

Background Information for Library Materials in Review

Book Title: <i>Looking for Alaska</i>	Synopsis Sixteen-year-old Miles' first year at Culver Creek Preparatory School in Alabama includes good friends and great pranks, but is defined by the search for answers about life and death after a fatal car crash. <u>Source: Novelist Plus - accessed via SCDiscus</u>
Book Author Green, John	
Copyright Year: 2005	

Professional Reviews of *Looking for Alaska*

Source: Follett Titlewave

Kirkus Reviews starred (March 1, 2005)

The Alaska of the title is a maddening, fascinating, vivid girl seen through the eyes of Pudge (Miles only to his parents), who meets Alaska at boarding school in Alabama. Pudge is a skinny ("irony" says his roommate, the Colonel, of the nickname) thoughtful kid who collects and memorizes famous people's last words. The Colonel, Takumi, Alaska and a Romanian girl named Lara are an utterly real gaggle of young persons, full of false starts, school pranks, moments of genuine exhilaration in learning and rather too many cigarettes and cheap bottles of wine. Their engine and center is Alaska, given to moodiness and crying jags but also full of spirit and energy, owner of a roomful of books she says she's going to spend her life reading. Her center is a woeful family tragedy, and when Alaska herself is lost, her friends find their own ways out of the labyrinth, in part by pulling a last, hilarious school prank in her name. What sings and soars in this gorgeously told tale is Green's mastery of language and the sweet, rough edges of Pudge's voice. Girls will cry and boys will find love, lust, loss and longing in Alaska's vanilla-and-cigarettes scent. (Fiction. YA)

Publishers Weekly (February 7, 2005)

This ambitious first novel introduces 16-year-old Miles Halter, whose hobby is memorizing famous people's last words. When he chucks his boring existence in Florida to begin this chronicle of his first year at an Alabama boarding school, he recalls the poet Rabelais on his deathbed who said, "I go to seek a Great Perhaps." Miles's roommate, the "Colonel," has an interest in drinking and elaborate pranks-pursuits shared by his best friend, Alaska, a bookworm who is also "the hottest girl in all of human history." Alaska has a boyfriend at Vanderbilt, but Miles falls in love with her anyway. Other than her occasional hollow, feminist diatribes, Alaska is mostly male fantasy-a curvy babe who loves sex and can drink guys under the table. Readers may pick up on clues that she is also doomed. Green replaces conventional chapter headings with a foreboding countdown-"ninety-eight days before," "fifty days before"-and Alaska foreshadows her own death twice ("I may die young," she says, "but at least I'll die smart"). After Alaska drives drunk and plows into a police car, Miles and the Colonel puzzle over whether or not she killed herself. Theological questions from their religion class add some introspective gloss. But the novel's chief appeal lies in Miles's well-articulated lust and his initial excitement about being on his own for the first time. Readers will only hope that this is not the last word from this promising new author. Ages 14-up. (Mar.) Copyright 2005 Reed Business Information.

School Library Journal (February 1, 2005)

Gr 9 Up-Sixteen-year-old Miles Halter's adolescence has been one long nonevent-no challenge, no girls, no mischief, and no real friends. Seeking what Rabelais called the "Great Perhaps," he leaves Florida for a

boarding school in Birmingham, AL. His roommate, Chip, is a dirt-poor genius scholarship student with a Napoleon complex who lives to one-up the school's rich preppies. Chip's best friend is Alaska Young, with whom Miles and every other male in her orbit falls instantly in love. She is literate, articulate, and beautiful, and she exhibits a reckless combination of adventurous and self-destructive behavior. She and Chip teach Miles to drink, smoke, and plot elaborate pranks. Alaska's story unfolds in all-night bull sessions, and the depth of her unhappiness becomes obvious. Green's dialogue is crisp, especially between Miles and Chip. His descriptions and Miles's inner monologues can be philosophically dense, but are well within the comprehension of sensitive teen readers. The chapters of the novel are headed by a number of days "before" and "after" what readers surmise is Alaska's suicide. These placeholders sustain the mood of possibility and foreboding, and the story moves methodically to its ambiguous climax. The language and sexual situations are aptly and realistically drawn, but sophisticated in nature. Miles's narration is alive with sweet, self-deprecating humor, and his obvious struggle to tell the story truthfully adds to his believability. Like Phineas in John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* (S & S, 1960), Green draws Alaska so lovingly, in self-loathing darkness as well as energetic light, that readers mourn her loss along with her friends.-Johanna Lewis, New York Public Library Copyright 2005 Reed Business Information.

Horn Book Magazine (March/April, 2005)

A collector of famous last words, teenage Miles Halter uses Rabelais's final quote ("I go to seek a Great Perhaps") to explain why he's chosen to leave public high school for Culver Creek Preparatory School in rural Alabama. In his case, the Great Perhaps includes challenging classes, a hard-drinking roommate, elaborate school-wide pranks, and Alaska Young, the enigmatic girl rooming five doors down. Moody, sexy, and even a bit mean, Alaska draws Miles into her schemes, defends him when there's trouble, and never stops flirting with the clearly love-struck narrator. A drunken make-out session ends with Alaska's whispered "To be continued?" but within hours she's killed in a car accident. In the following weeks, Miles and his friends investigate Alaska's crash, question the possibility that it could have been suicide, and acknowledge their own survivor guilt. The narrative concludes with an essay Miles writes about this event for his religion class -- an unusually heavy-handed note in an otherwise mature novel, peopled with intelligent characters who talk smart, yet don't always behave that way, and are thus notably complex and realistically portrayed teenagers.

Library Media Connection (November/December 2005)

Junior Miles Halter leaves for the Alabama prep school his father attended, searching for a "Great Perhaps" beyond his mundane existence. He meets Chip, a scholarship student with trailer-park roots; Lara, who initiates him into his first sexual experience (oral, fairly explicit, and very funny); Takumi, "the Asian kid" whose real specialty is rap; and, Alaska Young. Alaska is smart, sexy, funny, sometimes inscrutable, and profoundly troubled by childhood mysteries she only hints at to her friends. Their world changes when, after creating some sexual tension with Miles, Alaska gets a telephone call, leaves the campus in the pre-dawn hours, drunk and distraught, and drives her car full-speed into a police cruiser, killing her instantly. Was it suicide or an accident? Where was she driving to, and why? What was the significance of the white tulips in the back seat? Was her kiss with Miles a beginning, or an ending? Had she truly found a way out of the "labyrinth" that was her obsession? By looking death full in the face, the friends Alaska leaves behind also confront life, its pains and its pleasures. Looking for Alaska will haunt readers with its memorable characters, its literary and philosophical questions about life and death that so fascinate teens, and its ultimate affirmation of a life lived fully. Highly Recommended. Catherine M. Andronik, Library Media Specialist, Brien McMahon High School, Norwalk, Connecticut

Awards/Distinctions Awarded to *Looking for Alaska*

Source: Follett Titlewave, NovelistPlus

Booklist Editors' Choice - Books for Youth - Older Readers Category: 2005

Inky Awards - Silver Inky: 2007

Michael L. Printz Award: 2006

School Library Journal Best Books: 2005

YALSA Best Books for Young Adults: 2006

YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers: Fiction: 2006