

## 2027 Great Stone Face Book Talks

### **Busted-** by Dan Gemeinhart

Twelve-year-old Oscar Aberdeen has been to forty-nine funerals. He's an ace at bridge, loves Frank Sinatra, and is the youngest resident of Sunny Days retirement home by more than fifty years.

But Oscar's peaceful life is about to be "busted" wide open.

When a greedy new owner spikes the rent, Oscar and his grandfather face eviction. Desperate to save the only home he's ever known, Oscar takes a deal from the "bad news" resident, Jimmy DeLuca—a 102-year-old rumored ex-mobster.

The deal is simple: bust Jimmy out for one final day on the outside to complete his bucket list, and Jimmy will lead Oscar to a secret stash of cash.

What starts as a simple breakout turns into a madcap road trip involving a hairless cat, a stowaway named Natasha, high-stakes poker games, and even a police chase. Along the way, Oscar has to decide if he's willing to break the rules to do the "good" thing.

[Busted](#) by [Dan Gemeinhart](#) is a hilarious and heartfelt adventure about family, unlikely friendships, and what it really means to "squeeze the orange" of life.

Will Oscar get the money in time, or will this "humdinger" of an escape end with everyone behind bars?

### **Death by Whoopee Cushion-** by Vickie Grant

Manya's parents are so embarrassing! They love to loudly laugh and draw attention to themselves. They own the *Pranks-a-Million* joke shop where they sell gag gifts like fake dog poo, barf-in-a bag, exploding cigars, and whoopee cushions. Her dad is always cooking up new pranks in his lab, which he calls the *Funcubator*. Mom drives a bright yellow Volkswagen Beetle with giant googly eyes, a red clown nose, and a wind-up crank on top. Manya just wants to be a serious scientist, but that is hard to do when you're being raised by a couple of jokesters!

Manya's best friend Isaac, also loves science, and when they hang out, Manya's dad lovingly calls them "The Nerd Herd". Together, they enroll in an after-school program called *Serious Science for Serious Kids* at a local museum. There are only two other kids enrolled in the class, but their teacher, Dr. Michaels teaches them all about acids and bases and lets them do some fun experiments. Manya is having the time of her life!

But then, things turn deadly serious. First the police come to the shop to question Manya's parents because one of their trick cigars has exploded and badly burned an old man's face. Then, when her parents go to her school on Career Day to demonstrate their newest pranks, a custodian is killed when one of their whoopee cushions explodes. And finally, Manya's parents are arrested for murder!

Was it all a prank gone wrong, or are Manya's parents being framed? Follow along with Manya and Isaac as they put their STEM skills to work to figure out what truly happened.

## **Dragonborn-** by Struan Murray

What would you do if one day you opened your mouth to shout... and fire came out instead?

That's exactly what happens to twelve-year-old Alex Evans in *Dragonborn*. After the death of her father, Alex's life feels confusing and lonely. Her mother becomes extremely protective, setting lots of rules and keeping secrets. Alex doesn't understand why her life has suddenly changed so much.

Then one day something impossible happens—Alex lets out a fiery roar and discovers a shocking truth: dragons are real... and she might actually be one of them.

Soon Alex is taken to a hidden island called Skralla, a secret place where young dragons learn to control their powers. But Alex struggles more than the others. She can't transform into her dragon form properly, and her powers seem unpredictable and dangerous.

While Alex is trying to figure out who she really is, an ancient and powerful dragon named Drak Midna is rising again. This dragon is searching for a mysterious object that could start a war between dragons and humans. Somehow, Alex might be the key to stopping it.

This book is full of adventure, secrets, dragon training, and exciting battles. But it's also about dealing with grief, finding courage, and discovering who you truly are.

So after reading this book, you might start to wonder:

What if dragons weren't just in stories... what if one of them was sitting in this room right now?

## **Finding Lost-** by Holly Goldberg Sloan

Have you ever felt like you were carrying an invisible backpack filled with sand? That's how twelve-year-old Cordy Jenkins feels every single day. Two years ago, her father died in a fishing accident off the Oregon coast, and ever since, the weight of that loss has made everything—even the town she loves—feel like it's slipping away.

Cordy lives with her mom and her little brother, Geno, in a drafty, fish-smelling boathouse. They don't have much, and Cordy is terrified that her mother is going to give up and move them away from the only home they've ever known. She's looking for a sign—anything to change their luck.

What she finds instead is a muddy, hungry stray dog with terrible breath.

She names him Lost, and while he seems like just another mouth to feed, he becomes the spark that starts to pull her family back together. But healing isn't a straight line. When Lost needs an expensive surgery they can't afford, Cordy has to rely on a community of quirky, kind-hearted locals—like a heavy-metal loving librarian and a gentle veterinarian—to help them. But as her mom gets closer to the vet, Cordy realizes that 'moving on' might mean more changes than she's ready to handle.

It's a story about the 'pink dolphins' of life—those rare, magical moments of joy that show up even when you're grieving. It deals with real-world issues like financial struggles and fear of the future, but it does it with so much warmth and humor that you'll finish the last page feeling a little bit lighter.

## **The Free State of Jax-** by Jennifer Nielsen

Jaxon Averett has the absolute worst luck in the world. After his parents died and his grandmother got too sick to care for him, he was sent to live with the Grimmitz family in Walkonby, Kansas. His Aunt Helga and Uncle Clive can't even

remember his name, and his six cousins are basically professional bullies. On the night before his twelfth birthday, Jax decides he's had enough. He's not just running away—he's seceding.

Jax sneaks onto the neighboring property, rows a raft into the middle of a hot springs lake, and drops anchor. He officially declares his raft a micronation: The Free State of Jax. Population: 1. He's the President, and according to international law (which he's researched thoroughly), the Grimmitzes have no jurisdiction over him. But the property owner, a reclusive man named Owen O'Keefe, isn't exactly thrilled to have a new country in his pond—and the rest of the town thinks Owen is a murderer who hid a fortune in stolen money.

What starts as a funny, desperate attempt at freedom turns into a high-stakes mystery. While Jax is busy drafting a constitution and hiring a local girl as his "Three-Star General" to fend off his cousins' sabotage, he starts uncovering clues about Owen's missing brother and the town's lost money. The Grimmitzes are determined to drag him back to use him for free labor, and Jax realizes that to keep his "Free State," he might have to solve a decade-old crime that everyone else is too afraid to touch.

Is Jax a legal genius or just a kid on a raft? Can he prove Owen's innocence and find a real home, or will his "Free State" sink before the first election? If you want a story that's part hilarious "civics lesson" and part edge-of-your-seat mystery, you need to check out *The Free State of Jax* by Jennifer A. Nielsen.

Because sometimes, to find where you belong, you have to build your own country.

#### **Isle of Ever-** by Jen Calonita

Imagine you're twelve years old, your mom is struggling to pay the rent, and you've moved more times than you can count. Then, a lawyer walks into the diner where your mom works and tells you that you've just inherited a massive fortune. The only catch? To get the money, you have to win a game—and find an island that officially disappeared off the map 200 years ago.

This is the life of Everly 'Benny' Benedict. She's the heir to her ancestor Evelyn Terry's estate in Greenport, Long Island. But Evelyn didn't just leave a will; she left a trail of puzzles, riddles, and a centuries-old journal. Benny has exactly two weeks to follow these clues and locate the legendary Isle of Ever.

As Benny and her new friends, Zara and Ryan, dig into the mystery, the story jumps back and forth between Benny in the present day and Evelyn's own journal entries from 1825. Benny soon realizes this isn't just about a bank account or a big house. There's a curse involved, a place of eternal youth, and a group of modern-day treasure hunters who will stop at nothing—including sabotage—to find the island first. Every clue Benny solves brings her closer to a secret that could change the world, but it also puts a target on her back.

It's a perfect blend of historical mystery and modern-day adventure. You'll find yourself trying to solve Evelyn's riddles right alongside Benny, and the 'dual-timeline' storytelling makes you feel like you're uncovering a ghost story in real-time. Plus, the ending is a total cliffhanger that will have you reaching for the sequel immediately.

#### **The Last Resort-** by Erin Entrada Kelly

Twelve-year-old Lila has two very simple goals for the summer: Win back the friends who dumped her for being "too dramatic," and stop being so dramatic. She's ready to debut the "new, chill Lila." But then her estranged Grandpa Clem dies, and her parents drag her to Ohio to deal with his creepy Victorian Inn. Lila is devastated—not because she's grieving, but because it's *supremely* unfair. How can she prove she's changed if she's stuck in the middle of nowhere?

But the trip to Ohio isn't just boring—it's "odd." After a scary car accident, Lila starts seeing things. At every rest stop, there are people in old-fashioned clothes that no one else can see. She tells herself it's just her overactive imagination... until

the day of the funeral. That's when she sees her grandfather. Grandpa Clem isn't just a memory; he's a ghost. And he has a message: He wasn't taken by a heart attack. He was murdered.

It turns out the family inn isn't just a bed and breakfast. It's a portal—a "last resort" for spirits passing from the land of the living to the realm of the dead. Now, Lila has to team up with her skeptical brother, Caleb, and a ghost-obsessed neighbor named Teddy to find a killer. The catch? She's vowed to stay calm and rational, but how do you stay "undramatic" when you're fighting off evil spirits who are desperate to claw their way back into the human world?

If you like mysteries that are a little bit spooky and a lot of fun, you have to read *The Last Resort* by Erin Entrada Kelly. It's a story about family secrets, haunted hotels, and the one time being "dramatic" might actually save your life.

Check it out... if you're brave enough to check in.

### **Octopus Moon-** by Bobbie Pyron

Have you ever felt like an octopus? Not because you have eight arms, but because you feel *everything*?

Pearl is a ten-year-old living in a sunny Florida beach town. She used to feel like she had a hard turtle shell to protect her from the world. But lately, that shell has disappeared. Now, she feels like an octopus—sensitive to every wave and every sting around her.

On the outside, Pearl's life is great. She loves the aquarium where her mom works with loggerhead turtles. But as fifth grade begins, a heavy, gray fog starts to settle over her. Suddenly, the things she used to love—skateboarding, running, even seeing her best friends—feel impossible.

Pearl eventually finds herself sitting across from a therapist who gives her a word for this darkness: depression. To help her navigate the "fog," Pearl is given a unique challenge: try one "Impossible Thing" every day. For every task she completes—even if it's just getting out of bed—she adds a bead to a string.

But when a grant to save her beloved sea turtles is suddenly at risk, Pearl must decide if she can use her new "tools" to find her voice. Written in beautiful, lyrical verse, *Octopus Moon* is a powerful story about finding hope when you feel most alone.

### **One Wrong Step-** by Jennifer Nielsen

"For a climber, looking back can make the difference between survival... and a fall"

Atlas Wade has been trying to climb beyond the pain of losing his mother, and the ever growing rift that it has caused between his father and him. Atlas and his father climb mountain after mountain, only to move onto the next challenge before they can settle down and face the truth of their lives, and feelings.

The greatest challenge is ahead of them now. Everest, a mountain no one has conquered in the year 1939. The rift between father and son only grows wider as Atlas is told this is the one mountain he cannot ascend. He is left behind at

base camp with Maddie, a girl his age whose own father is a member of the expedition. But what happens when an avalanche sweeps over the peaks of Everest, where his father's climbing team had been? It leaves Atlas and Maddie alone on an unexplored mountain, determined to go up and save their fathers before it is too late.

**Outside-** by Jennifer Holm

Outside is dangerous. Inside is safe. That's what the grown-ups have always told them.

Razzi and her friends live inside the walls of the Refuge, safe from creatures and dangers that plague the world. As the oldest child in the compound it is Razzi's job to set a good example for the younger children and teach them the rules that help keep them safe. When she begins to dream about a strange dog and a life beyond the walls of the Refuge, she begins to question everything she has been told about the outside. Can Razzi find the courage to push beyond the only home she knows and discover what awaits on the other side?

**The Trouble with Heroes-** by Kate Messner

Imagine being caught on camera committing a crime—vandalizing a cemetery, of all things—and being told your only way to stay out of juvenile detention is to climb 46 mountains in a single summer. Oh, and you have to do it with a slobbery, uncooperative dog you don't even like.

This is the reality for 13-year-old Finn Connelly in [The Trouble with Heroes](#) by Kate Messner. Finn is angry, and he has every right to be. His father, a celebrated firefighter and 9/11 hero, died during the pandemic, leaving Finn with a legacy he can't possibly live up to and a mountain of complicated feelings he doesn't know how to process.

The story is told entirely through poetry, text messages, and even cookie recipes. As Finn treks through the Adirondack High Peaks, he meets mentors who don't just teach him how to hike; they help him see that his "hero" father was a real person—with real struggles, including his own battle with addiction.

Finn's summer becomes a grueling, mud-soaked journey to discover that being a hero isn't about being perfect—it's about the courage to keep climbing even when you're exhausted and the path is unclear.

If you've ever felt like you're carrying a weight too heavy to bear, or if you just love a good story about a boy, a dog, and the healing power of the great outdoors, you need to pick this book up.

**The Undead Fox of Deadwood Forest-** Aubrey Hartman

"Every Halloween, the local children gather at the edge of the woods to chant about the monster that waits to feast on their bones—but Clare isn't a monster. He's just an Usher."

Clare is a fox who isn't exactly dead, but he's definitely not fully alive. After a fatal accident years ago, he was given a choice: move on to the afterlife or stay behind to guide other animal souls to theirs. He chose to stay, living a solitary life in an autumn-locked forest where the leaves never stop falling, tending his mushroom garden and escorting souls to realms of Peace, Pleasure, Progress, or Pain.

But his quiet routine is shattered when Gingersnipes, a sunshiny badger soul, arrives at his door. For the first time in history, an ushering fails—Gingersnipes is rejected by every realm and simply cannot leave.

As the two begrudgingly team up to find a way for her to cross over, they discover a prophecy that claims Deadwood will soon vanish forever—and Clare with it. They must travel to find Hesterfowl, a visionary grouse, to uncover a truth that will challenge everything Clare believes about his purpose and his fate.

Aubrey Hartman's *The Undead Fox of Deadwood Forest* is a 2026 Newbery Honor book that is equal parts spooky, funny, and deeply moving. It's a story about finding out what you're really made of when you're forced to face the unknown.

### **Very Bad at Math-** by Hope Larson

Raise your hand if math has ever made your brain feel like it's melting. Now, imagine this: on the outside, you're amazing at everything. You're the Student Body President. You win debates. You play an instrument. To the rest of the school, you're basically perfect. But inside, you're panicking, because you have one tiny, life-ruining problem: You are failing math.

That's the reality for Verity—everyone calls her "Very," but her situation is very messy. If her grade doesn't improve, she'll be kicked out of office. That means saying goodbye to her reputation and all the big promises she made to her classmates—including the funds for the class trip they're all counting on. So, Very does what most of us do when we're struggling: She hides it. But the numbers keep blurring, the tutoring isn't working, and she's forced to work with Lucille—a girl who definitely does *not* like her.

The pressure reaches a boiling point when a student podcaster starts digging into Very's life, threatening to expose her secret to the entire school. But amid the chaos, Very discovers something life-changing. Her brain isn't "broken"—it just works differently. She has dyscalculia. Now, she has to decide: will she keep exhausting herself trying to be the "perfect" leader everyone expects, or will she find the courage to be honest about how she learns?

Trust me—you'll never look at a math test the same way again.

### **War Games-** Alan Gratz

Berlin, 1936. The world has gathered for the Olympic Games. The stadiums are gleaming, the crowds are cheering, and the Nazi flags are flying everywhere. 13-year-old Evie Harris is a gymnast for Team USA, and she has one goal: to win a gold medal. If she wins, she becomes a star. If she becomes a star, she can finally pull her family out of the crushing poverty of the Dust Bowl back in Oklahoma.

But as Evie walks the streets of Berlin, she realizes the "glittering" city is a lie. Behind the polished storefronts and the Olympic fanfare, there is an iron grip of terror. People are disappearing. Neighbors are turning on neighbors. Then, Evie is approached by a mysterious group with a terrifying proposition. They don't want her to just win a medal; they want her to use her gymnastics skills—her ability to climb, flip, and fit into small spaces—to help them pull off the ultimate heist: robbing the Nazi National Bank.

Now, Evie is living a double life. By day, she's competing alongside legends like Jesse Owens under the watchful eye of Adolf Hitler. By night, she's crawling through secret tunnels and navigating electrified passageways to steal Nazi gold.

She's surrounded by spies, and her "handler" is a Hitler Youth member who might be her only friend—or the person who hands her over to the Gestapo.

If she gets caught, it's not just her Olympic dreams that are over; it's her life. Can a 13-year-old gymnast take down a regime before the world realizes the true danger of the Nazi party? To find out if she can stick the landing on the most dangerous mission of her life, you have to read *War Games* by Alan Gratz.

The games are about to begin—and the prize is more than just gold.

**Will's Race for Home-** by Jewell Parker Rhodes

"My father is a far-thinking man." That's the first line of Jewell Parker Rhodes' latest novel, and it's the spark that ignites a 400-mile race for freedom.

It's 1889, twenty-five years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Twelve-year-old Will and his father are tired of the backbreaking, endless cycle of sharecropping in Texas. They aren't just looking for land; they're looking for a place where a Black family can finally be free.

The Oklahoma Land Rush is their one chance. But to get there, they have to survive a brutal trek across treacherous terrain, face down dangerous outlaws, and outrun the prejudices of a world that doesn't want them to succeed.

Along the way, they meet Caesar, a mysterious former Union soldier who carries his own heavy secrets. As they navigate everything from rattlesnake attacks to crossing the dangerous Red River, Will begins to realize that becoming a man isn't just about winning a race—it's about the courage to stand your ground when the whole world is trying to move you.

If you're looking for a fast-paced Western that's equal parts heart and history, you need to read *Will's Race for Home*.