



WSIRN Episode 202: The art (and awfulness) of the cliffhanger
Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Micah and Mia

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

[00:00:05]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 202.

Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader: What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading, and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

Readers, if you're in North Carolina or close enough that you want to make a little road trip, I'm going to be there for several events in October and I would LOVE to see you there. First on Thursday the 17th I'll be at Bookmarks NC in Winston Salem, with Charlie Lovett, to discuss his book *The Bookman's Tale*. This is our October read in the Modern Mrs Darcy book club. We frequently get to speak to the authors at the end of the month when we've read the book but this will be our first LIVE book club discussion as opposed to video, and we would love to see you there, whether or not you're a book club participant. Tickets are free, but are required in advanced. Then on Friday morning October 18th, I'm hosting a meetup in Winston Salem for our Patreon and Book Club communities. If you are making a trip from out of town, we want to give you more than one opportunity to see your fellow readers.

Then on Saturday October 19th, I'll be at Nest Fest, an all day festival hosted by my friend Myquillyn Smith, also known as the nester, right outside Charlotte in Midland, North Carolina. This is such a fun day with food, arts and crafts, music, good people, and authors selling and signing books. And I'm so happy to be back again to Nest Fest this year. For more information on all my upcoming events, visit my events page: that's at modernmrsdarcy.com/events. That's where you'll find information on these North Carolina events, but also my trips to Huntsville, Nashville, and Cincinnati this season. Modernmrsdarcy.com/events.

Today's episode is a double feature. I'm talking books with a pair of sisters, but unlike most of our episodes with multiple guests, they aren't looking to find titles they'll enjoy together. 12 year old Mia and 10 year old Micah already read the same books frequently, so we're looking to individualize their reading lives with totally separate recommendations.

Mia is the older of the two, and is looking to introduce a little romance to her bookshelves... without leaving her comfort zone of action and adventure behind. Meanwhile Micah battles a classic middle-sibling problem... all her books are hand-me-downs, so she's looking for a good mystery novel (or better yet, a series) that's exactly suited to HER taste first and foremost.

If you're an adult who has zero interest in quote unquote "kid books", I encourage you to give this episode a shot anyway! Most of the titles we're chatting about today are total hits with adult readers as well. Because good books are good books, no matter your age.

Now let's get to it!

Micah, welcome to the show.

[00:03:02]

MICAH: Hi, thanks for having me.

ANNE: As you know, and I know to your great frustration, we have not featured a great number of ten-year-olds on the show. So thank you for coming on. Is it hard to find good books to read sometimes?

MICAH: Yes. Absolutely.

ANNE: Tell me a little bit about that. This is not a struggle I'm familiar with because first of all, just like your mom was saying, when you are a strong reader, but you're not reading adult books yet, it can be hard to find books that are satisfying and have, like, really great, well-told stories, but don't talk about things that you feel like you're not ready to talk about yet.

MICAH: Yes. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Also, something that we experience in my house a lot, 'cause I have four kids. None of them is ten at the moment, but I've had a few ten-year-olds and I'm going to have another. They find great books that they can read in like four hours or less, so it feels like you're always needing to find something new to read, which is exciting but also can be a lot of work. Tell me about your reading life in your quest to find great books.

MICAH: I like mystery books, but it's hard to find books that are surprising because books like *Encyclopedia Brown* and *Nancy Drew* just ... They have the same plot, so it gets really boring.

[00:04:09]

ANNE: Okay, so you like mystery books. Right now, how do you decide what you're going to read next? Does your mom help you pick out books? Do you look on the Internet? Do you get suggestions from a librarian or maybe a friend?

MICAH: I just look in the library and look for books that catch my eye and read the inside of them.

ANNE: Do you know what we technically call that in the publishing world?

MICAH: No.

ANNE: That is the flap copy. It's an important way readers decide what to read next, but you know the author doesn't actually write that information.

MICAH: They don't?

ANNE: No. There's a sales team at the publisher that writes that information.

MICAH: Huh.

ANNE: They probably have a little bit of say in it, but they usually don't write it themselves. Have you've found a great book by that method?

MICAH: Not necessarily besides *Percy Jackson*, but I kinda already got that from Mia a little bit.
[BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: Now you too have an already sister who also loves to read. Do you get a lot of book recommendations from her?

MICAH: More from Mom who tells Mia who reads something that I like, that I want to read that, and Mom's like, that's too old for you, why don't you wait a certain couple of years, and I'm like ugh.

ANNE: Oh. Is that frustrating to feel like she's reading good books that you're not ready for?

MICAH: Yes. Very.

ANNE: Do you believe your mom and your sister when they say you're not ready for them? Or do you think you can go on and read them now?

MICAH: Well, from *Harry Potter*, I honestly think I could've read it then 'cause she said it was a little dark, but actually it wasn't that bad.

[00:05:31]

ANNE: Micah, you've listened to this show. You know how this works. You are going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you've been reading lately and I will do my best to recommend three titles you may enjoy reading next. Does that sound good to you?

MICAH: Yes.

ANNE: Okay. Tell me about the first book you love.

MICAH: I like *When You Reach Me*, a book about a girl named Miranda who starts getting these weird notes about the future. Miranda has to figure out who this guy is, what's up with the notes, and why her best friend won't talk to her.

ANNE: I forgot about her best friend not talking to her. Micah, I read this book as a grown up and I really loved it, so this is *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead. Do you remember how you found out about this book?

MICAH: My mom said it was a really good book and she put it on my Kindle and I was just like what the heck, this is amazing.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Is this one you've read recently?

MICAH: Maybe like a month or two ago.

ANNE: Well the reason I asked is because this is not an easy book to read. I mean, there's a lot going on in this story and it can be really confusing to readers.

MICAH: Yes, but it wasn't actually that hard for me.

ANNE: This book is set in New York a little bit before I was born. What did you think about reading a book set 40 years in the past?

MICAH: I think it was pretty cool.

ANNE: So this is a Newberry winner. I feel like this just came out, but it's actually ten years old now and it's about a sixth grader whose life is really pretty normal until suddenly, they get very, very strange. I just really admired the way Rebecca Stead, the author, turned this tale of friendship and mystery into something really complex and fascinating. There's an angle here that I did not expect that we think might be a spoiler to share. But I hope that kid and adult readers would give this a chance. Have you read anything else by Rebecca Stead?

MICAH: No. I don't think.

[00:07:18]

ANNE: Okay. She's written some other good books that you may thoroughly enjoy, but we'll talk about that. Micah, what did you choose for your second favorite?

MICAH: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

ANNE: Okay. Did you have a hard time deciding which *Harry Potter* or did you just know that you had to put *Harry Potter* on the list?

MICAH: I knew I had to put *Harry Potter* on the list and *The Deathly Hallows* is the most recent read one. And I absolutely love it.

ANNE: What is it that makes these books so great for you?

MICAH: Harry, Ron, and Hermione have to figure out how to defeat Voldemort. It has lots of magic and fighting. Why I like it is it's action packed and the books are entertaining.

ANNE: Action packed, entertaining. Do you like the idea of good versus evil?

MICAH: Yes and also, I like that they have to figure out what everything is.

ANNE: So I assume you've read the whole series.

MICAH: Yes, I have. Though I had to wait a year to read the five and up books, and I was like, Mom, come on. I don't care if it's dark because I had to wait for the *Goblet of Fire*, but then my best friend had a birthday party that was themed on that and she's like my best, best, best, best, best friend, so [LAUGHS] she had to let me read it. And I have to say, that's one of my favorite books, but *Deathly Hallows* still beats that by a lot.

ANNE: Well I'm glad you loved it. So now has everyone in your house read *Harry Potter*?

MICAH: No, my little brother. He's eight now. He has to wait until he's nine, so just one more year.

ANNE: Do you feel bad for him that he has to wait?

MICAH: Yes, 'cause I just want to spoil everything. [ANNE LAUGHS] Talk about it.

ANNE: Well I'm glad you can talk about these books with your mom and your sister in the meantime.

MICAH: At least I get to do that.

[00:09:04]

ANNE: Micah, what did you choose for your final favorite?

MICAH: *The Hunger Games*. Just the one book. Katniss volunteers to take her sister's place in a game where kids have to fight each other. I liked this first novel because it mostly follows Katniss trying to survive in the game. It doesn't include anything else, not much love. Not much fighting Snow. Just Katniss and Peeta versus everyone else.

ANNE: So, when you said you liked action-packed, yeah, you weren't kidding.

MICAH: [LAUGHS] Yes.

ANNE: Okay. Were you the first person in the family to read these books?

MICAH: Nope. Still Mia.

ANNE: I imagine you have lots of good books in your house and that Mia and your mom have ideas for what you could read next, so I imagine that's fun, but ...

MICAH: I hate waiting.

ANNE: Well, yeah, there's that. Do you like the idea of being the first one in your family to read a book every once in a while?

MICAH: Yes, but I found this second series to the first series in the book, and then Mia got to read it first because I returned it to the library, and then she got the audiobook on a phone.

ANNE: So she still beat you.

MICAH: Yup.

ANNE: Okay. I hope you love each other a lot.

MICAH: Yes, but you know, sibling rivalry.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I don't have a sister. I don't know.

MICAH: Oh, you don't?

ANNE: I can imagine. I've read books about sisters.

MICAH: Being the middle child is the worst.

[00:10:23]

ANNE: I'm the first born daughter. I've never been the middle. And I've never had a sister, but I've always wanted a sister, so I'm a little bit jealous that you have one. And I'm glad my daughters have each other, even though they have brothers too. And I imagine that it's trying being the middle child at times, but man, middle children are great at life.

MICAH: Sometimes. But you have one above you bossing you around and getting everything before you, and then you have one below you who gets all the cool toys when you got barbies. [ANNE LAUGHS] And also annoying you to death so. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: You want to hear something really, really unfortunate I did when I was a kid?

MICAH: What?

ANNE: I gave my brother, my little brother, a rubber band gun for Christmas.

MICAH: That was a bad idea. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: I thought he would love it, and I was right. And I just didn't think far enough ahead to imagine what would happen next. And I should have. But now he gives me good books to read and we get along great and I haven't seen that rubber band gun in like 30 years, so it's all good. But I do think that we especially need to find some books that are perfect, exactly right for you and maybe just you today.

MICAH: Yes.

ANNE: Okay. Now tell me about a book you ... Did you use the word hate?

MICAH: Yes. [LAUGHS] I hated *Where The Red Fern Grows*. I might have read it too early. It's really, really sad.

ANNE: This book is beloved, Micah.

MICAH: Why?

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Probably for the exact same reasons that you hate it. In my book *I'd Rather Be Reading*, I wrote about books that make you cry. I think the essay is called I'm Begging You To Break My Heart. But I tell the story of how the first time I read this book was in fifth grade. My teacher read it out loud, and none of us had read it before, and this was before the Internet and apparently, the elementary school kids didn't gossip and we didn't know what was coming and we didn't know what to expect. And she read it out loud, and I think the whole classroom was sobbing. And even my friend, who was super tough, didn't want to admit to crying, least of all about a book, just started complaining really loudly about his allergies and how they just made

his eyes water. And we were all just like yeah, sure they are. [LAUGHS] That - that - we all know what's happening here. And it doesn't have to do with allergies. So it was really sad. Do you not like sad books?

[00:12:35]

MICAH: Absolutely hate them, but the action-packed ones often have sad stuff in them.

ANNE: I can think of some really sad moments in *Harry Potter*.

MICAH: Yes. But they're just side characters.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] So you're okay with your side characters being involved in tragedy, just not your main characters.

MICAH: Yes.

ANNE: Okay. So you want a story that sad things might happen, but you want an end without tears.

MICAH: Yes. Or happy tears because happy tears are good.

ANNE: Ooh, can you tell me about a book that elicited happy tears?

MICAH: Probably the end of the *Five Kingdoms* series. It's amazing.

ANNE: Well I'm glad to hear that 'cause I'm taking notes. You know, I have four kids who are always looking for what to read next, so bring on the recommendations. Micah, what are you reading right now?

MICAH: I am reading *The House of Hades* by Rick Riordan, *A Grimm Warning*, *Mockingjay*, and I'm re-reading *The Mysterious Benedict Society*.

ANNE: Ooh, that seems like a good one for you.

MICAH: [LAUGHS] Yes.

ANNE: Micah, did I hear something about you loving the movie versions of your favorite books?

MICAH: I like the movie version of the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, but they cut out so much and it was depressing. I liked it, but I ... Always the books are better. You just get to imagine more. With the movies, it just helps me become a good actor because I love acting.

ANNE: Oh, really?

[00:13:58]

MICAH: Yes.

ANNE: Does that change the way that you read books? Maybe the way that you picture the scenes?

MICAH: Definitely.

ANNE: Interesting.

Readers, for so many of us, school was about learning practical, marketable skills. But deep down, we still love playing music, drawing, travel, and learning more about the books we love. Lucky for us, there's The Great Courses Plus.

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ANNE: Okay, so Micah, the books you loved were *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead, *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows*, and pretty much the entire series, and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. And it sounds like you are still reading that series.

[00:15:50]

MICAH: Yes.

ANNE: I'm guessing you're going to read the whole thing.

MICAH: I definitely am.

ANNE: Okay. You hated *Where The Red Fern Grows* because you do not want a book to make you cry sad, sad tears. Only happy ones. And right now you're reading more books that are fast-moving, lots of adventure. You have lots of good versus evil and good versus everybody else. So, Micah, for you, we're looking for books that tell great, meaty stories that have complex plots that you can't just finish in an hour, but that are still while they may be advanced reading wise, they're still age appropriate for a ten-year-old. I would like to assure you that I know they seem hard to find, but there really are plenty of these books out there.

And if you're listening now and you're nodding along, thinking, like oh, this is something I've been looking for in my own or I know my neighbor or my niece or my nephew struggles with this, this is one of the number one emails we get in from readers looking for books. They're looking for books that are age appropriate for young, advanced readers. So if you have some recommendations or you just want to chime in and say I so relate to this, please go to our show notes at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com and tell us 'cause I'm sure everyone would love a big recommendation party there.

Okay. That being said, are you ready to talk about what you should read next?

MICAH: Yes. But before we do that, I've got a joke for you.

ANNE: I would love to hear a joke.

MICAH: What's a lion's favorite book?

ANNE: I don't know, what's a lion's favorite book?

MICAH: *Pride and Prejudice*.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] You can come back and tell me Jane Austen jokes anytime. Standing invitation. Where did you hear that one?

MICAH: I made it up.

ANNE: That's a good joke. I think you have a future.

MICAH: [LAUGHS] Thanks.

[00:17:32]

ANNE: Okay. Micah, something that I know a lot of young readers and I mean, let's be honest, adults really love is finding a great series. Because that means instead of just finding one great book, you can find three or eight or twenty, all at once. You love *The Hunger Games*. You love *Harry Potter*. Do you feel that way about a great series too?

MICAH: Yes.

ANNE: Good to know. We'll get there. First I want to say if you loved *When You Reach Me*, I would really recommend you take a look at Rebecca Stead's previous book *Liar and Spy*. I don't think you're ready for all her books like *Goodbye Stranger* came out in 2015 and there are some themes there that I think your mom might judge too, not quite ones that you're ready for.

MICAH: Okay.

ANNE: But I think *Liar and Spy* could be a really great pick for you and as I'm sure you know or will learn, if you do find a book you love, it's great to look who the author is and see what else they have written. With many authors, it's the case if you like one work, you're going to like a lot of other books they've written. But this book is also set in New York. It's set in an apartment building. It is not set in an exactly the contemporary present day. There's a new kid who moves in to the building. His name is Georges, but it's spelled with an S on the end and so there's a lot of silly wordplay jokes throughout the book. And considering you just told me a *Pride and Prejudice* joke, I think you might think that aspect of it is really fun.

Georges with an S moves into the building and notices a spy club meeting sign posted up in their new apartment building's laundry room. He's new. He doesn't know anybody. He'll show up and check it out and he meets his new friend Safer. That's really his name: Safe with an R. He's a 12-year-old self-trained spy.

MICAH: I think I might have heard about this.

ANNE: Okay, I like the sound of this. It's got a real distinctive cover too. It's real pretty. It's blue. It's got an apartment building on the front with a pair of binoculars hanging down from the title text. What happens is Safer teaches Georges how to be a spy. He teaches him the tricks of the trade and puts him to work tracking a mysterious man in their apartment building that Georges and Safer call Mr. X. So this is a realistic novel, and it's about friendship and standing up for yourself. I think you might really enjoy it. I liked *First Light* also, which is a really interesting concept, but not as much as *Liar and Spy*.

Okay. For another standalone book, do you know a fairly new title called *The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl*? It is by Stacy McAnulty.

[00:20:16]

MICAH: Hm. I don't think so.

ANNE: Well the only reason I found out about this is I was traveling on, I think book tour last year and I was at a bookstore in Denver. It's called Book Bar Denver. If you're ever in the area, look it up. It's a really fun place to go visit. At Book Bar, they have a mother-daughter book club and unfortunately, I live 2000 miles away. Probably never going to make it to their mother-daughter book club unless I get very lucky with my timing. But I was interested in seeing what a mother-daughter book club would be reading, so I jotted down a bunch of the suggestions and I brought them home with me and my daughters ended up reading quite a few of them. So that is how I found out about *The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl*. This story is about a girl named Lucy. Well she's homeschooled. Her life completely changes when she is zapped by lightning.

MICAH: Oh.

ANNE: It does not kill her. Instead what it does is gives her a little bit of a quirkiness, like she becomes very sensitive about certain things and it also gives her incredible math skills. Like now all of a sudden, she's gone from struggling with learning to catch on to math in school to becoming a complete math genius. So it completely changes her life. But she doesn't want anybody to know it.

So what you have is a middle school girl dealing with these weird things that are really difficult to talk about, trying to live an ordinary life, trying to fit in with the world except she's suddenly become very, very special. So it's not that easy. She's spunky and plucky and smart and she's the kinda girl where you're like, she would be such a great friend. I would love to actually know her. And I think this might be interesting in a way that you don't see a lot in books. Just really fun to read about a likeable kid facing a very strange, but very entertaining challenge. How does that sound?

MICAH: That sounds amazing.

ANNE: That is *The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl* by Stacy McAnulty. Okay. Now what I really think you need is a good series. Are you on board for that?

MICAH: Yes!

ANNE: Have you read anything by James Riley?

MICAH: I'm not sure.

ANNE: He has written all kinds of books, all kinds of series, but the one I like for you the most based on your picks is called *Story Thieves*. The first book in the series is called *Story Thieves*,

just like the title. There are five books in the series. One of them is very strange. It's like a choose your own adventure, which I think you'll find super fun. The lexical score on these books is pretty high. The lexical score is a good indicator of the complexity of a certain text and you can look up on the Internet what I'm talking about. We'll put a link in shownotes. Something I noticed about the books you love is they all an element that messes with reality. *When You Reach Me*, *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*. The worlds portrayed in those books are not quite the same as the world we live in. Similar, but not the same. Thank goodness for that. And that is very true in *The Story Thieves* as well, but it definitely does have one foot firmly planted in reality.

These books are about a kid named Owen who is just going to school, same ol' same ol'. Regular life until one day he sees his fellow student, a girl named Bethany, climb out of a book in the school library.

[00:23:41]

MICAH: Oh.

ANNE: Right. 'Cause that doesn't happen in your real life.

MICAH: Yeah. I think my friend has read it. I think I've seen her hold it just like at our co-op, which is just like a pretend school that we run and stock.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I think you would like it, but she might know you a little better than I do. [MICAH LAUGHS] Bethany is climbing out of a book, not just because she found a magical way in, but because Bethany herself is half-fictional. So there's a couple things going on here. One, Owen discovers that even people he knows are half-fictional and because they are, they have the ability to leap into any book because that's what you can do when you're part made up of a story. Bethany is on a quest. Her father got lost in a book a long time ago and she's been trying to figure out which book he's lost in so she can go find him.

MICAH: Oh.

ANNE: But Owen has a slightly different take on the situation. [MICAH LAUGHS] Like he feels sorry for Bethany, but he also thinks, hang on. I have a favorite fantasy series. It's called something strange like Kiel Gnomesfoot. He would like nothing more than to go jump into that series. So he wants Bethany to take him. And of course, this is an action-adventure fantasy mystery novel. Of course they jump into the book. [MICAH LAUGHS] This is about friendship and courage and adventure and also power and very, sometimes strange pleasures of a good story. Five books. James Riley. *The Story Thieves*. What do you think?

MICAH: It sounds good and it also reminds me of *Five Kingdoms*. And it has lots of the same qualities as you just said.

[00:25:16]

ANNE: It does. I don't know if this one is going to make you cry happy tears or sad tears. But I like that you're comparing it to the *Five Kingdoms*, which we know you loved. Do you want a couple more titles I think you may enjoy?

MICAH: Okay.

ANNE: Check out the *Artemis Fowl* series if you haven't already.

MICAH: My sister's reading that.

ANNE: Cool. The *Framed* series, and I think you might be ready for this reading-wise, definitely content-wise, but I think you might be ready for this reading-wise as well, and that is *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. It is a series.

MICAH: Nice.

ANNE: Okay. Micah, thank you for talking books and about your reading life with me today. We talked about *Liar and Spy* by Rebecca Stead, *The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl* by Stacy McAnulty, and *The Story Thieves* series by James Riley. Of those books, what do you think you might read next?

MICAH: *The Story Thieves*.

ANNE: I can't wait to hear what you think. Thanks so much for talking books with me.

MICAH: I'm glad to be here.

Readers, now that we mostly stream our entertainment online nothing annoys everyone more than buffering in the middle of a movie. But do you remember that one VHS tape you played over and over so much that it eventually became warped in that spot? That seems unthinkable now.

But unfortunately analog media does degrade over time which is a great reason to digitize your favorite home movies now with LegacyBox.

My own family sent LegacyBox two boxes full of pictures, videos and even a few photo negatives that we didn't have prints of (this was definitely the most fun we've had cleaning up in a long time.)

And since a lot of my childhood memories are at my parents house, I gave them a box as well.

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Get started preserving your past.

Readers, we all love to refresh our snack drawers. But when's the last time you refreshed your sock drawer? If you can't remember, it's probably time for an upgrade.

Bombas socks are made with comfort innovations like arch support, a seamless toe, and a cushioned foot bed—all sock-speak for: super comfortable. They come in hundreds of colors and styles, making them perfect for men, women, and kids.

They really are perfect for everyone in the family. I recently got Will and our youngest a pack of father son matching socks. They are adorable. But not just that, they are super comfortable, whether you're out for a run or just padding around the house.

And now, Bombas' has a new line of Merino Wool socks that are made from soft, warm, and naturally moisture-wicking merino wool, designed with all of Bombas' classic comfort features. From keeping cool and dry on your morning run to staying comfortable in your office's freezing air conditioning, Bombas' socks are ready to work as hard as you do. And for every pair of socks you buy, Bombas will donate a pair to someone in need.

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Buy your Bombas at Bombas.com/READNEXT today, and get 20% off your first purchase. That's B-O-M-B-A-S dot com slash READNEXT for 20% off. Bombas.com/READNEXT.

ANNE: Mia, welcome to the show.

[00:29:13]

MIA: Thank you.

ANNE: I just got to talk to your sister Micah about her book selections and what we were really looking for her were fast-paced, mysterious, action-packed books that were good for her as an advanced ten-year-old reader, but also were still age appropriate.

MIA: Yeah, that sounds about right of what she would like.

ANNE: Now, you are two years older. Is that right?

MIA: Yes. That is correct.

ANNE: Okay. What grade are you in now?

MIA: I am now in seventh.

ANNE: And what are you looking for in your reading life?

MIA: In my reading life, I am mostly looking for something pretty fast-paced that way I don't get bored with it. I'm also looking for something with good character development, but character development that doesn't take up half the book to reach the certain point where the characters are actually good characters then you feel like you like them. I also mostly like fantasy and sci-fi novels, but I have read a couple of historical fiction novels, but I wasn't really great with history so I forget most of the historical things that happened. So historical fiction didn't really work that well.

ANNE: Do you have any theories on why it hasn't worked for you so far?

MIA: I guess I expect it to be fast-paced and like sci-fi and adventure and stuff, but most of the time, it's just a lot of like facts woven into a story which made it feel like the story part of it was getting lost instead of like mainly focused on the story.

ANNE: Ooh, interesting. Okay. You haven't said any titles. But I wonder if you've been reading one of those books that's written with the purpose of really being a history lesson for kids, but it's being packaged as a story. It's not being told with the express purpose of being a great story, and you want a great story.

MIA: Yeah, I think I have been reading some of those and I'm just like, I don't get why people like historical fiction. This is boring and it feels like, well I learned about ancient Egypt in third grade or something like that. I don't exactly remember exactly when, but it's just like why are you telling me something I already know? It feels like it's trying to talk to me like I'm stupid.

[00:31:22]

ANNE: Mia, I suspect that's because you haven't found the right one.

MIA: I suspect that as well. I know my mom is a lot like me in her reading life and ... At least from the stuff that she tells me, and she has read a really good historical fiction book recently. World War II and stuff. *Resistance Women*. She told me that I could read that when I'm a little bit older, so I think that I would probably like more books that were sorta like that, except age appropriate.

ANNE: Ooh. I might have one of those for you.

MIA: Cool.

ANNE: But first, before we get there, you know how this works. You're going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you've been reading lately and we will talk about what you should read next.

MIA: Okay. The first book that I love I said was *The Lunar Chronicles*.

ANNE: Ooh.

MIA: My mom actually heard about it from a friend and then she heard about it on this podcast so she was like, I'm going to guess that these are good. So she let me read them. Apparently I have been raving about them lately. [ANNE LAUGHS] So I really, really like them. It's about a cyborg girl named Cinder and she's a mechanic. Around the world at this time, there is a plague going on. This plague has been killing a lot of people. They really don't know where it came from but it just happened all of a sudden, so that's just like an underlying factor of the book that sorta helps create a little bit more suspense that like anyone can catch the plague at any time and it just adds like another element of danger to it, which I really liked. But anyway, one day Cinder is at her mechanic stand and the emperor of the eastern commonwealth came to her mechanic stand in hope of fixing his royal android because it broke down and apparently he's saying there's some valuable information on it, but I guess he says it like he doesn't really think it, but she knows that he's actually lying about it because she has a lie detector inside of her cyborg brain. So that's basically where the entire awesome story of it starts.

ANNE: Action-packed, sci-fi fantasy, fairytale retelling. Have you read the whole series?

MIA: I have read the entire actual series, and I just finished a spin-off book of it, *Fairest*, and I hope to read all the spin-offs of it because I just am very, very sad that this series ended, even though I'm glad it ended when it did because if it didn't end when it did, it would start getting bad and I don't think I would like it as much, so...

[00:33:51]

ANNE: You know, this sounds like a really strange book. You use the word cyborg and what I found is that lots of readers, tweens and teens and adults say on my gosh, this is the kind of book that I never expected to love, but I can't get enough of.

MIA: Exactly. When Mom told me about it, I was like, okay... [ANNE LAUGHS] I mean, I guess I could try reading that. [LAUGHS] So then she requested it from the library and then she picked it up, and I started reading it at my summer camp because I was like, well, this is like the only book I brought because they wouldn't let me read things on my Kindle at camp. So I started reading it and then soon, I got really sad when our break time was over because I couldn't read anymore and no, I have to read! I have to see what happens next! And so later I was like, well, next time I should just really trust Mom whenever she says I'll like a book.

ANNE: High-fives for you and your mother.

MIA: Yay.

ANNE: What did you choose for your next book?

MIA: I chose *The Hunger Game* series.

ANNE: Ah, another popular one.

MIA: Yeah. I chose *The Hunger Games* because I guess it was very fast-paced and there was a hint of a romance to it, which is the same with *The Lunar Chronicles*. But it wasn't the driving factor of the story. There were other plots going on. It was more of a subplot, which I felt helped me dive into it more. What it's about is a girl from a district, which you find out what that is in the book, her name is Katniss Everdeen. In this world, it's dystopian, so the government sorta mess everything up. The districts rebel against the capitol, which is basically the place where everything happens. It's like ... I guess it's like this state capital, like what we think of as the state capital like Washington, D.C. for us. All the districts in the past rebelled against the capital ... So the capital decided that they were going to make something to punish the districts, which was *The Hunger Games*. The rules of *The Hunger Games* are simple. Each district was to send one tribute into the capitol where they would go to a public arena where they would fight to the death. That is the basic story of *The Hunger Games* series.

ANNE: *The Hunger Games* premise is intense. Did you have any reservations about reading it?

MIA: Not really. I liked how intense it was and violence really doesn't bother me that much. Like a lot of people would be like, oh no, it's kids killing kids and stuff. And I mean, I do feel it, all the emotions you're supposed to feel. I'm not, like, heartless and I'm just like meh, whatever. They died. I actually care, but I don't, like, put myself into their shoes quite as much because it's not super relatable for me. I'm not in their shoes as much so it's not as scary.

[00:36:42]

ANNE: Okay, so it sounds like while you love to read a good story, you don't lose yourself in the story.

MIA: Yeah.

ANNE: You're able to remember that this is a book.

MIA: Which is the same when I'm watching movies as well. I just can remember that this is a movie. It's harder with movies though because you're actually seeing it, so. I guess that's kinda why I like books a lot better than movies is because I can remember a lot easier that it's not real.

ANNE: Mia, what did you choose for your final favorite?

MIA: For my final favorite, I chose *Five Kingdoms* series by Brandon Mull.

ANNE: Your sister was just saying she loved this, but she left the explaining to you.

MIA: Yeah. I really, really love this series. Really all of Brandon Mull's books. He is a fascinating writer. So this series starts with a boy named Cole Randolph going to a haunted house on Halloween. But something happens in this haunted house and he's very confused on really what's going on. Once they enter the basement of the haunted house where all the actual haunted house is, he hears the door lock behind him and he starts getting a little bit creeped out. So him and his friends, Dalton and Jenna, are like okay. So then they just continue on down. They're like whatever, it's probably just like some sound effect. So they continue down the stairs and into the basement where then they realize that this is not an ordinary haunted house and they get kidnapped by slave traders from another dimension. And they get taken to the Five Kingdoms. The whole place is called The Outskirts. There are Five Kingdoms in this, which is why it's called Five Kingdoms. A curtain falls on top of Cole in the haunted house, so the slave traders do not capture him. So Cole goes after them to try to rescue them. Only when he gets there, he realizes that like this is not normal at all. He finds out that no one in his world can remember him. Once he realizes that, he goes and tries to rescue his friends, but ends up getting captured again. Then he gets traded to the Sky Raiders, which is the name of the first book, and that's the basic idea of the book.

ANNE: How did you find this series, Mia?

MIA: My friend recommended them to me.

ANNE: Okay. It's good to have friends who also like to read.

[00:38:59]

MIA: [LAUGHS] Yeah, it really is 'cause then sometimes I'm just like completely lost, and I'm like, I don't have any books to read.

ANNE: I know.

MIA: And then they recommend a book to me and I'm like, okay, I'll try that. There are some times where a book gets recommended to you and you're just like, I'm not at all interested in this book and then you're just like, I don't want to be rude, but I don't like this book. That can be frustrating.

ANNE: That's a conversation I think I have with readers every day. It's not just you.

MIA: Cool.

ANNE: Mia, what book is not for you?

MIA: The book that was not for me is *The Truce at Bakura* ... My Star Wars pronunciation is not very good [ANNE LAUGHS] so this is a Star Wars novel by Kathy Tyers. What I don't like about this book was how it dragged on and on and on and it described everything so much that you lose the story. Like it was describing this one room for like two and a half pages. Princess Leia's hairdo for like half a page, and it was very frustrating because I couldn't focus on the actual story. Which is why I don't remember what this story was about at all.

ANNE: So not enough action, too much description.

MIA: Yeah, way too much description. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: What are you reading now?

MIA: I just finished *The Pretties*, the second book *The Uglies* series. I recently finished *The Lunar Chronicles* and a graphic novel *Real Friends*, and *Ghost Boys*.

ANNE: So you're reading a lot these days and you're reading all over the place.

MIA: [LAUGHS] Yes, I am reading a lot and I am reading way all over the place.

ANNE: I like it. And what are you looking for in your reading life? Any kind of books you want to try or anything you want out genre-wise or story-wise?

MIA: What I would like to be different about my reading life is I would like to be able to like romance novels or maybe be able to find romance novels that I like.

[00:40:51]

ANNE: So when you say romance novels, what do you have in mind?

MIA: I think I have in mind like the romance as part of the driving storyline, like in *Everything, Everything*, the romance was part of the driving thing, but the sickness that Madeline had was the main driving goal of the story, if that makes sense.

ANNE: There's a love story, but there's also a whole lot of action.

MIA: Exactly.

ANNE: And not just feelings.

MIA: And not just feelings. Just feelings is confusing and I guess the reason why I don't like it when it's just all the romance feelings is because I've never been in love as a 12-year-old, so I don't really get what that would be, so I don't understand it so I can't really feel what the characters are really feeling. So it just ends up being like if you like this guy, then you should like be with this guy. And then if you don't like this guy, just dump him. I don't care. Like it doesn't make sense to me. But if it's not the driving story, then I think I can get it a little bit more than just completely just feelings.

ANNE: All right, that's helpful. I've got some ideas. Are you ready to talk about them?

MIA: Yes.

ANNE: So, you loved *The Lunar Chronicle* series by Marissa Meyer, *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, and *The Five Kingdom* series by Brandon Mull. So collectively, that is a whole lot of books that we are talking about there. *The Truce at Bakura*, the Star Wars book by Kathy Tyers was not for you. And now you are reading all over the place, story and genre-wise.

MIA: Yup.

ANNE: Mia, first there's two books that I think would be worth adding to your list especially because you read a lot. You need a lot of book ideas. Three might only carry you through the weekend.

MIA: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

ANNE: Two books that are both historical, which isn't squarely what I see you loving here, but I think they have enough similar elements that I'd love to see you give them a try so that you can perhaps experience a book in a genre that hasn't worked for you so far in a specific novel that really does. The first book is *You Bring The Distant Near* by Mitali Perkins. This is a YA novel. It's inspired largely by the author's own personal story. She was one of three sisters, so I imagine that she has some life experience you can relate to, but a whole bunch that will be new

to you. So this is a novel that covers three generations of women, that bounces around the globe that tracks women facing challenges as they move and grow and interact with family and foreign cultures and I think there's enough in there that you have experience you will relate to that you will find, it'll be your way in, but I think it can really take you to new worlds and new experiences as well. And I think you might really enjoy that. However, there isn't as much action as there is in another historical book that might be an even better entry point to historical for you. That is *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein. It's about two females from very different backgrounds who are fighting in World War II. One is a pilot. One is a spy. They get into heaps of trouble and have to do incredible things. And I think it's got friendship, love, action, battle scenes, good versus evil, intrigue. I think there's a lot happening in this novel and I think you might find it really exciting.

When you started talking about *Resistance Women* and how your mom thought you might enjoy it when you're older, I thought, well, what could you enjoy right now that's very similar? And I think this is the answer. That's *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein. But let's talk about right now, your like action, sci-fi picks.

[00:44:22]

MIA: Yeah.

ANNE: 'Cause that's what I hear that you know that you love and I'd really love to send you out with books that you know you're excited to read. Have you picked up the *Renegades* series by Marissa Meyer yet?

MIA: No, I have not. I saw it advertised at the end of *The Lunar Chronicles* book and I was like, well this looks interesting but I have a whole bunch to do right now and a whole bunch other things to do I'm reading right now and I'll read that eventually.

ANNE: Okay. Well make eventually sooner rather than later because this is a really fun book. Although actually Mia, I think your timing might be perfect because *Renegades* came out a couple years ago, then *Archenemies* came out about a year ago, and the third book in the series comes out in November 2019. I don't know about you, but in my house, we think there's nothing worse than getting to a cliffhanger ending and having to wait years for the next installment.

MIA: It's so terrible. It's like the book is mocking you when you're just like, stop that. I want to read it.

ANNE: It is like the book is mocking you. It doesn't bother some readers, and to them, I say I admire your patience. [MIA LAUGHS] I do not have it. So the third book comes out November, maybe this fall is a great time to read the *Renegades* series. I hear from lots of readers who loved *The Lunar Chronicles* finding out about *Renegades* and being like well, I don't know, it's not the same. The characters are different. But I think this is worth your time, especially because

it has something that you're explicitly looking for in your reading life right now which is something that is romance-y, but isn't just about the feelings. And in *Renegades*, there's plenty of action.

So this is a superhero story. That's probably not what you think about when you hear about a superhero story because the protagonist here is Nova and she's not actually that kind of superhero. Her alias in the book is actually Nightmare. She is not a good guy. She's one of the villains and she is out for revenge against the true heroes, the renegades of the title who are in charge of the city. But as she starts executing her plans to extract revenge, she starts to get to know one of the superheroes, a guy named Adrian, and he happens to have his own reasons to get back against the bad guys and they are not on the same team but they get to know each other and sparks start to fly and this is an action novel. But it also has interpersonal element that I think in this context might be fun for you to read about.

So the backstory about how Marissa Meyer got her idea is really interesting. She said she got this idea in her head just from a billboard she saw someplace about originally setting this like in a school, like in a school for superheroes, and she ended up abandoning that concept. But when she first started thinking about her next novel, she thought oh, but what if? What if there was a group of superheroes and a group of supervillains and they were fighting each other? And what if a girl and a guy fell in love? And what if there was all kind of battle and intrigue and action along the way. And that's what *Renegades* is. How does that sound?

[00:47:33]

MIA: That sounds really awesome. All these books, I am now super, super excited to read and I'm like, this one book I was reading right now suddenly does not sound that interesting anymore compared to these books, so now I'm just like, go to the library and check them all out.

ANNE: Well, I mean, finish the book. Don't abandon the book. But I'm glad it sounds interesting to you.

MIA: Yeah, I will definitely finish the book, but then I will also, like, request these books at the library and, like, read them like as fast as I can without missing any details so I can get onto the next awesome book.

ANNE: Sounds good. Okay, now the next book I have in mind seems almost too perfect, and I think you must have read them already but it's *The Selection* series by Kiera Cass. Have you read these?

MIA: I have not heard of the author and I have not heard of this series.

[00:48:18]

ANNE: This is another multi-book series and it's been described as *The Hunger Games* meets *The Bachelor*. Now, I've only seen one episode of *The Bachelor*, but I still know what the Bachelor is. Do you know what *The Bachelor* is?

MIA: No, I do not.

ANNE: This is a reality TV show where they have one man and a whole bunch of women vying for his affection and week by week, contestants get eliminated until you have the winner at the end of the series, and I'm sure listeners who actually watch *The Bachelor* regularly 'cause lots of people watch the Bachelors are thinking oh my gosh, that's the worst description I have ever heard, and it probably is. And yet, it still does tell you a lot about what you need to know about *The Selection*. Here's *The Hunger Games* part about *The Selection*. These novels are set in the fictional nation of Illea, in which every citizen is assigned a caste. You can be a One, which means you are royalty. You have all the privileges, all the perks, really nice house, lots of money. Anything you want. You can be an Eight, which is like the untouchables, and then there's everything in between. The caste you're in determines where you live, what you do with your life, what kind of job you have, who you might marry, what opportunities are open to you, and which absolutely are not.

Our protagonist is America Singer. She is a Five, so she is not royalty. Her family's always a little bit hungry. Doesn't quite have enough to go around, but compared to the Sixes, Sevens, and Eights, they are doing okay and feel like they shouldn't be complaining. In the nation of Illea, there is a young prince named Maxon, and it's about time for him to get married, so since things haven't been that great in Illea, his parents decide that they are going to run a selection. Something that's happened in the psat and they are going to, I think, randomly draw 30-something women from among the various castes to come live at the palace and hang out with Prince Maxon and compete to become the next Queen.

This is very romance-y in the sense that it is all about who is going to fall in love with and marry whom. However it is not romance-y in the fact that, first of all, America is her own person. She's in love with the Five next door back home. She has zero interest in Prince Maxon, but she is very interested in going to compete because every week, she hangs in and doesn't get kicked out of the competition is income for her family 'cause she gets paid every week she stays.

MIA: Ohh.

ANNE: And so she is very interested ... I mean, don't you like her already? Like-

MIA: Yes I do.

ANNE: It's not the opportunity she would have wanted, although honestly, most girls in the kingdom do, but she knows that her family needs her and she wants to do what she can.

[00:51:08]

MIA: That sounds like a very, very interesting book and I think that I will really, really like that. I think that would have just enough action and stuff in it so that it's not just the love story, that I will be able to, like, read it without feeling like ugh, this is making no sense and barf, love.

ANNE: Oh, it'll make sense.

MIA: Okay, cool.

ANNE: They are really fast moving. And I read these all for my own sake when fellow grownup readers said, ugh, they're so fast and fun and I think you'll really enjoy them, Anne, and I thought, okay, if you say so. We will give this a try. Something else I think you should know about these books is while, I mean, if you look at the covers, they're beautiful women in beautiful dresses but that's not the only thing going on in these stories. When you start reading them, you'll see that maybe from a distance to the people of Illea, it looks like everything is perfect in the castle, but everything is not perfect in the castle. There's a lot going on in the royal family. There's a lot of complications between the 30-something women who are competing and there's a lot of tense, political situations happening between Illea and the other countries. I think given the books that you know have really worked for you, that that's something you enjoy as a reader and it's something you'll find here.

MIA: I really love and I sorta hate books like that because I read in bed at night and then it's time to go to bed and I'm like, no, can I just finish this one chapter. And then I finish the chapter, and I'm like, no, can I finish just one other chapter? And then everyone's like, no, you've already finished a chapter.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Yup. That's how it goes. Okay, so we talked about a lot of books today. *You Bring The Distant Near* and *Code Name Verity*, and then we dug deep on the *Renegades* series by Marissa Meyer, and *The Selection* series by Kiera Cass. Mia, of those books, what do you think you'll read next?

MIA: I'm thinking that I'll probably read *The Renegades* next because it's by like a familiar author. School is busy, and I need a fast paced book during the school year.

ANNE: That sounds great to me, and Mia, I can't wait to hear what you think. Thanks so much for talking books with me today.

MIA: You're very, very welcome. Thanks for much for letting me talk books with you. [LAUGHS]

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Mia and Micah today, and I'd love to hear what YOU think they should read next. That page is at

whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/202 and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today.

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Thanks to the people who make this show happen! What Should I Read Next is produced by Brenna Frederick, with sound design by Kellen Pechacek.

Readers, that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening.

And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.