

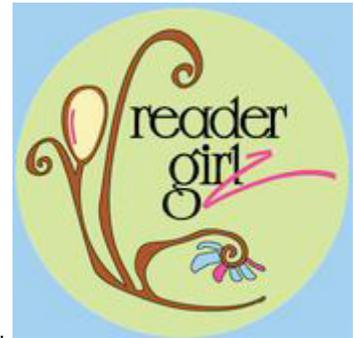
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An Online Book Club

This story originally appeared in Children's Bookshelf on March 8, 2007 **Sign up now!**
by Alexis Burling, Children's Bookshelf -- *Publishers Weekly*, 3/8/2007

In celebration of National Women's History Month, four critically acclaimed authors—Dia Calhoun (*Avielle of Rhia*), Janet Lee Cary (*Dragon's Keep*), Lorie Ann Grover (*On Pointe*), and Justina Chen Headley (*Nothing but the Truth [and a few white lies]*)—have just launched a monthly book group and online community called Readergirlz. Geared specifically toward teen girls, Readergirlz aims to be a place girls can go to connect with their favorite authors and other teens over books.

Each month, the **Readergirlz Web site** and **MySpace page** will post an array of new content for participating bookstores, libraries, schools, and individuals who are interested in forming a book club. In addition to highlighting a popular novel, the page will include discussion questions, a menu, decoration ideas, and downloadable music playlists selected by the author. Girls will be able to participate in online group chat sessions, read author interviews and the Readergirlz blog, and email the featured author with book-related questions or thoughts on issues covered throughout the month, such as tolerance, body image, date rape, and low self-esteem. As an incentive for participation, the first 50 teens who post a comment on the MySpace site each month will receive a prize.



The Readergirlz team also hopes to use the site to promote possible community service projects. "Read, reflect, reach out. That's the Readergirlz goal," Headley says. "Rather than partnering with any single organization, we've decided to feature links to different nonprofit organizations whose missions correspond to our book selections. That way, our readers will get the information that's most relevant to the books we'll read together,."

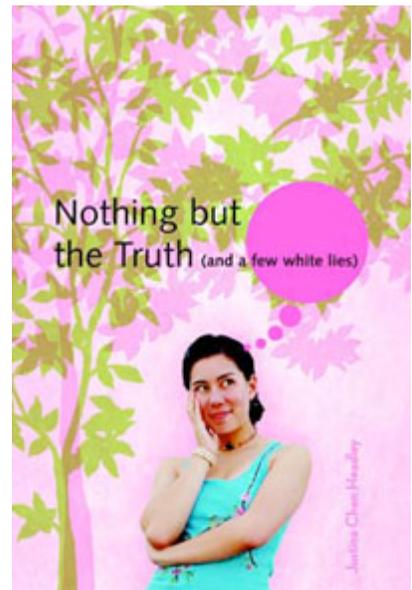
Nothing but the Truth (Little, Brown) is the first title featured on Readergirlz. Because of the book's focus on racism, the Readergirlz founders thought that it would be an ideal choice for fostering healthy debates. "We'll include discussion questions for girls to reflect on intolerance and prejudice," Headley says. "Then, we'll point them to www.tolerance.org, [which] gives teens tools to promote tolerance." The intention is to encourage girls to work toward bridging social, racial, and economic divisions in their communities.

As far as future book selections are concerned, the Readergirlz founders are choosing to keep them a secret. "We want to balance the fun of anticipation with giving librarians and bookstores enough time to stock our choices," Grover says. But public opinion has definitely played a part in the selection process. "We have been actively polling teens, librarians, and bloggers about their favorite gutsy girls in literature," Calhoun reports. "Suggestions have ranged from Anne in *Anne of Green Gables* to Hattie in *Hattie Big Sky*." The following month's choice will be listed on the Readergirlz Web site and on the MySpace profile page a month in advance. Unsolicited suggestions are still welcome via an email to any member of the Readergirlz staff, or as an entry in the group's discussion forum.

So just how did this group come together? According to Headley, the idea came to her while she was on her book tour last spring. "I made an effort to visit urban high schools that couldn't otherwise afford an author," she recalls. "I was shocked and heartbroken—all these kids with impoverished libraries and schools. I thought to myself: I can do something about that." Through her connections in the SCBWI, Headley approached three other philanthropically minded authors whom she thought might share her vision.

Like Calhoun and Grover, Cary thought it was a terrific idea. "I learned how brave girls can be through books," she says. "I remember thinking, okay, if [Headley] can do it, I can do it. Great books cross cultures and break boundaries. I'm hoping Readergirlz will challenge girls to dream big, support each other, and go for their dreams."

The founding foursome is planning a kick-off tour called Today's Girls, Tomorrow's History, beginning this month and extending through May, to schools, libraries and bookstores in the Pacific Northwest. At this point, a nationwide tour is not on the calendar, but according to Headley, requests for the fall are already coming in.



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