterious Special Circumstances, cuts Tally a deal: betray her friends and help the city locate the runaways or remain an 'Ugly' forever. When Tally joins the Smokies, she learns a chilling truth: the surgeries that the city performs are not just intended to render its inhabitants beautiful. The city also puts lesions into

the minds of the ‘Pretties’, making them shallow, unintelligent, and ultimately an easier to control population. Over the course of the novels, Tally struggles to maintain her sense of self within a society that literally alters how people think and ultimately succeeds in undoing the system of mind alteration.” To this day, at the ripe age of thirty-something-something, I still distinctly remember reading a few specific passages from the first book when it first came out. Tally exhibits incredible bravery even if her reasons start out selfishly: Track down Shay, follow her to the Smoke, betray them all, and earn her place as a Pretty. It’s all she’s ever wanted because it’s all her world allows her to want, so she’s willing to temporarily leave everything she knows behind, strike out into the wilderness, and face real life head-on in all its uncomfortable naturalistic glory. Girl is used to living in a technologically advanced society. She doesn’t even know what camping is, yet you want her to hike straight into a wasteland geography full of fallen cities and wild beasties? Mmkay. Count me in. Westerfeld is skilled at constructing a scene, and his characters are astonishingly believable for being from a far-off future civilization that uses a social caste system based on age. In fact, I liked the characters so much that I named my old kitty-cat after one of them. A superb follow-up is the spinoff series “Imposters,” which continues the story in the same world, only it is set years down the line and manages to be even more dystopian. All around, these books are a fantastic foray into adventure and supply ample action sequences that will have you turning page after page after page—

Mary: Oh, do you know which series you just made me remember? This takes me way back, and man, was it a great adventure! “The City of Ember” by Jeanne DuPrau! “Many hundreds of years ago, the city of Ember was created by the Builders to contain everything needed for human survival. It worked…but now, the storerooms are almost out of food, crops are blighted, corruption is spreading through the city, and worst of all—the lights are failing. Soon Ember could be engulfed by darkness… But when two children, Lina and Doon, discover fragments of an ancient parchment, they begin to wonder if there could be a way out of Ember.” Ember is a contained society, so imagine stepping food in the wilderness when you’ve always been behind towering walls. You think camping is hard… The character descriptions, the world building—all

of it is wonderful. This is a series that has stuck with me since I first read it years ago, more than I'd care to admit.

Rachel: (laughs quietly)

Mary: A quick look on Goodreads will tell you it's still enjoyed by all ages. A great classic read like is "The Giver" by Lois Lowry. It's set in a similar 'utopian' setting where everyone is assigned a role in their society, doesn't have to worry about pesky things like pain or sadness…but this means they also don't experience real joy, happiness, love, relief, or really any other emotion. At the age of twelve, Jonas is selected to learn from 'The Giver' who alone holds the memories of what society had been like before emotions and feelings of sensation were done away with. Through The Giver, he is able to experience memories from the past, things like beaches and sunburn. Things no longer present in their society. Sunscreen will take care of that, you don't need to stop going to the beach.

Rachel: (laughs)

Mary: Yikes…

Meagan: My next recommendation is also part of a series and is an adventure that is literally out of this world. It is "Amira & Hamza: The War to Save the Worlds" by Samira Ahmed. There is sibling banter, time stopping, and lots of science. "On the day of a rare super blue blood moon eclipse, twelve-year-old Amira and her little brother, Hamza, can't stop their bickering while attending a special exhibit on medieval Islamic astronomy. While stargazer Amira is wowed by the amazing gadgets, a bored Hamza wanders off, stumbling across the mesmerizing and forbidden Box of the Moon. Amira can only watch in horror as Hamza grabs the defunct box and it springs to life, setting off a series of events that could shatter their world—literally. Suddenly, day turns to night, everyone around Amira and Hamza [fall] under a sleep spell, and a chunk of the moon breaks off, hurtling toward them at lightning speed, as they come face-to-face with two otherworldly creatures: jinn. The jinn reveal that the siblings have a role to play in an ancient prophecy. Together, they must journey to the mystical land of Qaf, battle a great evil, and end a civil war to prevent the moon—the stopper between realms—from breaking apart and unleashing terrifying jinn, devs, and ghuls onto earth. Or they might have to say

goodbye to their parents and life as they know it, forever.…" It's an exciting, fast-paced read that draws on Islamic mythology. A readalike that is also fast paced, includes the stopping of time, a potential ending of the world, and initiation from an old artifact in a museum but rooted from a Hindu epic poem is "Aru Shah and the End of Time" by Roshani Chokshi.

Rachel: That is all we have time for, listeners. Thank you for joining us today, Meagan! It was great to have you on the show. The podcast will be on a one-month hiatus for the summer, so you'll hear from Mary and myself again after the short break. Remember to take a peek at our show notes for a list of everything we discussed this episode. Subscribe, rate, and share Not Your Mother's Library to help share these reading recommendations. Anyone and everyone is able to reach out to us on the Oak Creek Public Library website or through Facebook @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading. Bye!

(Brief outro music)