

Book Reviews

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The following book reviews were written by NCSTA members and teachers. We hope to make this an ongoing feature in The Science Reflector. If you are an author who has a book you would like reviewed or a teacher who would like to write a review, please [contact Beth Harris](#).

[Life on Earth - and Beyond: An Astrobiologist's Quest](#)

[The Prometheus Project: Trapped](#)

[The Prometheus Project: Captured](#)

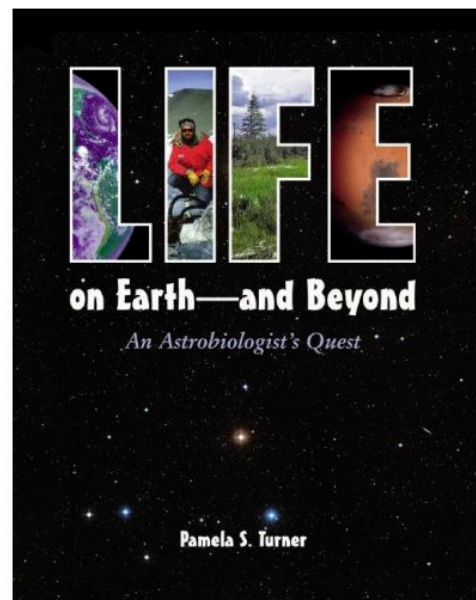
For more reviews and correlated activities check out the [Science Literature Database from UNC-Wilmington](#).

Life on Earth - and Beyond: An Astrobiologist's Quest

Pamela Turner,
Charlesbridge Press, Watertown, MA, 2008
ISBN: 978-1-58089-133-2

Astrobiologists look outward from the Earth seeking evidence of life elsewhere in the universe. They also travel to places on Earth where extreme conditions may be similar to those on distant worlds. Examining the conditions under which microbes survive in places that are very dry or cold may give scientists information they can use to search for life beyond the Earth. In this book NASA scientist Chris McKay takes the readers to Antarctica, Chile, Siberia, and the Sahara Desert. Readers are passive observers as he studies microbes to see if they can sustain life in the most inhospitable environments. Color photographs fill each page and show the scientist at work around the world. The photographs, include pictures of McKay and his colleagues at work in various, micrographs of bacteria, and satellite photos to paired with of physical features on the Earth's surface and similar formations on Mars. This interdisciplinary book has many applications in middle and secondary classrooms. The book contains numerous maps and climate data which support bioecology. References to places in the solar system that might have water provide the reader with ideas where life might exist. The essential role of water in the evolution and support of life is also stressed.

Fred L. Beyer
Retired Science Supervisor, Past President NCSTA

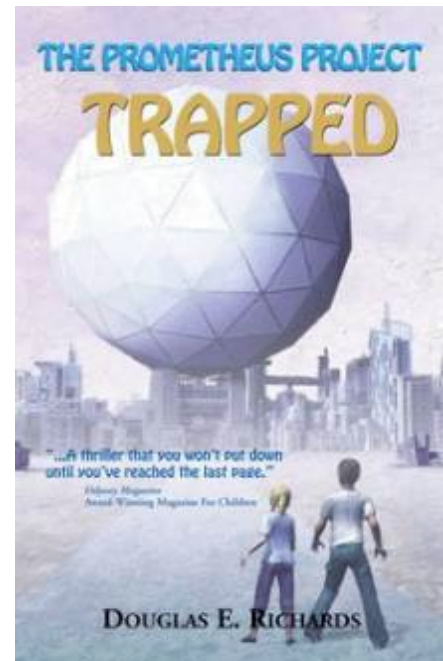


The Prometheus Project: Trapped

Douglas E. Richards
Dna Press, February 2005
ISBN 978-0974876542

Have you ever been uprooted from everything you are comfortable and familiar with because of a parents' new job? Start a new school? Make new friends? If you have, then you can sympathize with Ryan and Regan Resnik. Their fast paced adventure begins with their family moving from San Diego, CA, to boring Brewster, PA at the beginning of summer vacation. Ryan and Regan believe that Brewster is so dull that they have re-named the town Snoozer!

It doesn't take these adolescents long to overcome the boredom of "Snoozer", PA. They overhear their parents discussing top-secret information that leads to the greatest sci-fi adventure of their lives. Their parents, brilliant scientists, are working on a mission, riddled with secret codes, laser scanners, and all types of advanced alien technology. Ryan and Regan breach the area's security and secretly begin investigating this forbidden world called the Prometheus Project. They use the scientific method skills their father taught them to get past laser enforced areas, enter restricted buildings and descend deep into the earth through a specialized security elevator. Despite their excitement, they know that they cannot turn to their parents for advice or safety. It becomes their mission to solve the mystery of the Prometheus Project to save their mother from certain death.



Ryan and Regan are the most intelligent, energetic, amusing children I read about in a long while. Although this pair does appear to be a bit "too perfect," it is still enjoyable to follow, with them, in their footsteps as they crack codes and use their wits and knowledge of science to save their parents and themselves. Each chapter is filled with conflict and anticipation of what will come next. The Prometheus Project is a suspenseful thriller that you will not want to put down. It is vividly written so that you can easily imagine Ryan and Regan and their amazing adventure.

This book has numerous connections with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for grades 6 through 8 science. In any middle school science classroom this book could be used to aid students in identifying and creating questions and hypotheses that can be answered through scientific investigations, develop appropriate experimental procedures for given questions and student generated questions, analyze evidence to explain observations, make inferences and predictions, develop the relationship between evidence and explanation and use oral and written language to communicate findings and defend conclusions of scientific investigations. Ryan and Regan use these skills throughout the book when they encounter a problem.

The few scientists associated with The Prometheus Project have created a tunnel through the layers of earth to this interesting world. This book could be used in a 6th grade science classroom to help students discover the interior of the earth and explain the model, as well as evaluate ways in which human activities affect Earth's pedosphere and the measures taken to control their impact on vegetative cover, agriculture, and the use of land.

Another theme presented in this book is that the tiny ant-like robots, called nanobots, act as an immune system for this world by fixing broken parts. This correlates with the 7th grade science curriculum in that students can evaluate how systems in the human body help regulate the internal environment just as the nanobots regulate the inside of this alien city. Students can also connect the book by analyzing how an imbalance in homeostasis may result from a disruption in any human system.

In conclusion, The Prometheus Project could make a great addition to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in middle grades science. As a fast-paced science fiction adventure about an underground city built by an advanced alien civilization would help to teach children about science and technology by appealing to their creative minds. I recommend this book to any middle school science teacher, as well as reluctant readers and students interested in science fiction thrillers.

Alexa Camaione

The Prometheus Project: Captured

Douglas E. Richards
Dna Press, July, 2007
ISBN 978-1933255330

Captured, a sequel to Trapped, takes the reader back to Brewster, Pennsylvania, home to a top secret alien city built entirely below the surface of the earth. The scientists working to reveal the mysteries of this alien place have named it Prometheus. The city is protected by the alien society that built it, even though they are never seen by the humans. In their previous adventure, Regan and Ryan Resnick demonstrate their ability to be worthy members of their parent's scientific team, even though they are children.

They begin a new adventure when they are granted telepathic powers by "The Teacher," a believed main computer for the city that appears to have some type of control over events that occur within Prometheus. This 'Teacher' chooses to no longer communicate with Ryan and Regan in an effort to stay out of the way of the progress the team is making to understand this alien city. The children, however, are left with the ability to communicate with one another telepathically. They will rely on this talent to aid them in solving the problems they stumble upon when all of the residents, human and otherwise, of the top secret city are imprisoned and all exits to the city are sealed.

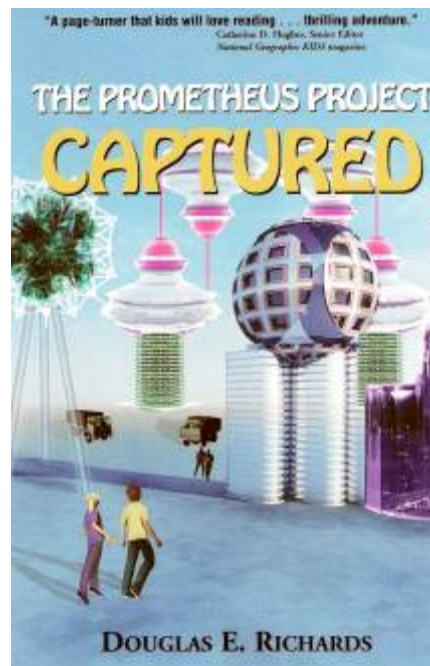
Prometheus is taken over by a group of mercenaries and their merciless organizer, an escaped alien with vast unknown capabilities and ruthless plans to create a world of his own. The adult members of the Prometheus team are taken prisoner and the children become their only hope for survival. With the future of the world at stake, Ryan and Regan outsmart the skilled alien and his well-trained force of mercenaries and free the prisoners. It is now up to Ryan and Regan to free their parents and the others being held captive by creating a force-field to escape through and capturing the bad guys.

This book has many connections to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for grades 6 through 8 science. In any middle school science classroom this book could be used to aid students in identifying and creating questions and hypotheses that can be answered through scientific investigations, develop appropriate experimental procedures for given questions and student generated questions, analyze evidence to explain observations, make inferences and predictions, develop the relationship between evidence and explanation and use oral and written language to communicate findings and defend conclusions of scientific investigations. Ryan and Regan use these skills throughout the book when they encounter a problem.

Another theme presented in this book is that the tiny ant-like robots, called nanobots, act as an immune system for this world by fixing broken parts. This correlates with the 7th grade science curriculum in that students can evaluate how systems in the human body help regulate the internal environment just as the nanobots regulate the inside of this alien city. Students can also connect the book by analyzing how an imbalance in homeostasis may result from a disruption in any human system.

In this book, however, the nanobots begin to "learn" through trial and error. It seems as though they have the ability to recognize when the scientists are testing areas of the city and instead of repetitively re-building these areas, they leave them alone until they are finished.

Ryan and Regan use their prior knowledge of technology and information systems to inside Prometheus to identify scientific needs, human needs, or problems that are subject to technological solution, locate resources to obtain and test ideas each time they are faced with a new problem. They also apply of scientific principles to analyze the risks and benefits of the actions they take to solve the problem at hand.



In conclusion, *The Prometheus Project: Captured*, would make a great addition to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in middle grades science. As a fast-paced science fiction thriller about an underground top-secret city built by an advanced alien civilization would help to teach children about science and technology by appealing to their imaginations. I recommend this book to any middle school science teacher, as well as reluctant readers and students interested in science fiction thrillers.

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