

Literature of Social Justice
Book Reviews by Aimee Rogers
January 2011

Empty by Suzanne Weyn. Scholastic Press. 183 pages. \$17.99. High School. 978-0-545-17278-3

Set in the very near future, *Empty* explores what might happen when the world runs out of fossil fuels. Told from the perspectives of three very different young adults in the small town of Sage Valley we watch as the predicted but still unexpected happens—oil is in dramatically short supply and people will go to any lengths to get more. In addition to the expected shortages people have had to learn to live without items made from petroleum and plastic so that means no nail polish, no pens and many other items that we take for granted. Food is also difficult to find because the oil needed to ship it around the country is too expensive. Tom, Niki and Gwen each find their own way to deal with the crisis but eventually unite in the hopes of fostering a more sustainable tomorrow. Although this book is science-fiction it presents very real issues in a terrifying light and as a result readers will think about their use of oil and the sustainability of their lifestyle.

Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan by Jeanette Winter. Beach Lane Books. 38 pages. \$16.99. All Ages. 978-1-4169-9437-4

Based upon real events in Afghanistan, *Nasreen's Secret School* illustrates the importance of education and the lengths that people will go to ensure education for all. During the reign of the Taliban women and girls were not allowed to attend school. In defiance of this rule secret schools for girls were established around the country. The penalties for being caught were severe but those involved were determined to teach and to learn. This is the story of one of these young girls. Through attending this secret school Nasreen found her voice and the world opened its many windows to her through knowledge. Winter accompanies this inspiring story with her beautiful and colorful illustrations that capture the essence of the place and the story.