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Robinson: Books, Books! Everywhere Books!

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*By Annabeth Miller,
ShowMe Times Editor*

The word “bibliophile” comes to mind when you know Rhonda Robinson. She loves books! And she works in the perfect place for someone who appreciates, enjoys and revels in books.

Rhonda Robinson is a librarian. To be specific, she is the librarian at T.S. Hill Middle School in Dexter. She is surrounded everyday by books and she has the opportunity to encourage and to enthuse young people about the joys and the new worlds they can discover by reading.

There’s one more positive about Robinson’s career. She has the opportunity to serve on a statewide committee that reads and reviews new books – good books – for middle school readers. Robinson is one of nine teachers in Missouri chosen to serve on the Truman Reader Awards Committee. These teachers review newly- released literature for young teens, and help develop the annual list of Truman Award books for Missouri students.

Robinson explains that a book doesn’t make it to the prestigious “Truman list” overnight. First ‘reader selectors’ read 25 books and rate them. The list of 25 is narrowed to 12, which in turn become the annual Truman list of books. The Truman committee – of which she is a member – reads “hundreds of books” and narrows it to the 25.

“So far I’ve read 147 books,” she said. And they are not books to be taken lightly – the majority are hefty sized novels. She said there have been some exceptional books in the stacks she has read the year. “It’s fun, because I love to read!”

Robinson said the list includes mostly all fiction books, all new releases, and with just a couple of criteria.

“Authors have to be living, and they have to be American,” she added. The Missouri Association of School Librarians sponsors the annual program. The books must also be newly published.

The side benefit to Robinson being a member of the Truman Reader Awards Committee is that she has received bound editions of all the books that she has read and reviewed. That’s 147 newly-published books the students at T.S.Hill Middle School can find on the library shelves. And when you add up the value of those 147 books, that’s nearly \$2,000 worth of new books that are in the school library – for free!

The books that Robinson has read and reviewed will be a part of next year's Truman list – and Dexter students will have an opportunity to read those books next school year. And since Robinson is a committee member, the Dexter students will play a part in developing the upcoming Truman list for all of Missouri.

“The students will have until December 1 to read the 25 that the committee chooses,” she said. Then the students will vote on those 25 books. The top 12 vote getters statewide will become the 12 books on statewide Truman list in two years.

“So our kids are two years ahead,” she said. Students will visit the school library and Robinson will recommend a book she has enjoyed from the list she is reviewing. “It’s really good! Besides the free books for the library, they’re getting the benefit of having someone who has read them –to weed through them all.”

One of Robinson’s favorites so far has been by Ruta Sepseys ’’Between Shades of Grey.’’

The novel is set in post-World War II Europe, and centers on a 15-year-old girl and her family. One night, the Soviet secret police barge violently into her home, deporting her along with her mother and younger brother to Siberia. The girl’s father has been separated from the family and sentenced to death in a prison camp. The story is about the family’s journey.

“It’s been my favorite (book) so far,” Robinson said. “It’s really good.”

The Missouri librarians also have book lists for other age groups.

- Show Me Reader Awards- grades 1-3
- Mark Twain Reader Awards- grades4-6
- Truman Reader Awards – grades 6-8
- Gateway Readers Awards – grades 9-12

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