

FROM THE EDITOR

Noteworthy authors, notable books



Each year, *ASBJ's* editors work their way through piles and piles of education-related books that we think will be of interest to school board members and administrators. Our list of notable books each year presents the best nonfiction reporting and thinking by some of the top writers and scholars of our time.

This year's list, which starts on Page 24, is no exception. But there is a twist—one we hope you will enjoy.

Inside, we have interviews with two popular, award-winning fiction writers whose books published in 2007 used schools as a backdrop to discuss broader societal issues. The books, Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes* and Tom Perrotta's *The Abstinence Teacher*, represent very different types of fiction—conventional melodrama and contemporary social commentary.

Picoult, whose book opened at number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list when it was published last spring, examines all sides of a school shooting in *Nineteen Minutes*. Within the confines of popular fiction, she provides insights into how incessant bullying affects a troubled social outcast and what occurs as a result.

Perrotta's breakthrough came in 1998, when his then-unpublished novel *Election*—about a race for high school president—was made into a popular film starring Matthew Broderick and Reese Witherspoon. He received an Oscar nomination in 2007 for the movie adaptation of his novel *Little Children*,

which sold more than half a million copies.

The Abstinence Teacher is a very adult book, not surprising given its subject matter, a teacher who is targeted by evangelical Christians for her views on sex education. It is also social commentary at its best, with characters whose nuances outweigh an otherwise easy and obvious target—the culture wars in today's suburbia.

What makes both books work within their respective genres is how they play with readers' conventional wisdom and comfort zones about topics that educators know all too well and often with dread. Neither may be to your taste or liking, but they reflect how contemporary authors view the world that surrounds you daily.

And that, at least in our view, makes them notable.

As we move—finally!—into the actual presidential election year, public education is struggling to find its place on the candidates' radar screen. Two billionaire philanthropists—Bill Gates and Eli Broad—are betting millions that they can get it there.

Their campaign, Strong American Schools, is profiled by Senior Editor Del Stover on Page 20. Will it work? Will it help public education? No one knows, but it will be an interesting story worth following throughout 2008. Until next month . . .

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