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Pages for the pre-adolescent

We have an 11-year-old daughter on the cusp of adolescence—a time when we will exit “The Wonder Years” and embark on “A Tale of Two Conflicting Agendas” (hers and mine). I am bracing myself. I know I will look back someday and mutter, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

I hear “just wait” and “you’ll see” from parents who have teenagers. With a knowing look, and perhaps a slight wince, they warn me that this “latent” stage of childhood is nothing compared to what’s around the old hormonal corner.

I want to prepare Taylor for the upcoming bumps in the road, but whenever I bring up the subject of her changing body, she can think of 99 other things to do. “That’s great, Mom. Can I go unload the dishwasher? How about I clean the lint out of the dryer?”

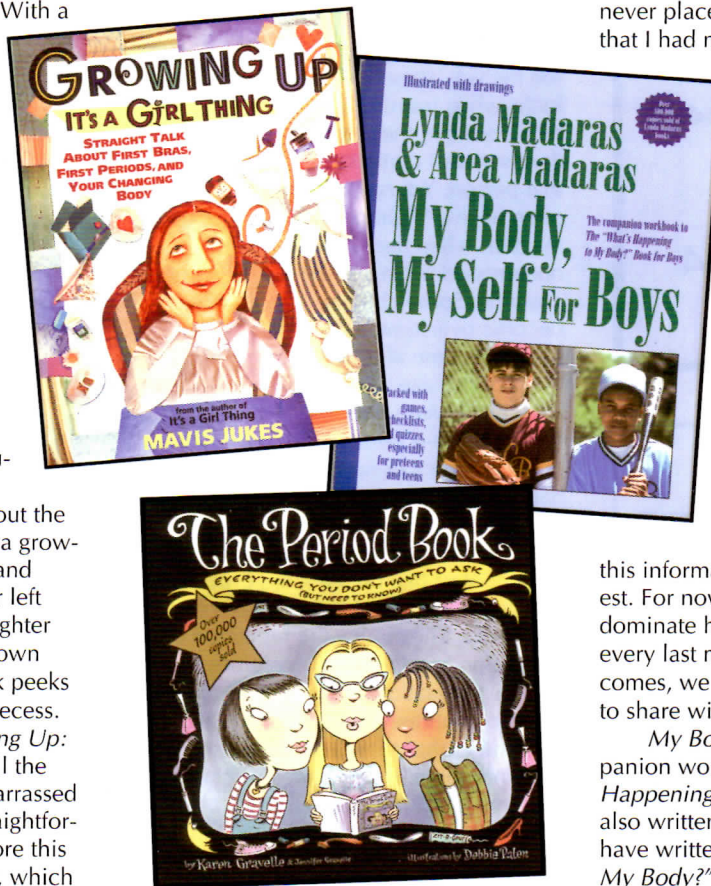
When it was rumored that a certain friend of Taylor’s was circulating a certain book among her buddies, I was concerned only about the secrecy. It turned out to be one of a growing number of books for preteens and teens on subjects sometimes better left read than said. Soon after, my daughter and I set out to find books for her own library, so she won’t need to sneak peeks at her friend’s book during lunch recess.

One of our favorites is *Growing Up: It’s a Girl Thing* by Mavis Jukes. All the questions my daughter is too embarrassed to ask aloud are answered in a straightforward, yet humorous, manner. Before this book, Jukes wrote *It’s a Girl Thing*, which includes most of the information in *Growing Up* but also includes information I’m not ready to share with my 11-year-old about topics like sexual orientation, teenage pregnancy and anal sex.

Growing Up addresses both physical and emotional changes and repeatedly conveys the message “Don’t worry!” Jukes tackles many of the fears girls have about becoming women by sharing stories from her youth or by offering practical tips. For example, she suggests girls keep a “just in case” pad but suggests that “if it’s been lost in the rubble on your closet floor or it’s under your bed with half a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a Dumbo eraser

stuck to it—help yourself to another one out of the bathroom cupboard, which is where most of us have our pad stash.”

A book with a no-nonsense title, *The Period Book: Everything You Don’t Want to Ask (But Need to Know)*, is another dog-eared member of my daughter’s library. Written by Karen Gravelle and illustrated by Debbie Palen, the book is a lighthearted



look at this rite of passage. *The Period Book* addresses fears with a chapter entitled “What If . . .” as in “What if I get my period at school?” or “What if I can’t get a tampon out?” Most helpful is the index for girls who need quick answers on particular subjects.

Gravelle gives boys equal time with *What’s Going on Down There: Answers to Questions Boys Find Hard to Ask*. This time Gravelle is aided by two teenagers for a different perspective.

What’s Going on Down There won’t be welcomed by all families, however. While it is written in a values-neutral manner, that stance may dissuade some par-

ents from purchasing the book. The author discusses when a person knows whether he or she is ready to have sex and there is a section on abortion. These are areas where people’s values differ and some might argue that the book’s neutrality actually indicates a position on these topics. Because of the individual and sensitive nature of puberty and sexuality, I would never place a book in my children’s hands that I had not read beforehand.

A good book but, again, one that parents should preview, is *Asking About Sex and Growing Up: A Question-and-Answer Book for Boys and Girls* by Joanna Cole of The Magic School Bus series fame. It is a step above books on the basics of puberty and contains well-crafted questions for the inquiring adolescent mind.

We have tucked away *My Body, My Self for Boys* by Lynda Madaras and Area Madaras for when our 9-year-old son is a little older. It’s not that Seanie isn’t old enough for this information, it’s that he has zero interest. For now, baseball cards and airplanes dominate his world and we are enjoying every last minute of it. When the time comes, we know we have a gem of a book to share with him.

My Body, My Self for Boys is the companion workbook to *The “What’s Happening to My Body?” Book for Boys*, also written by the Madaras duo. They also have written *The “What’s Happening to My Body?” Book for Girls* and *My Body My Self for Girls*.

The workbook appeals to the active nature of boys and includes a choose-your-own-adventure type of story about dealing with nocturnal “surprises” (my repressed choice of word, not theirs!) that has boys leaping through the book to find how to deal with such developments.

If life continues at the same pace, it will seem like a matter of days before I am handing *My Body, My Self for Boys* to Seanie (and my husband) to read and ponder. By then, Taylor will be smack in the middle of teen life and I’ll be struggling not to wince when the words “just wait” and “you’ll see” start rolling off my tongue. 🙌