



Waves of YA, Episode 24, Better than Fiction, It's Non-Fiction!

Transcript:

00;00;07;06 - 00;00;16;29

Chris

[CHRIS] Hello and welcome to Waves of YA, a podcast focused on literacy brought to you by the Ocean County Library Teen Literacy Work Group. My name is Chris. Today we have...

00;00;17;16 - 00;00;18;14

Courtney

[COURTNEY] My name is Courtney.

00;00;18;25 - 00;00;20;01

Rachel

[RACHEL] And my name is Rachel.

00;00;20;21 - 00;00;27;11

Chris

[CHRIS] Today's episode will be focused on nonfiction reads. What do you find appealing about reading nonfiction compared to fiction?

00;00;28;01 - 00;00;51;20

Courtney

[COURTNEY] It hits a totally separate spot for me. Sometimes I just want to learn about something and I feel like YA nonfiction has a lot of really well put together specific books on specific topics that are way more accessible than other sources of information.

00;00;52;13 - 00;01;30;08

Chris

[CHRIS] Yeah, there's definitely, like I've heard a lot of the adult ones read as a text book sometimes, where it's like, I finished school, I don't want to go back. I just want the information. They keep it more, like, engaging for them, like fact, fact. But like there's plenty of, like, adult nonfiction that is good and engaging, but sometimes, like, you get the one I'm like, no. Whereas YA tends to be like more manageable size too. You don't need crazy, crazy details. Like, I just want the general information. If I

wanna go deeper, I'll dig deeper on my own. A good starting point for, like, different topics that I'm interested in. I don't need to know every minute detail.

00;01;30;19 - 00;01;59;23

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Right, exactly. It's reliable information and it's presented in an easy to understand way. And again, I haven't read a lot of adult nonfiction, but some of it really does seem, like you said, a little bit textbook-y or almost like it's trying too hard to be like really formal and authoritative sounding, whereas with YA, it's still good information, but it goes through the basics and helps you get an overview of stuff.

00;02;00;09 - 00;02;15;06

Chris

[CHRIS] Yeah, it's accessible and, like, assumes you're coming in without knowing anything too, if you don't know anything, you're fine. You don't have to have all the jargon known already. It tells you, "Hey, these the terms you're gonna learn right now."

00;02;15;26 - 00;02;31;18

Rachel

[RACHEL] There are a lot of like nonfiction books that are graphic novels, too. And that kind of goes along with how we don't like things that are textbook-y. It's like, what are our nonfiction books that are graphic novels? And that makes it very appealing too - to just read a comic book about something that's true.

00;02;32;18 - 00;03;00;19

Chris

I absolutely love "Grand Theft Horse" by Greg Neri, which is super fun. It was a topic I knew nothing about, about a woman that stole a race horse, and it was very cool. I would have never known anything about it if I hadn't found it. It was like, oh, I was interested, I dug deeper on my own. But it was like, this covered all the information and nothing else added more to it, really. It was a quick read on a topic. It was so fun.

00;03;01;05 - 00;03;21;04

Rachel

[RACHEL] Well, I really like digging deeper too, with like, true topics. I mean, when I saw the play Hamilton on Disney Plus I really wanted to know more about it. And there's actually like this really good nonfiction book all about the Hamilton play that was written by Lin-Manuel Miranda going deeper into like the story of Hamilton in the play and all that good stuff.

00;03;21;14 - 00;03;23;00

Chris

[CHRIS] Do you remember the name of it?

00;03;23;15 - 00;03;26;24

Rachel

[RACHEL] It's called Hamilton. And then there's like a subtitle for it.

00;03;26;26 - 00;03;36;02

Chris

[CHRIS] We'll find it and we'll link it, that way if anyone wants to check it out. How was it still super popular? It's been how many years now counting and it's going strong.

00;03;36;22 - 00;03;37;17

Rachel

[RACHEL] Oh, it is.

00;03;38;15 - 00;03;42;09

Chris

[CHRIS] What category of nonfiction do you prefer most and why?

00;03;42;21 - 00;04;13;17

Rachel

[RACHEL] I really like nonfiction books that almost read like they're fiction and they could be made-up stories, but they're not. One of my favorite nonfiction books is called "The Pregnancy Project," and that was about a girl who, for her senior project, decided to pretend to be pregnant and kind of tackled a lot of stereotypes behind pregnant teenagers in high school. And that's a book that like could be like a made-up story, but it's not. It's a true story.

00;04;13;27 - 00;04;59;02

Chris

[CHRIS] I tend to go for biographies, celebrity biographies, memoirs, anything that's a life I didn't already live. I'm like, "Yes, I want to know more." And like celebrity biographies like are a mix of, like, this is Wikipedia like very easy versus like really in-depth, like "All Boys Aren't Blue" is really, really good, really in-depth. And "Notes from a Young Black Chef" were really, really good, really engaging. And I really enjoyed reading and getting to see a different perspective. And someone's life is so drastically different from mine. And it's great for teenagers too. They're only exposed to what's around them and being able to read people's memoirs and biographies and seeing how other people live and how other people grew up and getting to see what it's like.

00;04;59;16 - 00;06;03;17

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I've got one that's pretty recent, 2020. It's called "True or False: A CIA Analyst's Guide to Spotting Fake News." It's topical. It's informative, the way it's laid out. It addresses current events and it talks about the history of misinformation. And of course, I am personally and professionally very interested in information literacy and this concept of fake news and how we are all consuming our information and how that can be kind of twisted for different reasons. So I just think it's such an important thing for people to know. It's an important thing for young people to learn how to do, and it's very readable. It's not quite like that narrative nonfiction where it could almost be a fiction story, but it's

very readable. It's got a lot of good information and it's got neat little sidebars and stuff like that to keep it engaging. So I really enjoy that. Like find a topic and this is the way to get into it.

00;06;04;02 - 00;06;10;10

Rachel

[RACHEL] I also really like some how-to books too, or, like, crafting books too, because that counts as nonfiction.

00;06;10;10 - 00;06;12;26

Chris

[CHRIS] That does. I didn't really think about that.

00;06;13;19 - 00;06;37;07

Rachel

[RACHEL] Because I got a sewing machine a couple of years ago and I only used it a little bit, but I really like checking out books on sewing because it gives you all the patterns and step by step instructions. It's like almost 20 different patterns in one book. And to me that's a lot easier than like scouring Pinterest and trying to find all these sewing patterns. Just check out a book on sewing and it gives you all the information right there.

00;06;37;26 - 00;07;21;22

Chris

[CHRIS] And Pinterest doesn't have any quality control at all. And it didn't even occur to me like crafting books. And I do these Crafting with Chris videos on our YouTube channel. And every time I'm like, here's a list of resources that we have. It's all nonfiction. Yeah, all of our nonfiction crafting books are great, like someone has already gone through them and like, does this pattern work versus Pinterest being like, "Man, I hope this pattern works." No, no, it doesn't. Or like every Pinterest recipe I feel like is wrong or like, have you ever cooked chicken? Actually, I don't think you did. You wrote me a very lovely essay about your grandpa, but the recipe doesn't work. Like our cookbooks too, not such a huge category where it's so many different directions you can go with it.

00;07;22;03 - 00;08;09;22

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Something else that falls into nonfiction is poetry. I love poetry and getting a really nice poetry book can just be such a great experience because obviously, again, similar to crafting stuff for recipes on Pinterest, you can find a lot of poetry freely available online, but there's something to be said for having it professionally pulled together as a collection. There's a recent one called "Inheritance of Visual Poem," and it's actually the printed version of a spoken word poem, and it's got a lot of illustrations, and it's a beautiful, beautiful book. And the poem it contains, is also fun to read and an enjoyable experience.

00;08;10;13 - 00;09;03;11

Chris

[CHRIS] What are some titles that you would recommend for nonfiction readers out there? I had mentioned Notes from a Young Black Chef by Kwame Onwuachi. I feel like I'm pronouncing that wrong and I'm so sorry, but it's great. It talks about him growing up, his mom cooking, learning things from his mom... going to Africa, living with his grandfather, learning how they cooked and their recipes, opening his own restaurant in D.C. and creating fine dining with African culture tied into it and creating that space and taking up that spot and saying, "Yes, our culture and our food is valuable. It is fine dining." And it was really interesting to hear the stories that it also includes recipes. And I'm, like, I don't actually like cooking, but I would love to cook these for me.

00;09;04;04 - 00;09;07;17

Courtney

[COURTNEY] That sounds really good. The food and the book both sound really good.

00;09;08;13 - 00;09;15;22

Chris

[CHRIS] Oh, this recipe sounds great. I am lazy. This is not my crafting area.

00;09;16;07 - 00;10;20;24

Rachel

[RACHEL] Well, one biography I really like is called "Brazen: Rebel Ladies who Rocked the World." And I really like that one because it's a graphic novel and there's also 29 stories of just very remarkable women in it. So each story is only like ten pages long and it just gives you like the short introduction of what each woman did and how they made their mark on history. And it mentions all different women from all different backgrounds. It has politicians, it has entertainers, it has scientists. And there's a lot of women, too, that I've never even heard of before. I mean, there's a volcanologist, there's somebody who won a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in ending the Civil War. And, you know, everybody knows about Joan of Arc and what she did on history. But there's just so many women out there that aren't in the history books and aren't in a lot of nonfiction books. So you read this short, graphic novel and you just met 29 new women.

00;10;22;01 - 00;10;29;03

Chris

[CHRIS] And the illustrations in that are gorgeous, like, it's pretty to look at, too. The color choices are all pretty pastels.

00;10;29;16 - 00;10;31;29

Rachel

[RACHEL] Yeah, it's like a lot of pinks and blues and greens.

00;10;32;14 - 00;10;36;13

Chris

[CHRIS] Like, I remember when it came in, I was this is so pretty. I was like, "Oh, and it's a cool topic!"

00;10;37;21 - 00;10;41;20

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Have either of you ever seen "Creature?" It's a new one by Shaun Tan.

00;10;42;14 - 00;10;43;22

Chris

[CHRIS] No.

00;10;43;22 - 00;11;50;14

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Oh, it is gorgeous. It's kind of like a big book. Not thick necessarily, but larger size... but it's creature paintings, drawings and reflections, and it's just all this artwork by Shaun Tan interspersed with stories about his life and his work as an artist and how he got started and how his art style developed and it is just so cool. Like I just flipped open a page and there's this little steampunk-ish looking creature pulling a little cart with a giant strawberry on it. And it's really cool. It's the sort of thing that I feel like all ages could really appreciate. I'm enjoying it and I can definitely see it being inspiring and interesting for teens, especially if they're looking to get into art. And it's so creative that I really feel like if you're trying to share it with children, maybe not the essays in it so much, but the artwork would just really catch their imagination.

00;11;50;25 - 00;11;53;04

Rachel

[RACHEL] Wow. Do you know why he named it Creature?

00;11;53;21 - 00;12;58;04

Courtney

[COURTNEY] He's been drawing for a long time and he started as a very, very small child. I think he said three or something, which I mean, lots of people draw at three. But he was really, really into it. And he was always drawing these wild looking, just, creatures. I guess that was the thing that always really caught his interest. The cover, it's got this giant owl-looking guy with one big eye next to a little girl holding flowers. And that description sounds like it could be a little horrific. But all of his stuff is so charming. It all seems really friendly, even when it's unusual and outlandish and has what we might think of as monstrous features. For me, I feel like that's part of the appeal. You're taking something and it's so weird and there's so much in our society that says that things that are out of the ordinary are scary, and instead it's making them like, "These are little buddies." It's great.

00;12;58;24 - 00;15;05;29

Chris

[CHRIS] Another too for our history fans out there is "A Pirate's Life for She: Swashbuckling Women through the Ages" by Laura Sook Duncombe. I think there's like 30 different women pirates throughout the ages. We get a little introduction to it. If you want more, she has an adult version called "Pirate Women" with a lot more, like, weightier information in there. That's also really good. But I feel like I got like a quick little bites of information. She covers all the details that you need. I think I read it in a day, but I also really love pirates, so I was like, "This is great!" And another one that I read is about history, is "Samurai Rising: the Epic Life of Minamoto Yoshitsune" by Pamela S. Turner. So that's set in, I can't

remember which era of Japan, but obviously with samurai. It's the only biography of him in English and it's a YA biography so it's, like a super, super, super fast. Read, which is really cool and really interesting because like, it's not like covered in your history books and especially like the kids are really into anime and manga. Like this may have been mentioned in something that you've watched, but like there's not a lot of information, like more official and more reliable source in English. Also, "Monuments Men," or "The Greatest Treasure Hunt in History." The Monuments Men, and it is the story of the group of men and women that after World War Two ended, were trying to find all the stolen art and different artifacts that the Nazis have taken and returned to their original owners. And it's pictures and like different stories of what they found, how they formed, like something returned. It's a chunky book, and I like mentioned it to, like, a sixth grade class. They got super into it. So that was like really fun and really interesting. And that's a topic that kids are familiar with because World War Two, gets covered pretty much every year from middle school onward. They know some of it, but this is like a part that they don't get to hear about.

00;15;06;09 - 00;15;11;07

Courtney

[COURTNEY] That's awesome. And it's got the, like, sort of treasure seeking bit, which is cool.

00;15;12;07 - 00;15;22;19

Chris

[CHRIS] All these pictures of like one of the coffins that was filled with like stolen artifacts in the books, but... I'm like, "Look at this!" They're like, "Oh, tell us more." I'm like, "Yes! Now read the book."

00;15;23;02 - 00;16;27;25

Courtney

[COURTNEY] One that I like and I love to read different - like with that book - different perspectives about something that you know a lot about. And I like books about American history and the 1960s. And there's one called "Turning Fifteen On the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March by Lynda Blackmon Lowery." And she was a civil rights fighter. She was jailed nine times before her 15th birthday. And it's part of a story that we've all heard some of. We know some of the basics of it, but it gets into the specifics. It gets into one person and it makes it so immediate and real. And really not that long ago, it's someone who is still around to tell their story of what happened. And again, this is YA, so it's a pretty quick read and it's got a lot of pictures and everything in it. So I really recommend that one.

00;16;27;25 - 00;17;42;25

Rachel

[RACHEL] One book I like that I feel, like, also fits into that category is called "The Port Chicago 50." And that book is all about the prejudice and injustice that black men and women faced in America's armed forces during World War Two. Everybody knows that World War Two happened and the general events of what happened. But people don't realize how these people were treated during that time, too. What happened in the book was a massive explosion happened during the Navy base at Port Chicago, and it killed 300 sailors at the docks and 244 men refused to go back to work the next day until conditions were taken care of and they weren't facing any unsafe conditions anymore. It just opens your eyes to

like how black men and women were treated during that time. I mean, they were almost giving their lives, you know, to fight for us in World War Two. And they were treated so unfairly during it. And that book is also a graphic novel, too. And coming from somebody like me who isn't really a big history person, that's a fairly easy read with it being a graphic novel. And it's not too long either.

00;17;43;11 - 00;17;46;00

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I think that one's on my to-be-read list. Who's the author on that?

00;17;46;16 - 00;17;57;15

Rachel

[RACHEL] I'd have to look it up. I didn't take note of any of the authors. The only reason I read it was because it was part of the required reading for library school for my YA class, but I loved it.

00;17;57;25 - 00;18;39;04

Courtney

[COURTNEY] It's Steve Sheinkin, whose last name I hope I'm pronouncing correctly. He does awesome YA nonfiction. On a strictly more informative practical side, we just got in a new book called "Don't Sit on the Baby! The Ultimate Guide to Sane, Skilled and Safe Babysitting." It's a little handbook, but like I know probably a lot of teens are still babysitting as a way to make money, or even if it's just someone who has younger siblings who they're responsible for. Sometimes it's a really handy little guidebook and if you can't tell from the title, it's like trying to be a little bit funny, which I enjoy.

00;18;39;19 - 00;18;54;06

Rachel

[RACHEL] It's really interesting. Some people don't think that they have handbooks for all those kinds of things. People like get a job babysitting and they don't think to like go to the library and get a babysitting handbook. So it's really interesting that we have books like that now.

00;18;54;20 - 00;19;48;09

Chris

[CHRIS] So like stuff like that. Like you're like, "Oh, okay, cool... [indistinguishable] Like the amount of other things that go into it that you don't realize of, okay, I'm going to watch the kid. Like I have to make sure they have a snack. What are they allergic to? What should we do for entertainment? What am I doing with the kids to keep them busy? Also if something should happen, like what do you do? Like, how do you handle that? Like, that would be covered. And like, you're not like, Oh, I would go like, watch a kid. Like, especially as a teenager plan for like worst case scenarios. But what if the kid you're watching does, like, choke on a slice of banana - what do you do? Reading a book and then having that information of like, here's some suggestions that way you have that information rattling the back of your brain. It's really helpful. It's like, Oh, no, it's happened. I've thought nothing about it. And now I'm panicking. Like, that little boy could be like, "Remember the book! This is what you should do."

00;19;48;29 - 00;20;18;18

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Yeah, absolutely. And it's got lists of like if you're worried that the kid is sick, at what point is it an "emergency" emergency? Like if they're fever's over this or whatever, which honestly, as an adult, getting reminders on that stuff is useful because it is a lot of information and hopefully we don't spend all of our time thinking about the worst things that could go wrong. But you need to have that information at hand if you're going to be responsible for a child.

00;20;19;06 - 00;20;34;22

Rachel

[RACHEL] I think it'll also decrease the amount of emergency calls this child's parent is going to get too. If I feel like if I was babysitting as a teen, and something came up and I didn't know what to do, I'd, like, be calling my mom, I'd be calling the kids Mom. And what if they don't answer? Where do you do then? You Google it.

00;20;35;17 - 00;20;52;26

Chris

[CHRIS] Yeah. I babysat twice ever in my entire life. I was like, All right, I have got to get this kid off the bus, get them a snack. Hopefully they did their homework, or who I want to sit for an hour. I'm, like, watching this kid for an hour, like, please don't let there be an emergency. I was very lucky. Yeah, probably should've known a bit more about this before being like "Yeah, I can do this."

00;20;52;26 - 00;21;06;23

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Yes, if you decide to have a baby yourself, they don't even give you a handbook then. It's definitely useful information. You would think that they would give you one to take home with you or whatever.

00;21;07;08 - 00;21;13;15

Chris

[CHRIS] You're keeping a whole person alive. That's so much responsibility!

00;21;14;01 - 00;22;26;16

Courtney

[COURTNEY] So much. It's probably obvious by some of the stuff I'm talking about. I did also just browse the new shelf to see what had come in and looked cool, which is how I found that Don't Sit on the Baby book. But there's another one that is pretty new called "Seeing Gender: An Illustrated Guide to Identity and Expression." It's a really, really interesting book, and it goes through the differences between, you know, sexuality and gender expression and explains pronouns and neo pronouns. And I think it's really great to have a guide like this because even if you're someone who has never thought about gender in any real way, like it's never personally been something that's occurred to you, but you still want to be informed so that you're kind and respectful to other people. It gives kind of an overview on all of that, and I think that it's great if you do have any questions and you have started thinking about gender identity and sexuality and are trying to figure out what works for you, it can go through things and it talks historically, too, about the different ways that gender has been perceived in society.

00;22;26;26 - 00;22;43;06

Chris

[CHRIS] There's a whole series, and they're, like, tiny little books. I can't remember the name of the series. That are different... There's the illustrated guide to they/them pronouns and it's like a whole series that are like, they're all they're quick, they're really informative. They have a lot of details.

00;22;43;13 - 00;22;45;16

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Oh, like the itty bitty, like...

00;22;45;18 - 00;22;47;19

Chris

[CHRIS] They're so small, they're so easy to lose.

00;22;48;25 - 00;22;49;22

Courtney

[COURTNEY] They're so good though.

00;22;50;09 - 00;23;44;00

Chris

[CHRIS] They are. I feel like I have to go hunting for them because I, like, slide between books so easily. But they're really good. They're just quick little bites of information and also being able to come to a library and like you can sit down in the shelving and read it really fast and shove it back on the shelf and disappear without anyone seeing you... I don't want anyone to know what I'm looking at. I don't want my parents to see, like, search histories. I don't want to check out the book and make eye contact with the librarian. Like, we're not judging you. We want you to find the information you need about that. Teenager inherently like "don't look at me" anyway. And then on top of like, "Oh, no, that's a personal matter. Definitely don't look at me." A quick little, like, I want the information. I want no evidence that I look up any of this information. I don't want to like, acknowledge it or have any thoughts or opinions about it. Grab, redo the shelving, put it back, go.

00;23;44;08 - 00;23;51;14

Courtney

[COURTNEY] We'll find the title of it, and we'll make sure to link it on the book list for this episode. We'll find that series.

00;23;51;17 - 00;24;22;09

Chris

[CHRIS] They're so quick. Like I flip through them, I read them, I go, "Oh, this is great." And then like, I cannot remember the titles because they're so quick and easy to read. I do like a wide range now of YA nonfiction. Like I feel like it used to just be like stuff for book reports and like, "Hey, I have to write a report on World War Two." And now it's like, fun things, babysitting, like tough topics of gender. And then also, like, musicians and stuff. Yeah, wide range.

00;24;23;03 - 00;24;36;08

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And so much of the stuff that is in that book report or whatever the school project category is, it's so legitimate. It's legitimately interesting to read. It's laid out in such a good way.

00;24;37;09 - 00;24;57;29

Chris

[CHRIS] I remember looking through and I feel like there's nothing between elementary school level books and then adults where you have to write reports... or something for such a long time. Where you're like, "Well, I can't read this book for babies. And this book is kind of hard because I'm not an adult yet." And now there's stuff actually in the middle. We're like, "Oh, this is actually age appropriate."

00;24;58;14 - 00;25;15;05

Speaker 4

[VOICEOVER] Thanks for joining us today. Be sure to check out the Ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and events. All titles mentioned in today's episode can be found through the Ocean County Library. Free with your library card. Until next time, Happy reading.