BEST BOOKS 2023
TONI MORRISON wrote, “Efforts to censor, starve, regulate, and annihilate us are clear signs that something important has taken place. The thought that leads me to contemplate with dread the erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists’ questions challenging authority never being posed, unstaged plays, canceled films—that thought is a nightmare.”

You are the ones doing the important work—giving children access to the life-changing books that will inspire them to create the unwritten novels, unstaged plays, and essays that challenge authority and the powers that be.

We hope that our choices help you do that important work.

The Best Books process is a long one. It begins even as we finalize the prior year’s list, as we’ve already begun assigning books to review in advance of the new year. The editors keep track of every title we have starred, because our contenders are selected from among them. In the summer, we start the process in earnest, selecting committee members from our talented reviewers. They help us identify books we may have missed or gems that may have not been starred but deserve a second look. Then, after months of reading, discussion, and deliberation, each committee makes their selections, with 15 to 25 titles per category.

Thanks to the awesome reviews editors for their stewardship, discernment, and acumen in building their committees and leading the charge: Jasmine Amiri, Kimberly Olson Fakih, Amanda Mastrull, Florence Simmons, and Ashleigh Williams.

Kudos to our committee members, all reviewers and working librarians, for their dedication and hard work. Their insight on not only the excellence of each selection but also how these picks will be embraced by their fellow librarians and the readers they serve is invaluable: Alicia Abdul, Jenny Arch, Emily Beasley, Karen Bilton, Monisha Blair, Kristin Brynsvold, Lisa Buffi, Kristyn Dorfman, Jonah Dragan, Vi Ha, Bob Hassett, Kelly Kingrey-Edwards, Ashley Leffel, Andrea Lipinski, Kerra Mazzariello, Emmy Neal, Carla Riemer, John Scott, Myiesha Speight, Allie Stevens, and Emily Walker.

This list wouldn’t be as rich and relevant without them.

Much appreciation to the indomitable Michaela Goade for her incredible artistry and breathtaking art. Just, wow. She stands in for all the authors and illustrators represented on this list.

Last, behind the scenes, this issue and all year long, thanks to the creative team of Mark Titchman and Josephine Marc-Anthony (with editorial assistant Andrew Giakoumis’s help), who set covers and illustrations into the text like jewels and make the entire magazine the accessible, beautiful volume it is.

By Jasmine Amiri, Shelley M. Diaz, Kimberly Olson Fakih, Amanda Mastrull, Florence Simmons, and Ashleigh Williams

Illustration by Michaela Goade
K–PreS–K–Kingsley, a large hairy dog, has decided to “own” a human and goes out in search of the right one. He becomes intrigued by a girl in a red beret who needs him just as much as he needs her. A funny and unique tale.

PreS–Gr 3–When a family’s dog dies, the family gathers stories, photos, and the dog’s favorite things to create an ofrenda for Día de Muertos. A gorgeously illustrated book that acts as both a thank-you and a celebration for the animal friends that have passed on.

PreS–Gr 3–A child notices trash piles and resolves to do something about them to help beautify the community. With delightful collage illustrations, this book reminds readers that everyone has the power to come together and make a change.

K–Gr 3–A Black boy asked the question “Where are you from?” answers in the best way possible by highlighting his home and culture, as well as all the things that make him who he is. Heartfelt text and vibrant illustrations work together in this beautiful story about embracing one’s identity.

PreS–Gr 3–Being called a “big girl” was once a compliment, but starts to feel less so when a girl gets mocked for her size. After she tells people that their words hurt her, she says proudly that she likes herself the way she is. A lovely proclamation of self-love and speaking up for yourself.

PreS–Gr 3–The Moon travels around the globe from Egypt to New Zealand showing how
different countries observe Ramadan and Eid. An insightful look at the significant traditions and practices.

Gr 1–4–A Filipina girl fondly remembers summers spent helping her grandfather run his corner sari-sari store. The store provides more than nostalgia, however; when the girl moves to the United States, these memories help her find ways to connect with her new community. Illustrations brim with love and connection.

Gr 1–2–Gorgeous illustrations full of detail and movement present the adventure of a child learning about dragons from his diverse family background incorporating Eastern and Western dragon folklore. A wonderful embrace of both traditions in one child’s identity.

K-Gr 4–Hair carries a powerful legacy and connection in Native/Indigenous cultures. Lindstrom’s sparse, poetic language (“Our ancestors say: Our hair is our memories. Our source of strength”) and Littlebird’s bright palette capture both serenity and hope.

MEHRA, Namita Moolani. The Light Within You. illus. by Kamala Nair. Two Lions. ISBN 9781542039123.
PreS-Gr 3–A Diwali story that also tackles the hardship faced when a child has to move to another country. The sparkle of light on the pages brings an energy and a sense of wonder. A positive message about the light within that transcends the holiday.

Gr 2–4–A splendidly rendered migrant story that is awash in contrasts: light and dark, white space and ghostly shadows, bright colors and stark fences, peril and hope. Siblings play what begins as a game with three overarching rules: “Avoid the monsters. Don’t get caught. And keep moving.” Relatable and child-centered.

Gr 2–4–Yesenia is a small girl who narrates everything plátanos stand for in her family from the Dominican Republic. Of course, Norman and Palacios ensure that readers are desperately hungry when they close this book, but they also elevate a comfort food to a cultural icon, a path to memory, and a welcome home.

PreS-Gr 2–A young immigrant’s experience starting at a new school in a new language is captured in expressive illustrations that use a slow introduction of color to mimic how Mina adapts to her new life. As she grows more comfortable, her world becomes more vibrant and less isolated.

K-Gr 3–A unique book about migration sprinkled with Vietnamese mythology as seen through the eyes of a little boy and his grandfather as their special relationship unfolds. Breathtaking illustrations steal the show as the significance of animals, family, and nature are captured on each page.

Gr 1–4–A book festival celebration presented in a graphic novel style as English and Spanish words are intertwined throughout. This story is a great representation of all the wonderful services a public library can offer, from a map room and books on tape to video games and everything in between.

K-Gr 2–This brilliant story shares the positive impact Langston Hughes had on so many—big and small—through music, dance, and, of course, words. The Pumphreys strike again as they expertly weave text through their illustrations like streams of poetry in this incredibly eye-catching picture book.
K-Gr 2—A little boy visits his Polish grandmother, Baba, every morning, and although there is a language barrier, they communicate beautifully through the simple acts of sharing food, humming, and gardening. Iridescent art amplifies a heartwarming intergenerational gem.

K-Gr 3—Little Eka anxiously awaits the the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons, her favorite celebration in her native Japan. Tomigahara’s stunning illustrations capture the whimsical night and what makes a good and bad spirit. A truly fascinating cultural experience for readers.

K-Gr 2—Cousins Nora and Noah live in opposite parts of the world. As Hanukkah approaches, the two begin a friendly battle over who will celebrate it best. This glowing book shows family connections across the globe and remains true to the traditions of the Jewish holiday.

K-Gr 3—Zora’s love for Aunt Bea’s storytelling runs deep in this beautifully crafted picture book about family and keeping memories alive between different generations. Warm but heartbreaking, Coulter’s bold illustration technique complements Wilkins’s graceful ability to tackle the subject of death through her delicate words.

**TRANSITIONAL BOOKS**

Committee: Shelley M. Diaz, Florence Simmons, Ashleigh Williams

Gr 1-4—Bailey and Song have created a go-getters hero in Henry, resistant to conventional paths to learning and participating, possibly neurodivergent, and perfectly creative in his own right. Classroom scenes and spare writing give emerging readers a glimpse of inclusion that truly makes room for everyone.

K-Gr 2—In a remarkable chapter book that teaches problem-solving skills, a kind squirrel faces her fears. Cordell’s art is detailed, emotional, and action-packed; the heroine is brave; and the storytelling is outstanding. Delightful.

PreS-Gr 1—A story based on a Native American tale about a bear and a turtle racing across a stretch of ice. Written and illustrated by David (Mohawk), this should find a place in all collections, especially given the lack of Indigenous voices and representation in early readers.

PreS-Gr 1—A dog and cat explore their world with laugh-out-loud results. Text is simple, following a pattern; beginning readers will confidently read high-frequency words and learn new vocabulary. Cartoon illustrations vibrantly showcase the story. This engaging early reader stands out for all the right reasons.

Gr 1-3—This delightful early chapter book features Pakistani American second grader Ali Tahir and his family. Ali, his Dada, and little brother head to the market, where mishaps ensue. The sweet family dynamic, pitch-perfect text, and appealing illustrations will resonate with those not yet ready for longer chapter books.

traditions. The English narrative contains Spanish words. A fabulous example of Rudine Sims Bishop’s mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors metaphor, this sweet work has bright art and digestible text.

Gr 1-5—Frankie is a young reporter inspired by her journalist mom. While her mother is away chasing a story, Frankie makes her own news crew and reconnects with her sister. This adorable series debut has STEM elements and a wonderful depiction of family relationships. Fun illustrations add to its charm.

K-Gr 3—Lovable, guileless Jo Jo returns in this snow day adventure that centers kindness and community. Jo Jo and friends create winter Olympics on her Ojibwe reservation. This chapter book includes engaging material about Ojibwe culture, delightful illustrations, and a spunky heroine kids will embrace.

PreS-K—A young brown boy attends his last day of kindergarten—graduation day. Kids beginning to read will feel the excitement in this rhyming, easy-to-read book that features a diverse classroom. Whether at home or the library, this tale will resonate with emerging readers.

Gr 3-6—Saralee, a 10-year-old with a “super-nose,” uses her gift to save her family from biblical villain Haman, whom she has accidentally conjured up from the ancient past. The theme of Purim will enhance multicultural literature collections of early reader chapter books.

Gr 1-4—Jacob wants to have a pink hockey helmet, join the girls’ fan dance, and paint his nails, but he is teased and discouraged. With family support and Grandma’s fan, Jay is embraced for who he is. This book deftly depicts resisting gender norms and the richness of Vietnamese culture.

Red Comet. ISBN 9781636550763.  
K-Gr 2—This heartwarming transitional book follows Moose, who has one eye, and Bear, who has three legs, two shelter dogs who befriend each other while waiting for a new home. With cozy illustrations, this tale will charm readers and show them all about acceptance and seeing differences as strengths.
## MIDDLE GRADE

Committee: Emily Beasley, Monisha Blair, Kristin Brynsvold, Kristyn Dorfman, Ashleigh Williams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHN, Flora</td>
<td>A Spoonful of Time</td>
<td>Quirk</td>
<td>9781683693185</td>
<td>Gr 4-7</td>
<td>Maya discovers her Halmunee, who has dementia, can use food to travel through memories. Maya uses this gift to learn more about her past and her Korean heritage but uncovers many secrets and realizes nothing is what she knew. A charming story filled with recipes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALKAF, Hanna</td>
<td>Hamra and the Jungle of Memories</td>
<td>HarperCollins</td>
<td>9780063207950</td>
<td>Gr 4-8</td>
<td>Hamra has a lot of anger, from the way the pandemic has affected her family to her sadness over her grandmother’s illness. When she foolishly takes from the jungle, a were-tiger begins haunting her dreams. This beautiful, poignant fantasy novel hits all the right notes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIRD, James</td>
<td>No Place Like Home</td>
<td>Feiwel &amp; Friends</td>
<td>9781250877628</td>
<td>Gr 4 Up</td>
<td>Ojibwe tween Opin lives out of his car with his mother and older brother, passing through towns in hopes of escaping Child Protective Services. When Opin finds a stray dog, he believes stability is within reach, even as things get harder. A moving exploration of keeping hope and culture alive amid incredible challenges.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOW, Erin</td>
<td>Simon Sort of Says</td>
<td>Disney-Hyperion</td>
<td>9781368082853</td>
<td>Gr 5 Up</td>
<td>Simon and his family move to a small town after a horrific tragedy, but things like PTSD and the press refuse to be made part of the past. This realistic fiction title is equal parts hilarious and heartfelt, with strong, supportive characters and themes of friendship and trauma.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRADEN, Ann</td>
<td>Opinions and Opossums</td>
<td>Penguin/Nancy Paulsen</td>
<td>9781984816092</td>
<td>Gr 3-7</td>
<td>Agnes is required to go through confirmation with her church, but what if she doesn’t know what she believes? This short but powerful novel compares Agnes’s growing knowledge of opossums with her ability to think for herself. A quick but deep dive into critical thinking and helping others do the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROWN, Waka T.</td>
<td>The Very Unfortunate Wish of Melony Yoshimura</td>
<td>HarperCollins/Quill Tree</td>
<td>978006320767</td>
<td>Gr 4-7</td>
<td>Melony Yoshimura feels stifled by her overprotective parents. When an evil Amanjaku promises to make Melony’s wishes come true, she’s thrilled, until the Amanjaku wants more and more. A fresh take on a Japanese folktale that’s just the right amount of creepy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURRIE, Lindsay</td>
<td>It Found Us</td>
<td>Sourcebooks</td>
<td>9781728259499</td>
<td>Gr 4-8</td>
<td>When a teen goes missing in the cemetery, Hazel uncovers the cemetery’s connection to a horrific accident. Can she put its ghosts to rest and save the missing boy? Based on real-life events, this intriguing horror story has enough scares to satisfy without being terrifying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAIRMAN, Tara</td>
<td>The Girl from Earth’s End</td>
<td>Candlewick</td>
<td>9781536224801</td>
<td>Gr 4-7</td>
<td>Henna lives with her papas on Earth’s End, where she spends her days gardening and learning. When Papa Niall gets sick, Henna must do the unthinkable: leave Earth’s End to find the only cure, an extinct plant. A moving story about love, grief, and hope.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAY, Christine</td>
<td>We Still Belong</td>
<td>HarperCollins/Heartdrum</td>
<td>9780063064560</td>
<td>Gr 4-8</td>
<td>It is Indigenous People’s Day, and Wesley has written a poem to mark the occasion. This important story sheds light on contemporary Native American life and discusses discrimination and Wesley’s struggles with family, social, and identity issues as an Indigenous student in Washington state.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELIOPULOS, Andrew</td>
<td>Will on the Inside</td>
<td>HarperCollins/Quill Tree</td>
<td>9780063228702</td>
<td>Gr 5 Up</td>
<td>Will excels at soccer, until he is diagnosed with Crohn’s disease and must take a break. He learns he loves video games, but what will his friends think of him connecting with Griffin? Friendships, shifting beliefs, sexual identity, and chronic illness are deftly explored in this coming-of-age novel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>EVERETT, Sarah</td>
<td>The Probability of Everything</td>
<td>HarperCollins/Clarion</td>
<td>9780063256582</td>
<td>Gr 3-7</td>
<td>Keni loves probability, but when she learns an asteroid has an 84.7 percent chance of crashing into Earth in four days, she is determined to create a family time capsule. With a heartrending surprise twist, Everett masterfully, and realistically, explores grief.</td>
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Gr 5 Up—After losing his best friend, Noah tries to find and befriend the local cryptid, Mothman. In the process, he finds himself a group of supportive new friends. This beautiful look at gender identity, neurodiversity, strength, and friendship will resonate with readers young and old.

Gr 5 Up—Because of COVID-19, Matthew is isolated with his mother and great-grandmother. He uncovers a riveting story of his great-grandmother’s past, a family secret hidden since the great Ukrainian famine in the 1930s. This historical fiction mystery introduces readers to a forgotten piece of history while showing multi-generational relationships at their finest.

Gr 4-7—Anna Leiānī spends summers in Hawai‘i with her tātū learning her family’s mo‘olelo—stories. She really wants to act touristy to impress her Colorado friends, but accidentally enrages the Fire Goddess and now must save her best friend while learning to be true to herself.

Gr 4-8—Swimming is everything to Dominican American Aniana, but she must hide it from Mami, whose trauma around the ocean runs deep. When a juvenile arthritis diagnosis reveals her secret and hinders swimming, Ani rebuilds herself. This novel in verse thoughtfully tackles family dynamics, chronic disability, and coming of age.

Gr 4 Up—Azari is an asylum seeker in Ireland who tries to find a balance among the instability of her new home, making friends, xenophobic schoolmates, and freedom in her ability to run for pleasure. This is a compassionate and unique look at the Direct Provision system in Ireland.

Gr 4-7—Leeva’s mother says people are for fame; her father says they’re for money. But surely there’s more, thinks Leeva, who braves leaving her yard to discover the wonders of the world past the hedge. This Roald Dahl–esque novel is laugh-out-loud funny and deeply heartfelt.

Gr 5 Up—Iris wants change when her father dies of AIDS, so she joins his partner at one of the ACT UP protests demanding help for AIDS victims. This heartrending novel showcases the fear, ignorance, prejudice, and anger surrounding the AIDS crisis in the 1980s.

Gr 4-8—Ellie has always been fine getting by as an unremarkable girl. Then a magical earthquake imbues her with powers, and she finds herself thrust into the strangest of spotlights. This sweet novel uses a superpower plot to explore eminently relatable coming-of-age topics with humor and heart.

Gr 5 Up—Selah’s rules for being normal have always protected her, but when things become too much and she lashes out, she has to confront her differences. This novel in verse opens a door into the experience of living with autism, both the challenges and the joys.

NAYERI, Daniel. The Many Assassinations of Samir, the Seller of Dreams. illus. by Daniel Miyares. Levine Querido. ISBN 9781646143030.
Gr 4 Up—Monkey escapes being murdered by monks only to find himself indebted to Samir, the Seller of Dreams, and traveling down the 11th-century Silk Road trying to find freedom. This masterly tale is packed with legends, high jinks, and humor alongside deep ponderings on life and love.

Gr 5 Up—New girl Anna knows something has happened to Rachel, the formerly popular girl who is now an outcast. This burning question leads Anna down a road of deep research and opens up dark secrets about sexual harassment at her school. A compelling, age-appropriate #MeToo narrative for tweens.
Gr 4 Up—Nic’s father has always been reluctant to teach her how to use her Gift. But when some shocking truths come to light, Nic must hunt down a mysterious, powerful magical object to clear her father’s name. This fresh fantasy is impossible to put down.

Gr 5 Up—When world-traveling Daisy’s mother goes missing, it is up to Daisy to save her. Daisy discovers a magical world filled with “botanists” (plant magicians), and realizes there is so much more to herself than she ever imagined. A fast-paced, worldbuilding fantasy with lush settings and strong conservation messages.

Gr 4-8—When Lina’s family immigrated to the United States from China, Lina stayed behind with her grandmother. Now it’s Lina’s turn to join her family, but she’s shocked to discover how hard her new life is. This novel deftly deals with big, timely topics.

Gr 5-8—Calista can speak to ghosts, but a family curse means she loses the ability on her 13th birthday. When a vengeful spirit begins abducting children, Calista must defeat it to save her sister and break the curse. An eerie and emotional story with vivid scares and heartfelt depictions of grief.

YEA Committee: Ashley Leffel, Amanda Mastrull, Emmy Neal, Allie Stevens, Emily Walker

Gr 9 Up—When Imogen spends spring break visiting her best friend Lili at college, a white lie leads Imogen to restlessly question new romantic feelings. Filled with character dynamics that reel readers in, Imogen’s journey is a highly relatable one of introspection, embracing truth, and letting go.

Gr 9 Up—Jewish teen Rieke’s happy life in Romania changes in horrible, unimaginable ways during the Holocaust in this compelling novel based on Arnold’s grandmother’s experiences. It’s a heartbreaking, exquisitely written exploration of the bonds of sisterhood, love, and morality amid persecution, illness, and hunger.

Gr 9 Up—In an alternate Tang dynasty China, aspiring royal alchemist Zilan takes the imperial exams—and secretly raises the dead. Pulled into court politics, she connects with the Crown Prince as the Empress seizes power. An inventive, competition-based plot and exceptional worldbuilding will propel readers.

Gr 9 Up—Set 10 years after Firekeeper’s Daughter, this novel follows Perry Firekeeper-Birch during a summer internship, where she discovers a local college is keeping remains and artifacts that belong to her tribe—and decides what she’ll do to get them back. It’s important, thought-provoking, and captivating.

Gr 9 Up—A classmate’s unwanted advances lead 16-year-old Ivy on a cross-country road trip to get an abortion. Caletti’s examination of the stigma surrounding abortion, small-town conservative attitudes, and support from sometimes unlikely places make Ivy’s journey a must-read for all young adult readers.

Gr 8 Up—This novel in verse retells the Greek myth of Arachne from her perspective as she becomes an excellent weaver, develops a crush on a neighborhood girl, and sparks the ire of Athena. With excellent pacing and an enchanting story, it’s sure to engage readers.
abandons her future as a high-society socialite in Argentina to find answers in Egypt and discovers their dangerous expedition to Cleopatra’s Tomb. Magic and an excellent rivals-to-lovers romance add layers to the tightly woven plot and intricate historical worldbuilding.

Gr 9 Up–As Athan races through an absolutely unhinged mystery on the hunt for his missing Yia-yia, the spirit that has always followed him through the mirrors is catching up. La Sala invites readers to examine the space between self and other, reality and its distorted reflection.

Gr 7 Up–Over the course of 10 dates, Ryan and Avery fall in love. Fans of Levithan’s Two Boys Kissing will recognize Ryan and Avery and rejoice in learning more about their story. A swoonworthy romance that will have readers reminiscing on their first love.

MCBRIDE, Amber. We Are All So Good at Smiling. Feiwel & Friends. ISBN 9781250780386.
Gr 9 Up–When Whimsy and Faerry meet during in-patient treatment for clinical depression, they recognize the magic within each other but are unsure what their connection may be. Beautifully written verse and a fairy-tale metaphor give readers a better understanding of the struggles of living with clinical depression.

Gr 7 Up–Under a stage in a theater somewhere, some of Shakespeare’s beloved and betrayed female characters retell their own stories, taking agency over the things they wish could’ve happened differently. McCullough reinvigorates the canon and provides new entry points for modern students with compelling and deeply thinking characters.

Gr 9 Up–Transmasc Gem moved to small-town Georgia—closer to their Seminole roots—but fears they’re losing their mind, until the new girl informs them they’re both reincarnated gods—and soulmates. Intersectionally diverse with strong Native representation, the inventive mythos features deep, vivid characters and an action-packed plot.

Gr 9 Up–Determined to enjoy all her senior year has to offer, Effie embraces moving out of her comfort zone and speaking up. A fantastic contemporary tale filled with authentic moments about the daily life of a wheelchair user who is finding her voice while navigating an ableist world.

Gr 9 Up–In a noir dystopian world where gods’ descendants have their powers, Io uses her abilities as a private investigator, tracking people’s Threads and connections, when she accidentally witnesses a murder. A searing slow-burn romance, complex characters, and propulsive plot make for a vivid page-turner.

Gr 8 Up–When her parents disappear, Inez experiences visions of her late brother when she and best friend Layla check into a roadside motel after a derailed road trip; they may be connected to the numerous deaths that have occurred in the room. Slow-burn sapphic sweetness and photographs add sparkle to a haunting read.

OSHIRO, Mark. *Into the Light*. Tor Teen. ISBN 9781250812254.
Gr 9 Up—Manny, a queer teen cast out of his devout religious family, is determined to reunite with his younger sister, who is still living with their adoptive parents. Oshiro uses a nonlinear time line to tell a compelling story that explores trauma, abuse, and white saviorism.

Gr 9 Up—Vanja’s been a hero and a villain, but when her newest con accidentally awakens a sleeping goddess, she’ll have to work with new and old friends to keep from becoming a martyr. Thoughtful representation of asexuality and consent is woven in as Vanja and Eimeric’s romance evolves.

Gr 8 Up—Being Korean Argentinian, Alejandra Kim has always felt at odds with her peers, and fitting in becomes more of a hurdle when microaggressions at school pull Alejandra into the spotlight. An excellent teen journey exploring stereotypes, friendship, family dynamics, and what it means to belong.

Gr 9 Up—Khadija struggles to be the model daughter, but all that changes when Syrian refugees Leene and her mother come to live with Khadija’s family. Told in alternating viewpoints, with an unforgettable connection between two young women and the friendship that blooms through challenges, loss, and hope.

Gr 9 Up—Resistance to life as a wife and mother lands Silas a diagnosis of Veil sickness and conscription to a torturous conversion facility masquerading as a boarding school. Horrific fictional violence parallels the real psychological violence of forced conformity, but Silas finds redemption in community.

ZIMMERMANN, Laura. *Just Do This One Thing for Me*. Dutton. ISBN 9780593530337.
Gr 9 Up—Brimming with humor and absurdity, Zimmermann’s latest follows two sisters desperate to keep what remains of their family intact after their mother tries to abandon them for a Justin Timberlake concert and instead ends up dead in the shed. Witty, unexpectedly emotionally powerful, and unforgettable.

**POETRY**

Committee: Florence Simmons

Gr 3 Up—In this title written as a step-by-step guide, the authors teach the art of poetry by tasking students with exploring nature, questions, and ideas in unique ways. Both a teaching tool for writing poetry as well as an ode to poetry itself.

Gr 3–5—Poetry meets nonfiction in this skillfully designed and fun-to-read compendium. The intriguing theme of “astounding feats and features” of animals and the nice flow of text invite reading. This multifaceted package belongs on science shelves.
Gr 4-6—This collection of 29 brief poems and numerous mixed-media illustrations is arranged into 12 “rooms,” topics that range from curiosity and wishes to science, nature, and ordinary things. Crisp and concise, with internal rhymes and alliteration, these poems beg to be shared and read aloud.

Gr 3-5—Eleven poems of varying forms about Cuban women artists showcase the achievements of their subjects across a variety of disciplines, including handcraft, photography, sculpture, and more. A thoughtful, lovely collection for anyone who has an interest in the breadth of women’s artistic achievements.

PreS-Gr 3—U.S. Poet Laureate Harjo (Mvskoke Nation) urges readers to remember they are of the earth, indebted to and intertwined with the natural world. Goade’s (Tlingit) watercolor illustrations incorporate icons of Northwest Coast art. This paean to nature and Indigenous culture belongs in every school and public library.

Gr 2-6—This poetry collection includes words of wisdom, absurdist digressions, and laughs galore. In the tradition of Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky, poems cleverly tackle themes both serious and silly, and are paired with cartoonish black-and-green digital illustrations. An appealingly ridiculous book, recommended for poetry and humor fans.

Gr 1-5—This volume of playful poetry includes entries that twist up language, sensory poems about the world and our bodies, and several recurring themes. Monochromatic pen-and-ink illustrations are bold and full of movement. A collection sure to appeal to a wide range of poetry lovers.

Gr 9 Up—Free-form and rhyming verse poems make up this collection of reflections on tradition, family, and friendship; perseverance and resilience; and first love, grief, belief, and resolution. This book will resonate with readers who enjoy the poems of Naomi Shihab Nye and Elizabeth Acevedo.

NONFICTION/ELEMENTARY
Committee: Jonah Dragan, Kimberly Olson Fakih, Vi Ha, Florence Simmons

Gr 4-8—Backhouse spent five months in British Columbia’s North Coast, located in Ts’msyen territory, learning “from the Gwich’in to the Diné, and from the Niitsitapi to the Yup’ik, each group has its own grizzly-bear stories, songs, and dances.” This defining text on a misunderstood species blends science, heart, and deep knowledge.

Gr 2-4—Charles and Skidmore unveil the personality behind her calm demeanor while grounding Ketanji Brown Jackson’s story in hard work, focus, and the support system that readers may have witnessed in her confirmation hearings. The paintings are a glorious match for the biography.

Gr 2-5—So much of Chisholm’s historic time in office was about creating different frameworks of resistance and bringing to the table voices previously unheard. Engaging writing with a brilliant
use of visual metaphor in Juanita’s extraordinary artwork, plus a divine afterword—this is playful, approachable, important.

GIANFERRARI, Maria. **Fungi Grow.** illus. by Diana Sudyka. S.&S./Beach Lane. ISBN 9780593523629. 
K-G 3–Gr 4—There are too many reasons to thank Gianferrari this year, for elegant nonfiction that becomes unforgettable, as in this compelling look at the life cycle of a mushroom. Sudyka, in lockstep, provides vibrant colors in saturated spreads, in a book about safety and surprises in the wild.

K-G 3–Young readers, from babies to younger elementary students, will never see a river in the same way; Guillain has devised a vibrant concertina with Empson’s bright, semi-realistic illustrations that ingeniously follow a river coursing to the sea. This is an absolutely sensational piece of creativity.

PreS-G 1–Hodgson was ahead of neo-nonfiction that reads like a story but delivers hard science with *When Cloud Became a Cloud.* This second work is even stronger, placing the sun, moon, and earth in the sky like perennial buds, and letting the facts about our skies shine.

K-G 3–In small, clever chunks of information, Ignotofsky takes a primary level standard and elevates it into a bright, appealing, comprehensive, and beautiful volume. For classroom or story hours, this offers resources, activities, and inspiration on every page.

Gr 2–6—Committee member: “This has every-thing I dream of: the pairing of an artistic rendering of a birth of a star with the birth of a scientific mind.” Roy’s visuals perfectly capture the parallel stories, star and scientist, with the two texts interlocking into a seamless, dazzling whole.

K-G 4–In their debut picture book, Obuchowski and Pedry poetically but scientifically answer the question all young children need to know—where do birds sleep? From Bolivia to El Salvador, South Korea to Finland, this global journey is nature writing and illustration at its best, fearlessly addressing climate change as well.

PEARSON, Carrie A. **Virginia Wouldn’t Slow Down: The Unstoppable Dr. Apgar and Her Life-Saving Invention.** illus. by Nancy Carpenter. Norton. ISBN 9781324003939. 
Gr 1–3—Recommended reading for all parents with a fidgety, “quirky” child. The possibly dry subject of a five-step evaluation for newborns, a standard today, is leavened by a spirited telling and wonderfully borne out in friendly, even comical scenes. This STEM/STEAM title fits in as Apgar perhaps did not.

Gr 1–5–A fantastic way of teaching ecology, but more, this book expresses very high-level concepts about humanity and personhood within a positive framework of individuality. In accessible language and pictures, the visual and spoken narratives connect kids to different tangible and intangible ideas to grasp now or later.

Gr 3–6—Roy is having a great year (Larson’s *The Fire of Stars*), but this is her breakout book on how life begins and why reproduction is as essential to survival as light and water. Whether spawn, offspring, or propagation of the species, matter-of-fact answers are supported by extraordinarily detailed illustrations and diagrams to make the biology specific. Essential for all shelves, everywhere. Splendid.

Gr 2–5—A gripping, cinematically presented biography of a spirited heroine who always wanted pants so she could ride like the men. When she took up the cause of religious freedom dressed
as a boy, she became Juan, known as Mexico’s Joan of Arc. Dynamic, vibrant illustrations accompany a poetic text for a thrilling story about a remarkable person.

STELSON, Caren. Stars of the Night: The Courageous Children of the Czech Kindertransport. illus. by Selina Alko. Carolrhoda. ISBN 9781541598683. Gr 3-5—In an uplifting narrative standing in for the voices of young Jewish children, Stelson documents the breathtaking effort to move the children from Prague to England for safety during WWII, saving their lives. Alko’s glorious illustrations give life to history; children will be poring over every page.

WALKER, Cameron. National Monuments of the U.S.A. illus. by Chris Turnham. Wide Eyed Eds. ISBN 9780711265493. Gr 2-4—A fabulous compendium that leaves other monument books in the dust. Walker challenges readers to think about how a monument reflects what we value as a culture. A scrapbook format, a blend of modern facts and history, and delightful illustrations all stand out because of Walker’s examination of the monuments through an equitable lens.

WEATHERFORD, Carole Boston. How Do You Spell Unfair?: MacNolia Cox and the National Spelling Bee. illus. by Frank Morrison. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536215540. Gr 2-4—Ridiculous obstacles, open racism, and more were put before Cox, whose study habits and grace under pressure pulled her into first place. The storytelling in verse flows beautifully across Morrison’s sculptural scenes of this lanky, unflappable scholar, in the spotlight and behind the scenes, moving toward her inevitable triumph.


BROWN, Daniel James. Facing the Mountain (Adapted for Young Readers): A True Story of Japanese American Heroes in World War II. Viking. ISBN 9780593465660. Gr 5 Up—This focuses on four young Japanese Americans who fought for their country during World War II, three on the warfront and one as a protestor in the courts—all despite the treacherous Executive Order 9066, which incarcerated all people of Japanese descent. Equal parts enraging and inspiring, this is narrative nonfiction at its best.

DAY, Nicholas. The Mona Lisa Vanishes: A Legendary Painter, a Shocking Heist, and the Birth of a Global Celebrity. illus. by Brett Helquist. Random House Studio. ISBN 9780593643846. Gr 5 Up—Readers will be mesmerized by this gripping account of the 1911 theft of what would later become the most famous painting in the world. Day’s sly narrative, Helquist’s expressive drawings, and the mystery of La Joconde’s fate captivates until the last page.

DONNELLY, Rebecca. Total Garbage: A Messy Dive into Trash, Waste, and Our World. illus. by John Hendrix. Holt. ISBN 9781250760388. Gr 4-8—Donnelly makes garbage absolutely fascinating. Facts about what and how much we throw away, past solutions for waste, and how we can do better for our planet are all discussed in a light,

Gr 7 Up—This biography portrays the astonishing survival story of Jewish teenager Fritz and his father, determined to stay together in the Nazi death camps. Intertwined is the story of younger brother Kurt, who escaped to the United States. With elegant prose, this is a heart-pounding read of steadfast devotion in the face of almost certain death.


Gr 7 Up—This adaptation of Olaudah Equiano’s 1789 autobiography creatively and effectively utilizes the found verse poetic form. Combining the autobiography of this formerly enslaved man who rose to be one of England’s foremost abolitionists with explanatory sidebars puts Equiano’s story in the context of historic events.


Gr 6 Up—A thoroughly engaging—albeit sometimes gross—dive into the history of medicine and deadly diseases. Packed with little-known facts about ailments that have haunted the human population for centuries, this well-researched title will fascinate readers.


Gr 8 Up—This compelling history tells the story of the conviction of Italian immigrants Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti through a host of primary source documents and images. The meticulously detailed, thoroughly sourced, gripping narrative compassionately contextualizes this story while vividly explaining its historic significance.


Gr 5 Up—A thorough exploration of the historical and ongoing innovations of Indigenous North Americans from the realms of agriculture to thermodynamics, and how colonialism and persecution have necessitated adaptation. An interactive text that shines a light on essential, underrepresented Indigenous history in STEM and beyond.


Gr 4-6—Hopkinson’s gripping narrative of the rescue of World War II prisoners from Cabanatuan Camp in the Philippines is beautifully told through individual stories. Amply illustrated with maps and photos, and with extensive source notes, this is a high-interest read and a superb resource.


Gr 3-8—Levy profiles 16 boundary-pushing scientists of marginalized backgrounds from all over the world. Gorgeously designed, this volume sports stunning photos, engaging pull quotes, vibrant colors, and impeccable back matter. An inspirational text about underrepresented folks in STEM fields.


Gr 5 Up—Economic and social policy expert Mc Gee blends narrative with research to explain the systemic pitfalls of the zero-sum “us versus them” racial hierarchy, a result of white supremacy. This deep dive advocates for solidarity with concrete examples and metrics of success.


Gr 8 Up—In seven quick chapters, Miller
makes the complexities of outer space accessible and compelling. Through stimulating text and dynamic photographs, readers learn about the outer reaches of the solar system beyond Pluto. Fascinating and informative, an excellent resource that will keep even non-space-loving teens turning the pages.

Gr 9 Up—Raised in 1980s Jordan, Mufleh knew she would be killed if discovered to be a lesbian. While in college in the United States, she makes the agonizing decision to apply for asylum. This gripping memoir beautifully portrays the palpable urgency of a young woman who had to save her own life to be true to herself.

Gr 4–5—An offbeat subject is treated here with deep research and highly engaging text, focused on the history and mission of the mail, but also on the broad diversity of the workforce. With vibrant page design and copious illustrations, this will be a quirky favorite.

Gr 3–7—This illustrated memoir centers the late Caldecott Medalist’s childhood in 1940s Philadelphia, capturing his voice and heart through the sepia-toned sketches and earnest recollections. Perhaps we didn’t get to read this as Pinkney had envisioned it, but for his admirers and kids everywhere, this is just perfect.

Gr 4–Up—A gynecologist discusses everything anyone would ever want to know about vaginas. In this brilliant and illustrated title, Rodgers makes all the facts about periods, pregnancy, and more accessible to children and young adults. A phenomenal work that answers the questions most kids are too nervous to ask.

Gr 8 Up—This account of the Scopes Monkey Trial seems perfectly designed to engage readers. Yet the narrative’s true genius is that it situates this almost 100-year-old trial over the teaching of evolution in schools within today’s controversies surrounding intellectual freedom, faith, and the media.

Gr 5 Up—Blending adventure, history, marine science, and archaeology with a dose of technological gee-whiz, Sandler sketches the findings from seven historic shipwrecks ranging from South Africa to the Northwest Passage. Eye-catching illustrations are smoothly integrated with the dense text. This makes for excellent research or independent reading.

Gr 6 Up—Taking advice on writing from a masterful storyteller like Sepetys makes sense. Personal memoir and writing prompts are woven together seamlessly for readers to tackle cover to cover or in sections in this book that will certainly inspire the next generation of writers.

Gr 8 Up—In vivid language, Sheinkin recounts Rudi Vrba’s harrowing escape from the camps during World War II while contextualizing history appropriate for the intended audience. The narrative also tells of the survival of classmate Gerta Sidonova, living under an assumed identity. Dual stories build suspense while championing the teens’ survival.

Gr 7 Up—This collective biography told through “story-poems” explores the lives of six important Black Americans and their work fighting for racial justice. With illustrations that bring to life the figures and the times they lived in, it’s a compelling work that includes extensive back matter.

Gr 4–8—More than a compendium of bird species, Sibley’s superior volume captures the essence of
each bird, delving into the particularity of each one. His exquisitely illustrated book offers incredible yet digestible details and fascinating insights that will intrigue kids from urban to rural communities.


Gr 9 Up—A riveting social media firestorm at a high school in California in 2017 sets the stage for a new book by Slater, this time focused on school discipline and freedom of speech. Captivatingly crafted from interviews, news reports, and courtroom documents.


Gr 4 Up—Spicer takes readers on a captivating journey through the best and worst of microbes that live in homes, yards, food, and people. Entertaining, often amusing, and sometimes disgusting, this work is a superb choice for research or leisure. A thorough bibliography is also included.


Gr 3-7—Weiss-Tuider, a MOSAiC team member aboard the Polarstern, shares her compelling observations of the Arctic expedition, how they impact climate research, and what they reveal about humanity’s future. The text resembles a logbook packed with stunning mixed-media images that will inspire young people to climate activism.

GRAPHIC NOVELS

Committee: Jasmine Amiri, Jenny Arch, Shelley M. Diaz, Andrea Lipinski, Carla Riemer


Gr 8 Up—New students at the Gourmand Academy of Culinary Combat learn how to battle monsters and become great chefs, while dealing with school stress as well as friendship and family drama. A fun, action-packed, and engaging story that would be a great choice for reluctant readers.


Gr 6 Up—Students take turns standing up in front of the class to share eerie stories. Each tale is terrifying in a different way, but the school itself has its own scary secrets. Great for readers who love suspenseful and chilling stories with a Twilight Zone vibe.


Gr 10 Up—Bell’s experiences illustrate racism’s effect on the way Black youth learn to navigate the world and also on society at large. Dramatic art breaks out of a confining panel structure, making the story bigger yet more personal. The final result is a beyond powerful memoir.


Gr 9 Up—Brown chronicles the Russian army’s 2022 invasion and capture of the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. The black-and-white illustrations bring the city’s devastation to life, while the story shines a light on the horrors people experienced while trying to survive the relentless Russian attacks.


Gr 3-5—When a bold-but-brainless knight and a slight-but-smart squire arrive in Bridgetown, they find it’s missing its bridge. While the knight rushes off to find and fight a dragon, the squire (the true hero) pursues the problem from another direction. Chantler’s palette of Halloween neutrals sets the perfect mood for this clever story
in which moments of tension and danger are balanced by humor.

Gr 5 Up–Mia lives in Los Angeles with her Jewish mother and stepfather. Using money from her bat mitzvah, she sneaks away to Oklahoma to see her birth father and learn about their shared Muscogee heritage. Through narrative and art, key aspects of Jewish and Muscogee traditions are explored, giving a fresh look at honoring multicultural identities.

Gr 4-8–As Jordan enters his last year of middle school, he receives an acceptance letter from an art school. Does he really want to be the new kid again? This heartfelt, must-read conclusion perfectly complements Craft’s previous titles. Readers will be reluctant to let these characters go.

Gr 8 Up–Raquel has a crush on classmate Pardalita, admiring her from afar, and finally connects with her through theater. The quiet pace of this sweet romance mirrors Raquel’s growing attraction. The art shines, especially in moments when it’s more evocative than literal in expressing movement and emotion.

Gr 10 Up–Vulnerable and piercing, Glasheen’s debut follows a nonbinary teen in the 1980s who faces pressures of gender conformity and begins misusing alcohol, landing them in a rehab program. Dynamic watercolor pages unveil a healing story about recovery, friendship, and being true to one’s self—one that leaves a lasting impression.

Gr 4-9–Garvey is not an athlete like his older sister, which makes it hard to bond with his dad. But Garvey’s friends help him find his voice—figuratively and literally—by joining chorus, which helps them connect through music. Grimes’s tanka poems from the original book translate beautifully in the graphic novel format; Taylor’s night sky illustrations are especially striking.

Gr 3-5–A trip to the basement laundry to retrieve a missing sock turns into an epic journey as Milo ventures through the never-ending cavern, making unusual friends and encountering danger. Hatke displays a genius for setting as well as character; each level Milo descends features a different style of art, architecture, and sculpture. A stellar story about courage and friendship.

Gr 7 Up–Krosoczka’s tender follow-up to Hey, Kiddo depicts a life-changing experience at Camp Sunshine, a summer camp for children with severe illness, and their accompanying families. The warmth from the relationships formed throughout the story radiates off the pages. This book has a lasting impact.

Gr 4 Up–July Chen has a secret: she can see ghosts. When she meets a boy who’s trapped between life and death, she tries to save him, only to find their fates are more intertwined than either could imagine. This touching and emotional story contains an enticing mix of friendship, love, Chinese mythology, and magical dumplings.

Gr 8 Up–In this breathtaking memoir, Lee masterfully portrays the experience of being in between worlds and cultures as a first-generation Korean American navigating high school. Emotion and detail fuel the ink-washed pages as adolescence, mental health, loneliness, and a fragile mother-daughter relationship are explored with nuance and raw honesty. A stunning piece of work that takes the comics medium to new heights.

Gr 5-8–Pedro’s family embarks on a road trip from California to Mexico to help his abuelito before bringing him back to the U.S. to live with them. An unpredictable fusion of humorous and reflective moments that gives fascinating insight into the immigrant experience.
Humor and sentiment take center stage as the expressive artwork demonstrates his world expanding and his identity emerging. A poignant self-discovery story.

SINDU, SJ. Shakti. illus. by Nabi H. Ali. Harper-Alley. ISBN 9780063090132.  Gr 3-7—Featuring rich, expressive illustration, SIndu and Ali’s enchanting graphic novel follows Shakti who calls upon a Hindu goddess to help save her new town of Amherst, MA, after she discovers it has been cursed by school-bully witches. The result is a high-stakes narrative that braids mythology, family, and harmony into an enthralling coming-of-age story.

STEINKELLNER, Emma. Nell of Gumbling: My Extremely Normal Fairy-Tale Life. Random/Labyrinth Road. ISBN 9780593570661. Gr 4 Up—Nell lives in the magical town of Gumbling, but to the folks who nest there, it’s just home—until a pair of siblings arrive to transform it into Castletown, setting up a “small town vs. big development” conflict. This sweet and quirky story of magical adventures, friendship angst, and the challenges of growing up is told through Nell’s illustrated journal and will charm readers.

STERLING, Zachary. Mabuhay! Scholastic/Graphix. ISBN 9781338738643. Gr 4 Up—in this love letter to food trucks and Filipino culture, siblings JJ and Althea pay little attention to their family’s folktales—until they start coming true. Weaving humor throughout, this heartwarming story gives new meaning to embracing one’s heritage. A high-energy delight that gives folklore, family, and food center their due.

TANG, Betty C. Parachute Kids. Scholastic/Graphix. ISBN 9781338832686. Gr 4 Up—A family trip from Taiwan to California in 1981 turns from American Dream to nightmare when Feng-Li’s parents tell her and her two siblings that they will be staying—on their own. Feng-Li plays peacemaker between her brother and sister as they face overwhelming challenges. A memorable and compelling immigration story.

WHEELER, Kate & Trent Huntington. Team Trash: A Time Traveler’s Guide to Sustainability. Holiday House. ISBN 9780823452279. Gr 3-6—Science fair partners Charlie and Oliver accidentally activate a time machine that whisks them away to different ages and places to learn about trash and recycling. A cute, smart, and incredibly informative book about recycling, upcycling, composting, and other STEAM topics.