

A vibrant, whimsical illustration of a girl reading a book against a starry night sky. The girl, with dark hair and a yellow bow, is wearing a blue shirt with red and white checkered suspenders and a green skirt with a white ruffled hem. She is sitting and holding an open yellow book. The background is a deep blue night sky filled with white stars, pink and yellow comets, and large, stylized green and yellow flowers. Several orange and black monarch butterflies are scattered throughout the scene. The overall style is colorful and dreamlike, with a focus on nature and reading.

Best Books 2025

“The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.”

—Jim Trelease, *The Read-Aloud Handbook*



WHEN I READ THESE WORDS in graduate school, they rang so true. They echoed as I led story time at libraries all over Brooklyn, NY, and as I raise my own children. Unfortunately, the act of reading aloud is in decline.

New research by HarperCollins UK reveals that parents are losing the love of reading aloud, with fewer than half sharing that reading to children is “no fun for me.” Gen Z respondents think of reading as “more a subject to learn than a fun thing to do.”

As for reading alone, that same study says that only 32 percent of 5–10-year-olds frequently choose to read for enjoyment, down 55 percent from 2012 (<http://bit.ly/43rW14E>).

Additionally, a new report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), based on 2024 test scores, found that a record-low number of fourth and eighth grade students in the United States had “below-basic” reading skills. According to the NAEP, one-third of eighth graders had “below-basic” reading skills—the largest number since the exam began in 1969. Also, 40 percent of fourth graders’ reading skills were designated “below-basic,” the most in two decades (<https://bit.ly/4qZ5r2V>).

Of course, this is alarming news for parents, educators, and all those who care about children and literacy. But we, librarians and lovers of stories and information, have the solution. It’s been ingrained in us since we entered this profession—it’s *why* we entered this profession. Bring back readers’ choice. Bring back read-alouds. Bring back the joy of reading.

This is our gospel truth. It’s why 28 librarians

and five reviews editors came together to select 191 Best Books for children and young adults. Months of reading and discussion, spreadsheets and caffeine, all in service to this splendid list of enjoyable, excellent, and engaging books to preach that gospel.

We hope that this curated offering, filled with adventurous and fantastical stories, silly and breathtaking picture books, true-crime mysteries and stirring romances, and universally consumed manga and graphic novels, will be the joy-making resource that you need to impact the next generation of readers (and their grown-ups).

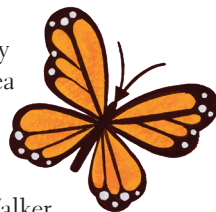
We hope that each title on this list will prove Maya Angelou’s words that “Any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading, to make reading one of [their] deep and continuing needs, is good for [them].”

—Shelley M. Diaz
SLJ Reviews Director



Thank you to all of the reviewers who helped us create this year’s Best Books list:

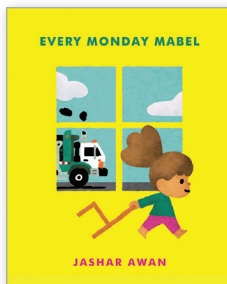
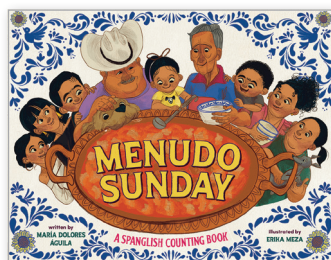
Alicia Abdul, Monisha Blair, Kristin Brynsvold, Lisa Buffi, Tracy Cronic, Molly Dettmann, Jonah Dragan, Rachel Forbes, Rose Garrett, Vi Ha, Bob Hassett, Angie Jameson, Chance Joyner, Rosemary Kiladitis, Mary Lanni, Louis Lauer, Ashley Leffel, Andrea Lipinski, Emmy Neal, Joe Pascullo, Lisa Rowland, John Scott, Mariah Smitala, Allie Stevens, Lynne Stover, Debbie Tanner, Allison Tran, Emily Walker



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

Illustration by Loris Lora

Best Books 2025



Picture Books

Committee: Jonah Dragan, Kimberly Olson Fakih, Chance Joyner, Louis Lauer, John Scott

ÁGUILA, María Dolores. *Menudo Sunday*. illus. by Erika Meza. Dial. ISBN 9780593462256.

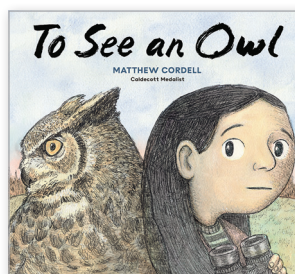
K-Gr 3—So many books attempt to talk about family, community, bonds of sharing, of gathering. This required reading—also a counting book—may instigate new rituals in the homes of readers who encounter it.

AWAN, Jashar. *Every Monday Mabel*. S. & S. ISBN 9781665938150.

PreS-Gr 2—For anyone who has ever been or loved the weird little kid who always does her thing, Awan's spare story will resonate. Mabel's ritual is carried out in an illustrative style reminiscent of Taro Gomi's work; even better, the sanitation truck is right on time, and readers find that Mabel's not such an outlier after all.

BURGESS, Matthew. *Fireworks*. illus. by Cátia Chien. HarperCollins/Clarion. ISBN 9780063216723.

PreS-Gr 1—Chien gloriously translates sound and feeling to the page, offering children and adults a sensory experience of the inexplicable thrills of exploding lace and rocket bursts in the sky. Burgess provides a steady text that vibrates with the excitement surrounding the displays.



CORDELL, Matthew. *To See an Owl*. Random House Studio. ISBN 9780593649893.

PreS-Gr 2—Majestic, simple, studied drawings bring the protagonist face-to-face with the natural world. Cordell's certainty of purpose, to show the value and vivid adventures available to those who “look,” makes this book impossible to put down.

FORSYTHE, Matthew. *Aggie and the Ghost*. S. & S./Paula Wiseman. ISBN 9781534478206.

K-Gr 3—Those readers with an annoying, want-to-be-included younger sibling will readily settle into this version of haunting. Aggie can't escape the ghost, and Forsythe's taut sentences and expressively blocky, atmospheric scenes never give away his hand. Deserving, witty, complete.

GOADE, Michaela. *Moon Song*. Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316461634.

Gr 1-4—In alliterative language as lyrical and atmospheric as the moonlit accompanying scenes of northern forest, water, and sky, Goade evokes both the wonders of the natural world and her own Tlingit and Haida cultural background.

HAN, Sally Soweol. *Nightsong*. Bloomsbury. ISBN 9781547615063.

PreS-Gr 3—Soft drawings feature hard sounds, ephemeral and yet captured by onomatopoeia, as a boy discovers that the whole world sings to him, if only he is still and listening. From the raucous to the sacred, from city to country, Han's illustrations have the look of watercolors brushed across clouds.

HANNIGAN, Jess. *The Bear Out There*. HarperCollins/Quill Tree. ISBN 9780063289482.

Gr 1-4—In blocky, color-splashed acrylic collage, a narrator becomes that self-possessed, hysteria-inducing voice of campfire stories and urban legends, constantly threatening a visitor with dreadful scenarios of what may come. Groups will lean into every delicious word.

HARRIS, Shawn. *Let's Be Bees*. Holiday House/Neal Porter. ISBN 9780823457090.

PreS-Gr 2—Father and child cycle through funny imaginative leaps, to be buzzing bees, or chirping birds, or rustling trees, and more. There is no “what does it mean” to this riot of sound effects and crayonlike, ebullient scratchy scenes, but just the lingering need to share this work.

JUDGE, Lita. *Old Blue Is My Home*. Abrams. ISBN 9781419771521.

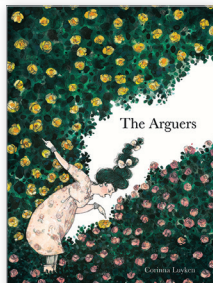
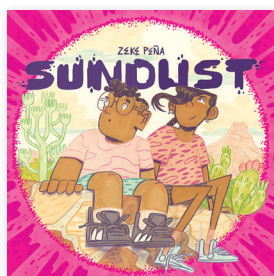
Gr 1-4—An old-school picture book in the best sense, the story of a child's longing amid housing insecurity to belong to a more conventional, settled world. Based on the author's childhood, the book comes with iridescent watercolor and colored pencil scenes of home in a snug blue van.

KANG, Angie. *Our Lake*. Penguin/Kokila. ISBN 9780593698235.

Gr 1-4—Kang's story happens to be about a death in the family, and it happens to be about a lake, but the book weaves new notions of time and space: time together, time to heal, and the space to build memories. Glowing gouache paintings move from sunlight to shadows to show tentative recovery from a devastating loss.

LUYKEN, Corinna. *The Arguers*. Penguin/Rocky Pond. ISBN 9781984814425.

PreS-Gr 2—The heir-apparent to Edward Gorey, Maurice Sendak, and Hilary Knight, Luyken offers up a brand-new fairy tale that feels as old as time and is relentlessly funny.



Children will understand the joy of arguing, as well as its downside, in a book that needs both group-sharing and one-on-one deep dives.

MANOLI, Costantia. *The Fig Tree*. illus. by Leah Giles. Roaring Brook. ISBN 9781250763136.

K-Gr 3—Without sentiment but infused with the emotional vibration of a country torn in two, the elegant story of a fig tree in the times before a conflict that led to the dividing of the Republic of Cyprus (Greek Cypriot) from Turkish Cypriot. Collagelike scenes contrast sculptural figs and the thorns of barbed wire.

MATA, Niña. *New*. HarperCollins. ISBN 9780063318250.

K-Gr 2—A young Filipina wearing hand-me-downs on the first day of school stars in a resonant and comic story, offering empathy for other newcomers and a lesson in compassion for onlookers. The story never sinks into tropes as it shows how pushing through is far better than staying behind.



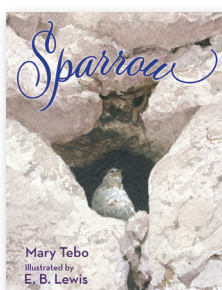
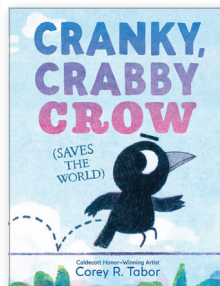
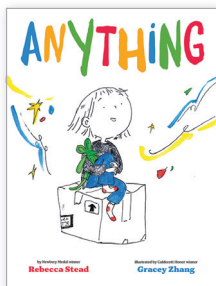
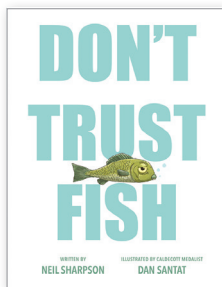
PEÑA, Zeke. *Sundust/Polvo solar*. Penguin/Kokila. ISBN 9780593700112.

K-Gr 3—Two children, one with a fade, the other with a long looping braid, jump over the wall into the wilder desert landscape where chasing sundust and imagination turns into a marvelous adventure. Spare storytelling and all the colors of the Southwest combine into a long, languid, revelatory day. Available in Spanish and English.

RANSOME, James. *A Place for Us*. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen. ISBN 9780593324882.

K-Gr 4—Ransome's diplomatic note about this heartrending wordless book explains that he hopes to amplify the conditions of those without resources. What readers will find in this effusive day-in-the-life story is a Black American family





and how they cope with limited money, the public library, and a park bench to create their own version of “shelter.”

SARDÀ, Júlía. *The Witch in the Tower.* Candlewick Studio. ISBN 9781536243017.

Gr 2 Up—Exquisitely stylized artwork keeps pace with the deliberate, winding text of the ephemeral companion to *The Queen in the Cave*. For readers of longer form picture books, this is eye-filling and exquisitely told; a visit to these pages requires only a passport of the imagination.

SHARPSON, Neil. *Don't Trust Fish.* illus. by Dan Santat. Dial. ISBN 9780593616673.

PreS-Gr 3—Readers learn up-close the role of the “unreliable narrator” in this hilarious satire, with deadpan delivery, art and text that take sophisticated liberties with the page, and a jab at the dark side of the internet. Misinformation or good advice? Let children decide.

STEAD, Rebecca. *Anything.* illus. by Gracey Zhang. Chronicle. ISBN 9781797215150.

K-Gr 3—Through white pages, room angles, black lines, and a judicious use of rainbows, Zhang's art effusively conveys the implied losses of the story, as well as tentative steps forward for a father and daughter in their new life.

STERER, Gideon. *We Are Already Haunting Here!* illus. by Charlie Mylie. Union Square Kids & Co. ISBN 9781454960478.

K-Gr 4—A small ghost in a bowler hat leaves the family haunt to go find a perfect perch of its own. But what it finds? Heartbreak, hauntings, and hope live rent-free in a cannily affecting story of homecoming.

TABOR, Corey. *Cranky, Crabby Crow (Saves the World).* Greenwillow. ISBN 9780063373587.

PreS-Gr 1—Tabor takes on the superhero trope and sends it into space with this glimpse of stealth friendships among a curmudgeonly crow and the animals it tries to

keep at a distance. Choosing a blocky art style and leaving out needless explanations that might ruin the humor, the author knows that the best heroes keep their accomplishments to themselves.

TEBO, Mary. *Sparrow.* illus. by E.B. Lewis. Astra. ISBN 9781635926880.

PreS-Gr 3—A resonant story about Jerusalem that doesn't mention Jerusalem; here is Sparrow, at home in a crack in the Western Wall but something is missing. In perfect prose and suspense-building scenes, the story follows a small bird through a day full of promise and offers children a view of a landmark through the prism of hope.

WENZEL, Brendan. *Good Golden Sun.* Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316512633.

PreS-Gr 3—In scenes that are direct descendants of Eric Carle's tissue-paper gems, a blissfully childlike version of the “what” and “how” of the ever-present sun as it casts a glow over our days; in Wenzel's hands it becomes a paean to mindful interactions with nature.

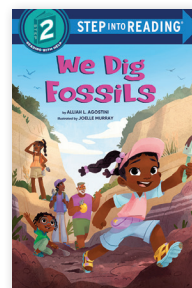


Transitional Books

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

AGOSTINI, Alliah L. *We Dig Fossils.* illus. by Joelle Murray. Random. ISBN 9780593812532.

PreS-Gr 1—Ava and her family take a trip to a fossil park, where, after a long day of digging, Ava's hopes of finding a fossil are finally realized. Great with repetition and onomatopoeia, this humorous story is unique and fun.



AHN, Angela. *Julia on the Go! The Big Splash.* illus. by Julie Kim. Tundra. ISBN 9781774882078.

Gr 2-4—Julia returns to her community's swim team after a hiatus to find that the sports program is in danger of being cut, all while her favorite coach has been replaced by a



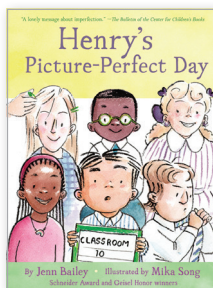
much harsher one. With pitch-perfect dialogue, Ahn presents a resonant, slice-of-life chapter book about friendships, pushing past first impressions, and conflict resolution.

ATINUKE. *Love from Anna Hibiscus!* illus. by Lauren Tobia. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536239515.

Gr 1-3—Nigerian youngster Anna Hibiscus's worldview is changed when she vacations with her grandparents at their childhood village. In this lovely series addition, Atinuke covers topics like child abandonment and socioeconomic disparity in an age-relevant way and offers examples of kids inspiring the adults in their lives by doing good on a local scale.

BAILEY, Jenn. *Henry's Picture-Perfect Day.* illus. by Mika Song. Chronicle. ISBN 9781797230252.

Gr 1-3—Henry returns in this sweet, funny tale of embracing imperfection and authenticity on class picture day. Prose and illustrations excel in their trademark expressive simplicity. Young readers on the autism spectrum may relate to Henry's musings and his wry skepticism of the "rules" around an important event.



BROACH, Elise. *Bulldozer & Friends: Bulldozer Goes to School.* illus. by Kelly Murphy. Little, Brown/Christy Ottaviano. ISBN 9780316564199.

Gr 1-3—The delightful construction vehicle makes his school debut. Broach and Murphy continue their long-time collaboration to deliver this stirring and accessible early chapter book about the power of friendship and determination to overcome every challenge.

CYPESS, Leah. *Miriam's Magical Creature Files: The Truth About the Tooth Fairy.* illus. by Sarah Lynne Reul. Abrams/Amulet. ISBN 9781419772405.

Gr 2-4—Youngest sibling Miriam is convinced her family is fibbing about the tooth fairy, and she's going to prove it with science. Full of endearing art, including charts, doodles, and field notes, Cypess's novel is a hilarious account of a charismatic Orthodox Jewish girl who will charm kids and adults alike.

HAYDU, Corey Ann. *Zoomi and Zoe and the Sibling Situation.* illus. by Anne Appert. Quirk. ISBN 9781683694601.

Gr 1-3—Fuzzy monster Zoomi and her favorite human Zoe



navigate the trials of big sisterhood. Haydu's tender prose and inventive vocabulary capture the delight and frustration a new baby sibling brings; Appert's sweet, colorful art highlights an imaginative world of fun words and creatures readers will adore visiting.

HIGUERA, Donna Barba. *The Unlikely Aventuras of Ramón and El Cucuy.* illus. by Juliana Perdomo. Abrams/Amulet. ISBN 9781419777424.

Gr 2-4—The Newbery author's first chapter book series centers a young Cucuy (Latine boogeyman) and his first assignment to terrorize a naughty human boy who is more homesick than mischievous. Perennial themes, clever worldbuilding, quirky characters, and Perdomo's adorable art blend perfectly in this just-right, silly entry.



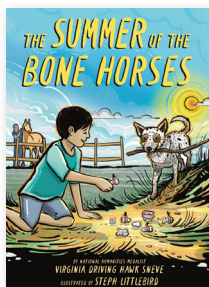
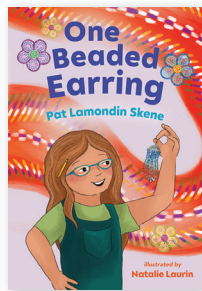
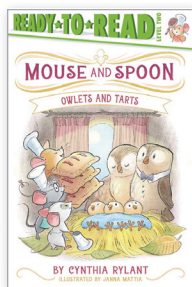
LYONS, Kelly Starling. *Ty's Travels: Super Ty!* illus. by Niña Mata. HarperCollins. ISBN 9780063083721.

PreS-Gr 1—With a makeshift cape and mask, Ty becomes Super Ty, using his imagination and kindness to save the day—until he faces a problem he can't solve, prompting his older brother to become a superhero, too. This joyful, empowering early reader celebrates imagination, family, and small acts of heroism.

MEDINA, Juana. *Elena Camps.* Candlewick. ISBN 9781536216424.
PreS-Gr 2—Determined elephant Elena struggles to set up her camping tent. Medina's signature art, the short text, and the playful onomatopoeia and humor in this engaging story will show emerging readers the values of perseverance and emotional regulation.

PIZZOLI, Greg. *Earl & Worm #1: The Bad Idea and Other Stories.* Knopf. ISBN 9780593649664.

PreS-Gr 2—New neighbors Earl and Worm become best friends over the course of three short stories. Similar to Elephant and Piggie and Frog and Toad, this duo will quickly find its place as a staple on young readers' shelves.



RYLANT, Cynthia. *Mouse & Spoon: Owlets and Tarts.* illus. by Janna Mattia. S. & S./Simon Spotlight. ISBN 9781665962186.

K-Gr 2—At the Mouse and Spoon bakery, three determined mice help a pair of exhausted owls and their babies fall sleep with their delicious treats. Cozy art in a soft palette, paired with brief sentences and a gentle narrative, make for a satisfyingly sweet early reader, perfect for bedtimes.

SKENE, Pat Lamondin. *One Beaded Earring.* Natalie Laurin. Orca. ISBN 9781459841598.

Gr 1-5—When Delia brings her mom's cherished beaded earrings to school and loses one, she strives to make things right and learns about her Métis heritage along the way. Monochrome illustrations depict a loving family bonding over traditions in a rich, accessible narrative of a multigenerational family reconnecting with their Indigenous roots.

SNEVE, Virginia Driving Hawk. *The Summer of the Bone Horses.* illus. by Steph Littlebird. Abrams/Amulet. ISBN 9781419759550.

Gr 1-3—A Dakota boy spends the summer with his grandparents at a reservation while his father undergoes a serious operation in this spare and moving early chapter book. Through cultural touchstones and resonant themes, Sneve and Littlebird sensitively capture the uncertainty of familial challenges and the resilience found in intergenerational bonds.

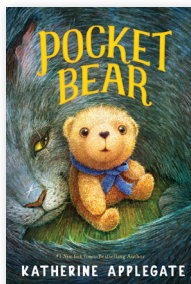


Middle Grade

Committee: Monisha Blair, Kristin Brynsvold, Tracy Cronce, Rose Garrett, Mariah Smitala, Ashleigh Williams

APPLEGATE, Katherine. *Pocket Bear.* illus. by Charles Santoso. Feiweil & Friends. ISBN 9781250904362.

Gr 4-6—Created to sit in a soldier's pocket, Pocket Bear now runs the Second Chances Home for the Tossed and Treasured. When a new teddy bear with a fascinating past shows up, he and his feline friend Zephyrina discover even more about courage, love, and the enduring effects of war.



BLANKMAN, Anne. *The Enemy's Daughter.* Viking. ISBN 9780593623046.

Gr 4-7—It's 1915, and after surviving the *Lusitania* attack and her father's capture on suspicion of being a spy, Marta's perilous journey home to Germany forces her to question loyalty, war, and prejudice. A powerful historical fiction adventure fusion of friendship and survival.



BRINER, Karen. *Starry, Starry Heist.* Holiday House. ISBN 9780823456444.

Gr 4 Up—When Max meets the mysterious DZ, who reveals that time travel is real and Max can do it, he must choose: go back to correct his biggest mistake or save the painting *The Starry Night* from never existing. This science fiction story skillfully weaves in grounded elements that make it appealing to all readers.

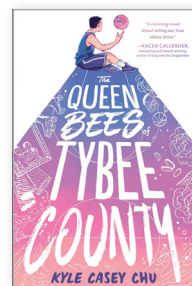


CHERRYWELL, Steph. *The Ink Witch.* Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316585958.

Gr 3-7—Transgender Becca discovers her witch heritage when Aunt Malatrice casts a spell on her mother; this takes Becca on a quest through a magical world where she will collect the necessary items to save Mom. Equal parts humor and fantasy make for an exciting story of inner strength and courage.

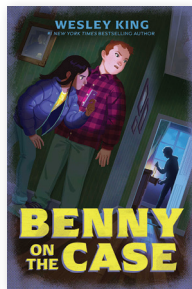
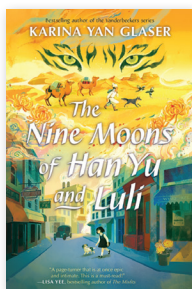
CHU, Kyle Casey. *The Queen Bees of Tybee County.* HarperCollins/Quill Tree. ISBN 9780063326958.

Gr 6 Up—When Derrick Chan's basketball plans fall through, a summer with his grandmother in Georgia leads him to new friendships, self-expression through drag, and a deeper understanding of his late mother. This book demonstrates courage in the face of challenging situations—even when it's family who poses the biggest obstacle.



EDGMON, H.E. *Defanged.* Feiweil & Friends. ISBN 9781250874009.

Gr 4 Up—Vampires are out of the coffin, and a cure is now available, but Lux Priddy doesn't want to be cured. So, he runs away to find the rumored city of Nox Urbus, where he



can be himself. With a cast of lovably odd characters, this is a deliberate yet engaging look at the way society vilifies groups who are different from the so-called norm.

GLASER, Karina Yan. *The Nine Moons of Han Yu and Luli*. HarperCollins/Allida. ISBN 9780063284432.

Gr 5 Up—Told in alternating timelines between ancient China and Depression-era New York, the story follows Han Yu, who travels the Silk Road alone when his family falls ill, and Luli, who is desperate to save her family restaurant. A beautiful, moving story about bravery and the power of art.

IDIL, Raidah Shah. *How to Free a Jinn*. S. & S./Salaam Reads. ISBN 9781665982634.

Gr 4–8—When Insyirah moves to Malaysia, she's shocked to learn that the spirits from her grandmother's stories are very real and alive there. This thrilling and rich fantasy centers on a girl with the gift to see and control jinn.

KIM, Graci. *Dreamslinger*. illus. by Drew Alott. Disney/Hyperion. ISBN 9781368104777.

Gr 5 Up—Aria Loveridge, a Dreamslinger haunted by her mother's death, infiltrates Seoul's kingdom-training program to expose its secrets. She uncovers truths that could reshape her destiny and the world's. Surprises abound that will have readers guessing to the very end and begging for a sequel.

KING, Wesley. *Benny on the Case*. S. & S./Beach Lane. ISBN 9781665937696.

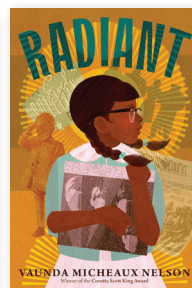
Gr 4 Up—When thefts threaten to shutter the Newfoundland retirement home where he lives, Benny launches an investigation to save it. This charming mystery, set against a refreshingly unique backdrop, balances an engaging whodunit with rich emotional depth, themes of friendship and acceptance, and a rare portrayal of a protagonist with Mosaic Down syndrome.

LUKOFF, Kyle. *A World Worth Saving*. Dial. ISBN 9780593618981.

Gr 6 Up—A's transphobic parents drag him to a conversion support group where teens keep disappearing, and he fears he or his friends may be next. Very real-world challenges, such as hate and homelessness, face A, though Lukoff expertly intertwines these with Jewish folklore and mysticism in this heartrending tale.

MANDANNA, Sangu. *Vanya and the Wild Hunt*. Roaring Brook. ISBN 9781250899835.

Gr 4 Up—When a mythic monster attacks her home, Vanya



is swept into a hidden world of magical books, mythical beings, and long-buried family secrets. This fast-paced fantasy weaves globe-spanning traditional folklore with themes of belonging and self-acceptance, creating a rich, inclusive world where a neurodivergent protagonist finds courage and community.

MEJIA, Tehlor Kay. *The Better to Eat You With*. Delacorte. ISBN 9780593647073.

Gr 5–8—Evan can't wait to escape her parents' arguing (and her mother's food restriction) at Sonrisa resort with her friends. But something fearsome is terrorizing the camp, and Evan realizes it's as hungry as she is. Mejia sensitively weaves a harrowing yet hopeful tale of parental-induced anorexia with a heart-pounding creature feature.

MESSNER, Kate. *The Trouble with Heroes*. Bloomsbury. ISBN 9781547616398.

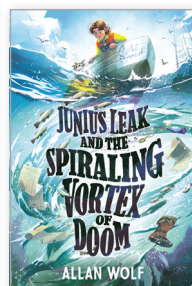
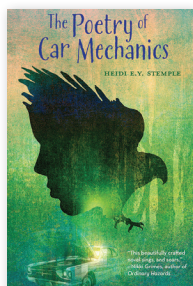
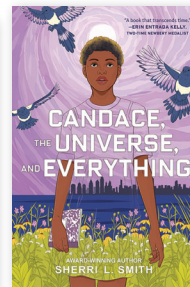
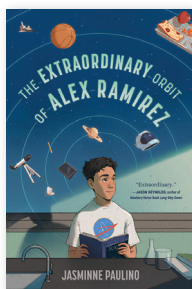
Gr 3–8—Climbing the Adirondack Mountains is not Finn Connelly's idea of fun, but after his anger manifests in vandalism, his sentence is to hike the entire range. Through Finn's poetry and letters detailing his thoughts on grief and adolescent angst, readers join in his breathtaking and deeply satisfying journey.

NELSON, Vanda Micheaux. *Radiant*. Dutton. ISBN 9780593855782.

Gr 4–7—In 1963 Pittsburgh, Cooper navigates being a Black girl amid turmoil on a personal and a national scale. Nelson's powerful verse novel centers a tween learning to love herself; readers will appreciate the seamless infusion of notable historical events into a perennially relatable narrative of self-acceptance and compassion.

PAULINO, Jasmine. *The Extraordinary Orbit of Alex Ramirez*. Putnam. ISBN 9780593859315.

Gr 5 Up—Seventh grader Alex loves science and space, but in his self-contained classroom, he doesn't learn much



about either. When his teachers tell him he's not ready to join the regular science class, he decides to be his own advocate—and maybe even prove he can be extraordinary.

PYRON, Bobbie. *Octopus Moon*. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen. ISBN 9780593616291.

Gr 3-7—All the change that fifth grade promises sends Pearl spiraling. When she is diagnosed with depression, she is excited to have an explanation and course of action, but the stigmatization that comes with it leads to more challenges. This novel in verse is one of the most authentic and honest portrayals of depression for this age group.

RANSAW, Rosalyn. *Smoke and Mirrors*. Abrams/Amulet. ISBN 9781419770135.

Gr 4 Up—After being unfairly blamed for a barn fire, Andy agrees to help a reclusive old man restore a decaying mansion with ties to a vanished magician and an unsolved murder. Fast-paced and layered, this mystery deftly explores race, bias, and trust through the eyes of an emotionally complex narrator grappling with his father's incarceration.

REARDON, Joan. *Dad Rock Dragon Quest*. S. & S./Aladdin. ISBN 9781665963367.

Gr 3-8—Zadie takes after her rock and roll-obsessed dad, so she can't wait to spend a week with him; if only her mom's boring boyfriend wasn't tagging along. When poachers invade and kidnap her dad's dragon, an epic magical adventure ensues. Readers will love this fast-paced yet emotional exploration of family dynamics.

ROMERO, R.M. *The Tear Collector*. Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316578066.

Gr 4-8—Malka and her brother Ezra live on an island with the few survivors after the Flood. When Ezra gets the island's illness, Malka is desperate to find a cure. Readers will root for Malka to save the infected islanders in this dark and powerful dystopian tale that is infused with hope.

SMITH, Sherri L. *Candace, the Universe, and Everything*. Putnam. ISBN 9781524737931.

Gr 5 Up—Candace Wells feels unmoored by changing friendships at the start of eighth grade, but her world expands dramatically when a mysterious time-traveling bird flies out of her new locker. This intergenerational story delivers a captivating blend of science fiction and coming-of-age storytelling that explores friendship, identity, and wonder.

STEMPLE, Heidi E.Y. *The Poetry of Car Mechanics*. Astra/ Wordsong. ISBN 9781662660214.

Gr 5 Up—Dylan, 15, struggles to connect with his grandfather and his toxic masculinity after his mother's three-year absence due to her mental health. Stemple's artful writing will have readers flying through the pages, though the emotional depth will cause them to pause and savor each word.

SUMNER, Jamie. *Please Pay Attention*. S. & S./Atheneum. ISBN 9781665956079.

Gr 5-8—When a school shooting threatens her sense of well-being, Beatrix, who has cerebral palsy, must learn to reclaim her bravery and sense of safety through equine-assisted therapy and love. Told in verse, this important novel explores the resulting emotions and struggles when the unimaginable happens and you can't protect yourself.



WATSON, Renée. *All the Blues in the Sky*. Bloomsbury. ISBN 9781547605897.

Gr 5 Up—Sage has been grieving since her 13th birthday, when her best friend died in a freak accident. She can't imagine how she'll go on, especially because she blames herself. Written in verse, the story is a beautiful testament to the power of love and community in healing.

WOLF, Allan. *Junius Leak and the Spiraling Vortex of Doom*. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536217452.

Gr 4-9—Set around the 1980 Lake Peigneur Disaster, this historical fiction novel, told by the lake and Junius Leak, has it all: pirates, environmentalism, family complexity, and mental health struggles. When Junius is exiled to spend 12 days with a previously unknown uncle in Louisiana, he'll end up having a life-changing adventure.



YA

Committee: Ashley Leffel, Emmy Neal, Florence Simmons, Allie Stevens, Emily Walker

ANCRUM, K. *The Corruption of Hollis Brown*. HarperCollins. ISBN 9780063285835.

Gr 8 Up—Convinced he will be alone once his friends leave for college, Hollis gets more company than he could have imagined when a restless ghost named Walt hitches a ride in his body and unstoppable feelings develop despite separation looming. A wild and unforgettable story of small-town desperation with a creative premise and extremely believable characters.

BAYRON, Kalynn. *Make Me a Monster*. Bloomsbury. ISBN 9781547615865.

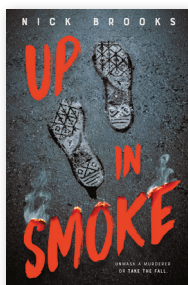
Gr 9 Up—This *Frankenstein* retelling blends folklore with a modern twist, following Meka's work as a mortician's assistant. It's a job which becomes more complicated when the dead don't stay that way. Meka and her recently resurrected boyfriend are everything a Gothic romance could ask for, soft and supportive despite the ever-encroaching sense of fear as classic horror elements are perfectly executed.

BOULLEY, Angeline. *Sisters in the Wind*. Holt. ISBN 9781250328533.

Gr 9 Up—After Lucy's father dies, she is placed in the foster care system but flees once she finds information that puts her life in danger. After an explosion at work, her caretakers reveal that her mother was Ojibwe and that she has a family. This strong stand-alone story of trust and betrayal is full of suspense and survival.

BROOKS, Nick. *Up in Smoke*. Holt. ISBN 9781250359933.

Gr 8 Up—Cooper thought he would just be a lookout as his friend looted a store during a riot. When gunshots ring out, and Cooper's friend Jason is implicated, things become much more complicated. Cooper and Jason's sister Monique must find the killer before



Jason is found guilty. A high-stakes thriller with a touch of romance that focuses on the systemic injustices faced by Black people.

BROWNE, Mahogany L. *A Bird in the Air Means We Can Still Breathe*. Crown. ISBN 9780593486474.

Gr 9 Up—Set during the height of COVID-19 in New York City, an interwoven collection of teens' stories imparts the lasting impact of this time period. Grace and care fill this honest examination of the pandemic, highlighting the path many walked through grief, loss, and discovering hope.

CHEWINS, Hayley. *I Am the Swarm*. Viking. ISBN 9780593623862.

Gr 10 Up—The women in Nell's family all receive a magical gift on their 15th birthdays. For Nell, her emotions manifest as insects. As her inner rage creates swarms of wasps, Nell must decide if she will repress the swarm or feel all the emotions swirling inside. A powerful novel in verse that encourages readers not to silence the storm inside.



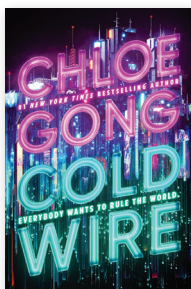
COLLINS, Suzanne. *Sunrise on the Reaping*. Scholastic. ISBN 9781546171461.

Gr 7 Up—A young Haymitch becomes Katniss's tragic foil as a tribute in the 50th Hunger Games, and readers confront how much of what they believed about his games was just Capitol propaganda. A masterwork of subverted expectations, this addition to canon rewards fans with familiar faces and answers to long-held questions.

DREWS, CG. *Hazelthorn*. Feiwel & Friends. ISBN 9781250376299.

Gr 8 Up—The rules that have strictly governed Evander's life for as long as he can remember start to fade after his guardian's grisly death; his only hope for survival in the botanical horror of an estate he has inherited may be the boy who once tried to kill him. A haunting, twisted, and wonderfully dark tale of self-discovery.



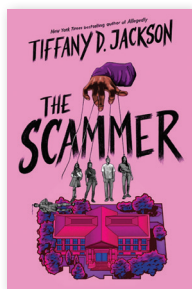


GONG, Chloe. *Coldwire*. S. & S./Margaret K. McElderry. ISBN 9781665960137.

Gr 9 Up—In a futuristic dystopia, most of the population escapes to the shiny “upcountry” virtual world from their “downcountry” existence. Lia and Eirale confront the dangers of a corporate-run reality while unraveling the same world-shattering mystery from different directions. A dynamic blend of propulsive action, romance, and red herrings that nevertheless grapples with vital sociopolitical themes.

JACKSON, Tiffany D. *The Scammer*. HarperCollins/Quill Tree. ISBN 9780063271272.

Gr 9 Up—Jordyn’s roommate’s charismatic brother Devonte captivates first her roommates and then many of the students at her HBCU. As Devonte’s demands on his followers grow more intense, Jordyn must find a way to save her roommates and stop his hold on them. A unique take on cult followings with Jackson’s signature style that will leave readers guessing until the last page.



KAUFMAN, Amie & Meagan Spooner. *Lady's Knight*. HarperCollins/Storytide. ISBN 9780062893390.

Gr 8 Up—Lady Isobelle and Gwen come up with a plan: Gwen will pose as Sir Gawain in the Tournament of Dragonslayers. If “Sir Gawain” wins, Isobelle won’t have to marry the knight who’d like to claim her as a prize. But then the girls fall in love with each other in this sapphic rom-com filled with humor and adventure.

KELLY, Anita. *Donut Summer*. HarperCollins/Quill Tree. ISBN 9781335012890.

Gr 10 Up—Mateo’s over-the-top gregariousness is nothing but annoying to Penny, who is beyond aggravated at having to share her summer donut shop job with them, but corporate pressure, family struggles, and Penny’s mounting anxiety turn out to be problems for which Mateo provides a great balance. A big-hearted, inclusive take on mental health and the enemies-to-lovers trope.

LA SALA, Ryan. *The Dead of Summer*. Scholastic/PUSH. ISBN 9781546125877.

Gr 8 Up—Shortly after Ollie and his mom return home to Anchor’s Mercy, ME, a new illness begins to spread among

the inhabitants after a tropical storm. Told in converging timelines through interview transcripts, drawings, and Ollie’s narration, this thriller combines witty, emotional characters and a packed plot.

LEE, C.B. *Coffeeshop in an Alternate Universe*. Feiweil & Friends. ISBN 9781250417336.

Gr 8 Up—Brenda’s carefully laid life plan is altered when she meets Kat in a coffeeshop—which turns out to be in another (magical) universe. The girls must figure out how their two worlds are connected so they can save Kat’s universe. Readers will love escaping into this fun, diverse, and cozy fantasy.

LEE, Susan. *The Romance Rivalry*. HarperCollins. ISBN 9781335012876.

Gr 10 Up—Rival romance book reviewers Irene and Aiden compete for a brand sponsorship while fake-dating their freshman year of college. Brilliantly executing an abundance of romance tropes, this upbeat competition tale tackles the intricacies of navigating social media amid a budding heartfelt romance.

MCBRIDE, Amber. *The Leaving Room*. Feiweil & Friends. ISBN 9781250908087.

Gr 9 Up—Gospel’s Leaving Room is a place of transition, where souls cross from this life to whatever comes next. Many things are mysterious even to Gospel herself, though, and as she untangles her circumstances, readers are swept along on an emotional and evocative journey in a smart and unforgettable novel in verse.

MCCULLOUGH, Joy. *Everything Is Poison*. Dutton. ISBN 9780593855874.

Gr 9 Up—Carmela Tofana begins an apprenticeship at her mother’s apothecary but soon discovers there’s more to the place than meets the eye. Interspersed with verse, this





historical dive into the notorious Aqua Tofana shows the strength and resilience of those who fought for women's autonomy in 17th-century Rome.

MEYER, Marissa. *The House Saphir*. Feiwel & Friends. ISBN 9781250320957.

Gr 7 Up—A revamped “Bluebeard” in which handsomely mysterious Armand hires clairvoyant con artist Mallory to banish his ancestral murderous ghost. Fully rounded characters and mystical creatures embody atmospheric delights, witty banter, and calculated twists, filling a sublimely macabre tale.



OGLE, Rex. *When We Ride*. Norton. ISBN 9781324052821.

Gr 9 Up—How far are you willing to go for a friend you consider a brother? Diego has done everything to be the first in his family to go to college. Lawson deals drugs to support his mother and gain the lifestyle he wants to have. When Diego gets entangled in Lawson's drug dealings, both boys face the consequences. An intense novel in verse that shows how toxic friendships can lead to tragic ends.

REID, Ava. *Fable for the End of the World*. HarperCollins. ISBN 9780063211551.

Gr 10 Up—In a dystopian world, a livestreamed event called the Gauntlet pits people in debt against Angels, girls designed by the government to kill them. But Angel Melinoë and Inesa fall in love and try to survive together. This sapphic love story shows people in a bleak, controlled situation fighting together with hope.

SMITH, Sasha Peyton. *The Rose Bargain*. HarperCollins. ISBN 9780063372528.

Gr 8 Up—In 1848 London, a fae queen rules England and offers her subjects their deepest desire—for a price. Ivy is aware of how fae bargains go wrong, but the competition for the crown prince's hand could solve all her family's problems. A fun and feminist romantasy, this is a sugar rush in book form.

SOTO, Julie. *The Thrashers*. Wednesday Bks. ISBN 9781250377173.

Gr 9 Up—An infamous group of friends is investigated after a girl is found dead on prom night; said girl might also

be haunting them. A mystery-packed thriller driven by an unreliable narrator, this sustains brilliant twists and turns as the brutal truths are unveiled.

TAYLOR, Emily J. *The Otherwhere Post*. Putnam. ISBN 9780593404546.

Gr 9 Up—After living in hiding for years, Maeve is inspired by a mysterious letter to con her way into the Otherwhere Post. There she can learn the magical art of scriptomancy and attempt to clear her father's name. A clever cast of well-developed characters support the unique magic system and worldbuilding, driving home the ever-escalating stakes as Maeve fights for justice and her place in the world.

VAN NESS, Jonathan & Julie Murphy. *Let Them Stare*. HarperCollins/Storytide. ISBN 9780063346246.

Gr 9 Up—When gender-nonconforming fashionista Sully loses an internship and then discovers an extremely rare vintage bag, trying to exorcise the bag's poltergeist and selling it becomes top priority. Romance and excitement turn out to be much closer to home than Sully could have imagined. Charming and warmly hilarious.

ZOBOI, Ibi. *(S)kin*. HarperCollins/Versify. ISBN 9780062888877.

Gr 7 Up—Marisol is a soucouyant: a fiery woman of Caribbean folklore who sheds her skin on the new moon to feast on souls. Genevieve does not know who her birth mother is but knows that there is something new brewing in her soul. When Marisol and Genevieve's paths collide, familiar relationships and magic meet in this novel in verse. The rich, lyrical language drives an exciting story of magical realism that readers will not be able to put down.



BEST BOOKS 2025 LIST CONTINUES ON PAGE 14→

Phenomenal Loris Lora

This month's cover artist wove aspects of Frida Kahlo's life into a garden of creativity



Since 1997, *School Library Journal's* December issue cover has been created by an artist whose work was chosen as an SLJ Best Book that same year. Past illustrators include Maurice Sendak, Bryan Collier, and Yuyi Morales. This year's cover was made by two-time Pura Belpré Honor-winning Loris Lora, illustrator of one of SLJ's 2025 Best Books, *Frida Kahlo's Flower Crown* (Abrams), by Nydia Armendia-Sánchez.

Frida Kahlo's Flower Crown is the second picture book biography Lora has illustrated; the first was *Phenomenal AOC: The Roots and Rise of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez* by Anika Aldamuy Denise (HarperCollins, 2022).

In her bordered illustrations for *Frida Kahlo's Flower Crown*, arrayed in the colors of a Mexican sunrise, children can play hide-and-seek with the

flora of the region: tejocote, prickly pear, date palm, Mexican wild yam, old man cactus, and more. These have the simple sensibility of potato stamps but are far more delicate—an iridescent feast.

Lora shifts easily from biographies of powerful women to board books that will entice children into reading; in Laura Gehl's *Who Laid These Eggs?* and *Who Dug This Hole?* (both Abrams, 2025), the illustrations are full of bulging, bold shapes of friendly creatures that elevate the lift-the-flap concept to fresh new heights.

For *May Your Life Be Deliciosa* by Michael Genhart (Abrams, 2021), Lora infused the illustrations with the colors of her childhood in Mexico, with saturated pastels that head in the direction of neon but never stray from more subdued origins.

Magazines versus books

SLJ asked Lora what's different about the process of designing magazine covers as compared to book illustration. The difference is designing within the given parameters. For Lora, "this included designing around all the magazine cover text and labels while

also trying to captivate the audience's attention with a single image. It can be quite a task, but I enjoy storytelling and eye-catching images."

The prompts for any Best Books cover artist—stars, readers, celebration—are daunting, but Lora plunged in. "Frida surrounded herself with plants, books and curiosities; I found a connection to the prompts through this," Lora explains.

"The cover was largely inspired by an early spread where young Frida is

playing with her imaginary friend (herself, as a nod to her 1939 *The Two Fridas*) under a cedar tree. I envisioned this version of Frida further escaping into her curiosity and imagination through the books and stories she reads," Lora reflects.

"Brightly colored stars, flowers, and animal creatures emerge from the pages and loop around her in the night sky. I think of how the stories we tell also evoke this same sense of curiosity and imagination."

Armendia-Sánchez's text guided Lora's illustration choices. "Nydia's writing was always my north star when illustrating the book," Lora

says. "Whenever I felt like

I was too overwhelmed on details of Frida's biography and making sure everything was factually correct, I always referred back to Nydia's storytelling and focal point. She beautifully blends Frida's biography with nature in a very poetic way, and I wanted to match it. My goal as an illustrator is to bring text





Phenomenal Loris Lora *continued*

and image together to create a powerful book for readers to enjoy.”

She had a chance to contribute details beyond the text, without taking the book off course. “Behind Nydia’s words is a heavy amount of research into Frida Kahlo’s complex life,” Lora notes. “Details about the time period, what her garden looked like, and Frida’s lifestyle all support the story in ways that are not mentioned in the text. Incorporating these details and knowing when to pull back was essential. I wanted to make sure it was true to the story Nydia wrote and be able to interpret it in my artistic voice.”

“Behind Nydia’s words is a heavy amount of research.... Details [that] help support the story in ways that are not mentioned in the text.... I wanted to make sure it was true to the story Nydia wrote and be able to interpret it in my artistic voice.”

As with her work on *Phenomenal AOC*, Lora brings bold visuals to tell the story of a strong woman of color via flattened perspectives and impressionistic blocks that are unconventional in a picture book biography.

Naming such influences as Charley Harper, Alice and Martin Provensen, Mary Blair, J.P. Miller, and Alexander Girard, Lora says, “A lot of my influences come from mid-century artists and graphic designers who are shape-based and graphic in their approach.”

She explains further: “Perspective is often implied through basic shapes and can lend itself to storytelling and creating strong compositions. Over the years, I’ve really learned to embrace this way of looking at things and bring it into my practice with modern sensitivities. Color plays an important role in my storytelling and often helps evoke emotions through the harmonies created. My sense of color not only comes from learning color theory but also from my Mexican culture and upbringing.”

Addressing difficult truths

The author and Lora had to grapple with aspects of Kahlo’s story that the artist foreshadows in choices that carry through to Kahlo’s later years.

“Her iconic brow is instantly recognizable and might be one of the first things we notice when we envision Frida,” Lora says. “It was a helpful detail to lean on when depicting young Frida and following her through the years. With any story where we follow a character aging, it’s helpful to have a specific feature or color palette to help the reader follow the character. Even on the magazine cover, her eyes and brows are instantly recognizable under her flower crown.”

Kahlo’s polio and her later, serious streetcar accident are difficult parts to include in a children’s book, but Armendia-Sánchez does; Lora embraced the direct approach with the illustrations as well. “We wanted to not shy away from these very difficult parts of her life, even if we found creative ways in showing it,” Lora continues. “One of the notes I

remember discussing with the team was making sure Frida’s right leg was much thinner due to polio. It might not be noticeable at first, but it’s a very important detail.”

“Symbolism can be a helpful tool when illustrating difficult moments,” Lora says. “Instead of showing an actual accident, we showed her in bed recovering and being uplifted by creativity. But if you look closely at the illustration, near the vase with broken stemmed flowers, I drew a skeleton figurine and toy streetcar on the nightstand to help illustrate this tragic moment in her life and how close she was to death.”

“Finally, on the last spread, the team and I felt it was important to show her in a wheelchair painting surrounded by nature. Frida dealt with a lot of chronic pain throughout her life and often painted in bed or in a wheelchair. It’s important to show people throughout history with disabilities who also did remarkable things. Frida’s resilience is incredibly inspiring and an important fact to know about one of the most celebrated Latina artists in history.”

Future projects

Lora has several new works underway, including *123s of Baby’s Needs*, a sequel to the *ABCs of Baby’s Needs* (both little bee books), and a nonfiction title with Nosy Crow.

“I enjoy being able to illustrate various types of books for all ages and collaborating with authors,” she shares. “Recently though, I’ve been trying to tap into writing and illustrating my own picture book projects and looking forward to being inspired.”



Poetry

Committee: Molly Dettmann, Florence Simmons

BREWER, Caroline. *Harriet Tubman, Force of Nature: A Biography in Poems.* What On Earth Bks. ISBN 9781804661444.

Gr 3-7—The incredible life of Harriet Tubman is told in various poetic forms with bold and beautiful artwork, back matter, and further reading. These compassionate poems will resonate with readers, and with the exquisitely crafted illustrations, bring this important story to life.

BURGESS, Matthew. *Words with Wings and Magic Things.* illus. by Doug Salati. Tundra. ISBN 9781774880289.

K-Gr 5—A whimsical, vibrant collection of poems and art that transforms everyday moments into magical adventures. In this book, readers explore both the power of imagination and language.

ELLIOTT, David. *In the Desert.* illus. by Gordy Wright. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536223385.

Gr 2-5—A tribute to the resilience of desert wildlife reveals through poetry how life flourishes against all odds in the vast, unforgiving Sahara. An excellent resource for language arts, animal studies, and geography units, and a wonderful read-aloud.

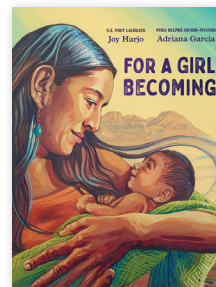
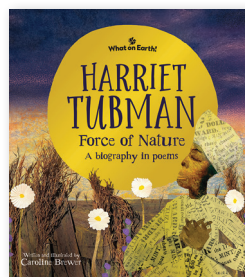
ENGLE, Margarita. *Hopeful Heroes.* illus. by Juliet Menéndez. Macmillan/Godwin. ISBN 9781250313942.

Gr 4-8—This book of poetry features inspiring Latines whose courage, creativity, and perseverance shaped history. The connection between poetry and history gives life to these stories.



GRAHAM, Joan Bransfield. *Awesome Earth: Concrete Poems Celebrate Caves, Canyons, and Other Fascinating Landforms.* illus. by Tania Garcia. HarperCollins/Clarion. ISBN 9780358396048.

K-Gr 5—A collection of poems in the form of the natural



landscapes that are their subjects. The blend of information and poetry makes for the perfect read-aloud.

HARJO, Joy. *For a Girl Becoming.* illus. by Adriana M. Garcia. Norton. ISBN 9781324052241.

K-Gr 3—A luminous celebration of Indigenous heritage and womanhood, Harjo's poetic text and Garcia's radiant art intertwine to honor life, ancestry, and the sacred beauty of becoming.

SMITH, Charles R. *Black Diamond Kings: Heroes of Negro League Baseball.* illus. by Adrian Brandon. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536225358.

Gr 2-5—Powerful poems and striking art honor legendary Negro Leagues players, blending sports, history, and rhythm into a vibrant tribute to Black excellence and baseball legacy. A surefire hit for baseball fans and a resource for social studies, history, and language arts.

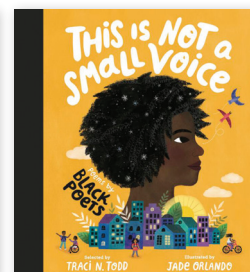
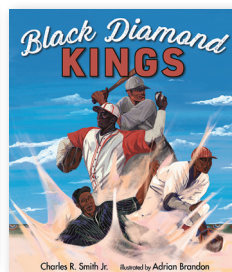
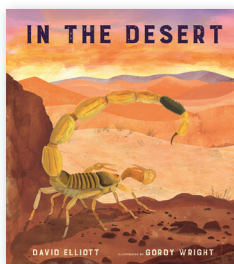
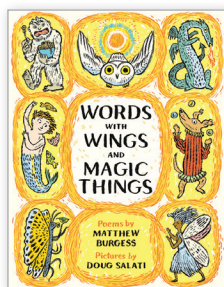
TAYLOR, Sean. *Five Little Friends: A Collection of Finger Rhymes.* illus. by Fiona Woodcock. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536242911.

PreS-Gr 3—For the littlest poetry readers, this collection features rhymes involving fingers and hands; each work is relatable yet asks children to use their imaginations. This excellent book can be read cover to cover, or readers can pick favorite words and movements to act out in music or physical education classes.



TODD, Tracy N., sel. *This Is Not a Small Voice: Poems by Black Poets.* illus. by Jade Orlando. Nosy Crow. ISBN 979888772042.

Gr 1-5—A vibrant anthology celebrating Black life in all its depth, joy, struggle, history, and hope, through powerful poetry and luminous art. That stellar combination draws readers into the wide experiences of being Black.





Nonfiction Elementary

Committee: Kimberly Fakh, Vi Ha, Mary Lanni, Debbie Tanner



ALBEE, Sarah. *Zero! The Number That Almost Wasn't*. illus. by Chris Hsu. Charlesbridge. ISBN 9781623544324.

Gr 1-4—Across civilizations and eras, which the riotous art makes no attempt to present in traditional order, zero's backstory is a loss that no one knew was missing. This book blazingly challenges children to a new thought—a time before zero and what its invention meant.

ALZNAUER, Amy. *The Five Sides of Marjorie Rice*. illus. by Anna Bron. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536229479.

Gr 1-4—Tessellating shapes fascinated Marjorie Rice as a child, and her interest never let up; she was recognized as a mathematician despite her lack of degree. Fantastic kaleidoscopic mosaics take on the subject of tiling, showing children that curiosity will take them everywhere.

ARMENDIA-SÁNCHEZ, Nydia. *Frida Kahlo's Flower Crown*. illus. by Loris Lora. Abrams. ISBN 9781949480351.

Gr 1-3—Lora (this month's cover artist) brings vibrant color and sharply articulated shapes to the abbreviated but dense vision of Frida Kahlo's childhood. Key life events (polio, a streetcar accident) are covered, but the emphasis is on the spirit and exhilaration of the artist at the story's center.

BLACKBURNE, Livia. *Dreams to Ashes*. illus. by Nicole Xu. Lerner/Carolrhoda. ISBN 9798765627228.

Gr 2-5—For classroom use or group sharing, the story of the Los Angeles massacre in 1871 when 18 Chinese men were killed. It is rendered in merciless text and heightened, atmospheric paintings; this time of great violence and hatred reveals harsh facts that are still true today.

BLUMENTHAL, Karen & Jen McCartney. *Revolutionary Mary*. illus. by Elizabeth Baddeley. Roaring Brook. ISBN 9781626723115.

Gr 3-5—A compelling biography of the only woman to have her name on the Declaration of Independence, this book charms through dynamic, action-filled scenes of the era and

the determined heroine none of us knew. It's ripe with lessons on the printing press, society at the time, and the birth of a nation.

BROCKENBROUGH, Martha. *A Gift of Dust*. illus. by Juana Martinez-Neal. Knopf. ISBN 9780593428429.

Gr 3-6—The drift of Saharan dust trails across these gorgeously illustrated pages, as Brockenbrough and Martinez-Neal poetically traverse the majesty and reach of something people seldom consider: the dust that floats and bobs in sunlight, its origins, and its roles across the ages.

CHIN, Jason. *Hurricane*. Holiday House/Neal Porter. ISBN 9780823458493.

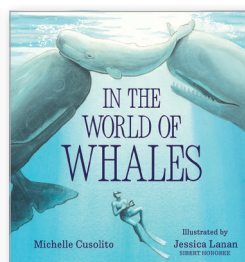
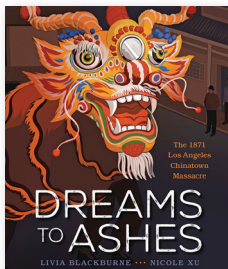
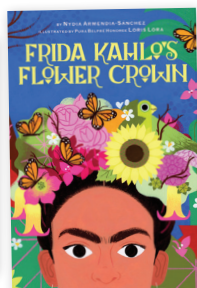
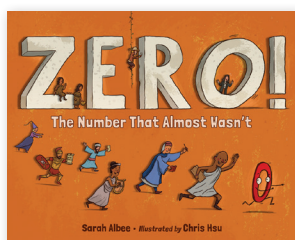
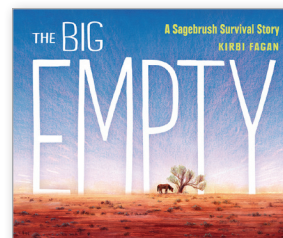
Gr 1-4—Working in matter-of-fact prose that delivers like a dramatic procedural, Chin maps out the path of the hurricane and its impact on a town, covering its aftermath and offering tons of back matter to inform and inspire reader interest.

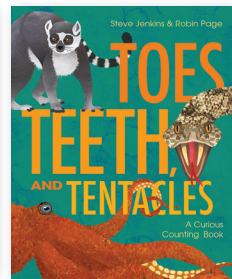
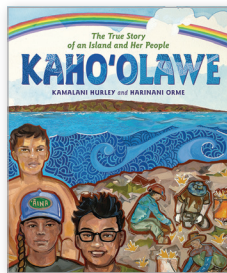
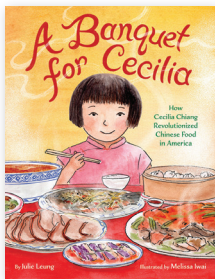
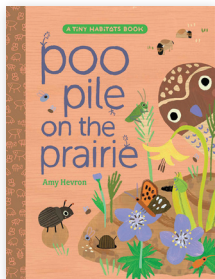
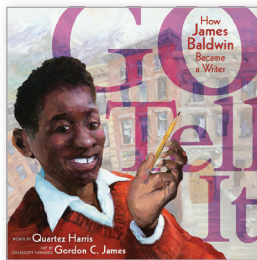
CUSOLITO, Michelle. *In the World of Whales*. illus. by Jessica Lanan. Holiday House/Neal Porter. ISBN 9780823453429.

K-Gr 4—Cusolito and Lanan pull readers into the somber, magnificent true story of a Belgian free diver who witnessed the birth of a sperm whale. It's a rare and painterly glimpse of an ordinary event writ large and stately.

FAGAN, Kirbi. *The Big Empty*. Lerner/Millbrook. ISBN 9798765627242.

K-Gr 3—The land of sagebrush is home to some, nourishment for all, and looks like nothing—but Fagan finds that its beauty and lure is everything. The glorious pages invite readers to reconsider the meaning of home and take a look at nature.





HARRIS, Quartez. *Go Tell It*. illus. by Gordon C. James. Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316483933.

Gr 2-5—Endpapers feature books lined up with tenements and brownstones as a monumental metaphor for the impact of reading on James Baldwin's life. Bring this into any classroom and connect the dots for children on this unlikely legend, gigantic talent, and American hero.

HEVRON, Amy. *Poo Pile on the Prairie*. S. & S./Beach Lane. ISBN 9781665935029.

K-Gr 2—Hevron summons readers into the pages to learn about poo, which becomes its own ecosystem over the months; this is an astounding visit to elegant natural processes.

HURLEY, Kamalani. *Kaho'olawe*. illus. by Harinani Orme. Lerner/Millbrook. ISBN 9798765605011.

PreS-Gr 4—In the years 1941–1993, Kaho'olawe was regularly bombed, an “empty” island target for the U.S. military; however, its residents always understood its value and fought for it. Lyrical text and magnificent mural-like art combine in a palette that glows as the years unfold.

JENKINS, Steve & Robin Page. *Toes, Teeth, and Tentacles*. Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316456692.

Gr 1-4—A counting book of a different stripe, scale, and ridge; the Jenkins-Page collaboration continues to delight with idiosyncratic and riveting takes on the natural world.

LAROCCA, Rajani. *Some of Us*. illus. by Huy Voun Lee. Little, Brown/Christy Ottaviano. ISBN 9780316571753.

K-Gr 4—With scenes of people of every background and from every corner of the globe, this warm hug of a book offers children a look at the prickly challenges and grace notes on the path from immigrant to naturalized citizen.

LAROCHE, Giles. *Extreme Places: The Most Remote Homes on Earth*. HarperCollins/Clarion. ISBN 9780358690184.

Gr 3-6—Charming houses of all ilk, on all terrain, show children how the word *home* can mean shelters dotting a glacier or an island from a volcano; this book is laudatory for reminding readers that these locations represent the many facets of how we live on this planet.

LEUNG, Julie. *A Banquet for Cecilia*. illus. by Melissa Iwai. Little, Brown. ISBN 9780759557413.

Gr 1-5—A fairy-tale start—a childhood in an old palace in Beijing—and historic events of the 20th century led Cecilia Chiang to open a Chinese restaurant and change the way we eat.

SLIVENSKY, Katie. *I, Rock*. illus. by Steph Stilwell. S. & S./Beach Lane. ISBN 9781665940368.

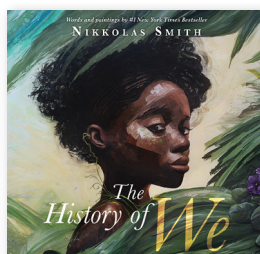
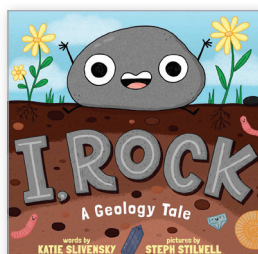
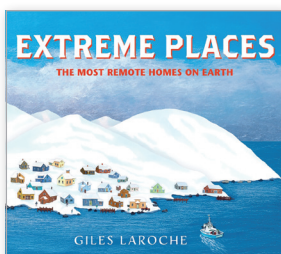
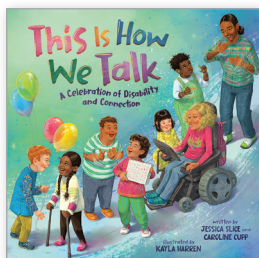
Gr 1-4—Stilwell's illustrations take on the ridiculous task of allowing a rock to do all the talking in this fact-based book on the four-billion-year-old story of geology. Slivensky cracks wise as she nudges children to consider the noble rock.

SLICE, Jessica & Caroline Cupp. *This Is How We Talk*. illus. by Kayla Harren. Dial. ISBN 9780593529935.

PreS-Gr 2—A comprehensive glimpse of the obvious, lesser-known, and downright surprising ways humans communicate; a range of body sizes, skin colors, abilities, support equipment, and dress stresses that expression belongs to everyone.

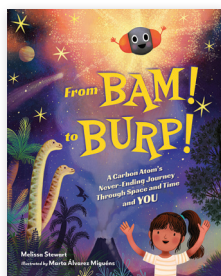
SMITH, Nikkolas. *The History of We*. Penguin/Kokila. ISBN 9780593619681.

Gr 1-5—In sculptural paintings, the story of humans; it reads like an anthem as well as a poem. Searing, unforgettable connections will have children combining in one thought the unity of our origins as well as our diversity.



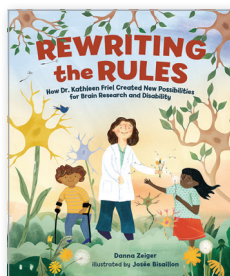
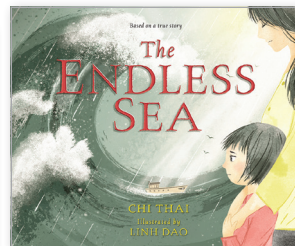
STEWART, Melissa. *From BAM! to BURP!* illus. by Marta Álvarez Miguéns. Charlesbridge. ISBN 9781623544461.

Gr 1-4—The story of the carbon atom that led to, well, everything we know, told with humor, intelligence, and fun. Atoms never disappear; they just move from one object or creature to another; Stewart’s brilliant approach ensures readers will find it enthralling.



THAI, Chi. *The Endless Sea.* illus. by Linh Dao. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536239607.

Gr 1-4—A memoir of a child’s beyond-perilous journey with her family from post-war Vietnam to a new life in the United States. Devastating global events unfold with the grace of a fugue through cinematic, emotional illustrations. History executed large and small, for everyone.



ZEIGER, Danna. *Rewriting the Rules.* illus. by Josée Bisaillon. Lerner/Millbrook. ISBN 9798765647271.

Gr 1-4—A biography of Kathleen Friel, born with cerebral palsy, who rewrote the book on how brains can be rewired, earning a Ph.D. The art renders the angles of her limbs and body and makes plain the mountains she moved with her passion to know more.



Nonfiction Middle to High School

Committee: Alicia Abdul, Lisa Buffi, Shelley M. Diaz, Bob Hassett, Lynne Stover, Ashleigh Williams

ALEXANDER, Lori. *Seeds of Discovery: How Barbara McClintock Used Corn and Curiosity to Solve a Science Mystery and Win a Nobel Prize.* illus. by Rebecca Santo. Harper/Clarion. ISBN 9780063245990.

Gr 4 Up—With lyrical storytelling and clear explanations of genetics, Alexander introduces Barbara McClintock to young readers, from her adventurous childhood to her Nobel-winning discoveries. A richly illustrated mix of biography, science, and inspiration, this book celebrates persistence, creativity, and the power of questioning. An inspiring resource for young science enthusiasts.

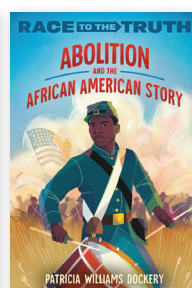
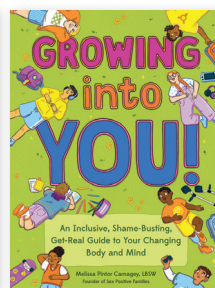
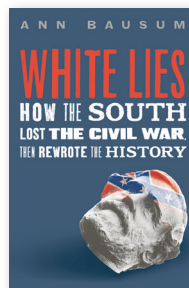


BAUSUM, Ann. *White Lies: How the South Lost the Civil War, Then Rewrote the History.* Roaring Brook. ISBN 9781250816573.

Gr 9 Up—Boldly outlining 20 historical lies maintained by American white supremacists to justify enslavement and Jim Crow oppression of Black people, Bausum sheds much-needed light on the myth of the “Lost Cause.” Period photos and illustrations, as well as ample sourcing, make for a weighty and necessary corrective.

CARNAGEY, Melissa Pintor. *Growing into You! An Inclusive, Shame-Busting, Get-Real Guide to Your Changing Body and Mind.* illus. by Brianna Gilmartin. Quirk. ISBN 9781683694311.

Gr 6 Up—A refreshing, interactive puberty guide for young



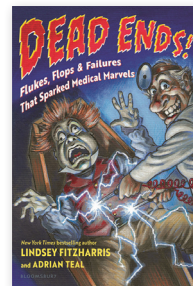
people of all genders. Carnagey uses inclusive language and emphasizes bodily and emotional autonomy while broaching a wealth of topics around growing up, from periods and pronouns to self-care and friendship. Activity prompts, engaging graphics, and abundant back matter round out this invaluable library addition.

DOCKERY, Patricia Williams. *Abolition and the African American Story.* Crown. ISBN 9780593811368.

Gr 6 Up—Part of the “Race to the Truth” nonfiction series, this book covers a sweeping history that highlights well-researched names and stories, focusing on the Civil War, Black migration, and Reconstruction. Breadth of content includes photos, maps, sidebars, and expansive back matter.

FITZHARRIS, Lindsey. *Dead Ends! Flukes, Flops & Failures That Sparked Medical Marvels.* illus. by Adrian Teal. Bloomsbury. ISBN 9781547615025.

Gr 5 Up—Fitzharris delivers an impeccably researched and engaging narrative that invites readers to explore the rich history of medicine and its marvels. While scientific topics are often complex, Fitzharris excels at making them accessible to middle graders. A valuable contribution to a category rarely explored for this age group.





FLEMING, Candace. **Death in the Jungle: Murder, Betrayal, and the Lost Dream of Jonestown.** Random/Anne Schwartz. ISBN 9780593480069.

Gr 8 Up—A true crime masterpiece about the life of Jim Jones and the devastating end to the Peoples Temple cult. Fleming is adept at building tension, which will leave readers racing to the disturbing conclusion. Mass murder and other sensitive topics make this hard to read, but this chilling narrative is difficult to put down.

FRIEDMAN, Tova. **The Daughter of Auschwitz: The Girl Who Lived to Tell Her Story.** HarperCollins/Quill Tree. ISBN 9780063381544.

Gr 4 Up—A compelling and heartrending memoir of Friedman's experiences as a Jewish child during the Holocaust. She hauntingly narrates her imprisonment and how she lived under the constant threat of death, sometimes surviving through sheer luck. An emotional and essential read.

GABEIRA, Maya. **Beyond the Board: The Untold Story of the World's Most Daring Big Wave Surfer.** Abrams/Amulet. ISBN 9781419760020.

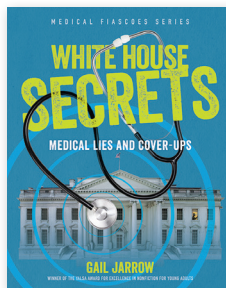
Gr 9 Up—The world's top female big wave surfer recounts her unconventional adolescence in Rio de Janeiro, discovering surfing through a boyfriend, going pro at 17, and setting out on not just a career but a way of life. A compelling, reflective narrator, Gabeira inspires through her passion and powerful drive for excellence.

GADDY, Kristina R. **A Most Perilous World: The True Story of the Young Abolitionists and Their Crusade Against Slavery.** Dutton. ISBN 9780593855522.

Gr 8 Up—Uniquely focused on four children of four storied abolitionists, Gaddy's interwoven biography tells the truth of abolition work in the United States, using a combination of primary documents and adept narration; it moves quickly with short chapters.

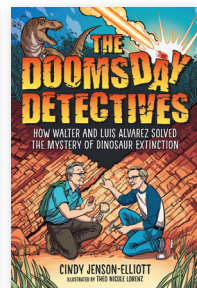
GRUSH, Loren with Rebecca Steffoff. **The Six (Young Readers Edition): The Untold Story of America's First Women Astronauts.** S. & S. ISBN 9781534497047.

Gr 6 Up—Six women decided to become astronauts and changed the landscape of NASA, but it was not without obstacles which Grush tackles head-on. Giving each astronaut their due and highlighting each individual's goals before achieving this spotlight, the book offers readers an intimate understanding of just what it takes.



JARROW, Gail. **White House Secrets: Medical Lies and Cover-Ups.** Astra/Calkins Creek. ISBN 9781662681035.

Gr 7 Up—Jarrow's latest covers nine presidents, from James Garfield to Joe Biden, who suffered medical issues during their time in office. Her well-researched narrative invites readers to think critically about fitness. History buffs and aspiring medical historians will savor this engrossing volume.



JENSEN-ELLIOTT, Cindy. **The Dinosaur Detectives: How Walter and Luis Alvarez Solved the Mystery of Dinosaur Extinction.**

illus. by Theo Nicole Lorenz. Lee & Low/Tu Bks. ISBN 9781643791098.

Gr 4-8—A celebration of curiosity and collaboration, this book highlights the ongoing nature of scientific discovery, using rich illustrations and clear explanations to chronicle how a Cuban American father and son uncovered the cause of dinosaur extinction. The captivating storytelling will engage curious minds and dinosaur enthusiasts.



KELLY, Erin Entrada. **At Last She Stood: How Joey Guerrero Spied, Survived, and Fought for Freedom.** Greenwillow. ISBN 9780063218901.

Gr 4-8—Learning about Joey Guerrero's story is to learn about Filipino history and culture in addition to religious faith and leprosy. This slim volume brings a historical heroine to the forefront in ways only Kelly can provide, with enthralling emotional depth.



KENNEY, Karen Latchana. **Fascinating Fungi: Nourishers, Killers, Connectors, and Healers.** Lerner/Twenty-First Century. ISBN 9798765611173.

Gr 6 Up—In a dynamic layout packed with colorful photos and illustrations; clear, engaging writing; and informative sidebars, Kenney presents truly fascinating fungi in a range of contexts—historical, scientific, and cultural. The illuminating text is rounded out with back matter to satisfy every budding mycologist.

LAWLOR, Laurie. **Many Voices: Building Erie, The Canal That Changed America.** Holiday House. ISBN 9780823455638.

Gr 5 Up—A social history for young people that seeks to explain the complex interplay of political, technological, cultural, and economic forces that culminated in the creation of the Erie Canal. Told from diverse perspectives, this impeccably designed narrative is highly useful for STEM, early American history, and engineering shelves.

LEIREN-YOUNG, Mark. **Octopus Ocean: Geniuses of the Deep.** Orca. ISBN 9781459838956.

Gr 4-7—This visually stunning title is sure to captivate, covering everything readers would want to know about octopodes, from anatomy to different species, and even celebrity octopuses known for escaping their tanks. An excellent choice for research or entertainment.

LEVY, Debbie. **A Dangerous Idea: The Scopes Trial, the Original Fight Over Science in Schools.** Bloomsbury. ISBN 9781547612215.

Gr 4-7—Levy patiently unspools the tale of the spectacular 1925 Tennessee trial that challenged a law forbidding the teaching biological evolution. Along with sketches of the personalities and outlines of political currents, the narrative is illustrated with period photos, lithographs, extensive source notes, and a detailed timeline.

LOCKE, Katherine & Nicole Melleby, eds. **Athlete Is Agender: True Stories of LGBTQ+ People in Sports.** Little, Brown/Christy Ottaviano. ISBN 9780316572002.

Gr 4-6—Inclusive and compelling, this anthology gathers first-person accounts from queer, trans, and nonbinary athletes through essays, poems, and profiles. Blending memoir, history, and activism, these stories highlight resilience, representation, and the vital message that sports can be a safe home for everyone. This affirming collection is inspiring and empowering.

MESSNER, Kate. **History Smashers: Ancient Egypt.** Random. ISBN 9780593902332.

Gr 4-7—This humorous, and fact-packed exploration of one of history's most fascinating civilizations is lively, informative, and visually rich. Readers journey through centuries of dynasties, pyramid-building, and pharaoh intrigue, supported by lively illustrations. The inclusion of modern discussions on artifact ownership adds depth, ensuring readers learn while being thoroughly entertained.

MILLER, Sarah. **Hick: The Trailblazing Journalist Who Captured Eleanor Roosevelt's Heart.** Random House Studio. ISBN 9780593649091.

Gr 9 Up—Lorena “Hick” Hickok’s journey from a difficult Midwestern childhood to becoming one of America’s most respected journalists is chronicled in this moving portrait of ambition and forbidden love. Hick’s career and secret relationship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt are revealed through historical detail, heartfelt storytelling, and an exploration of validity in the face of societal constraint.

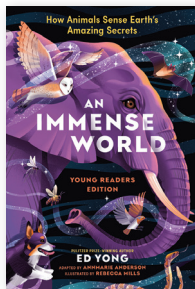
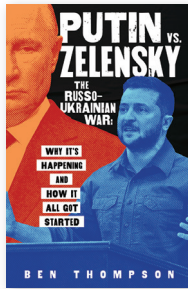
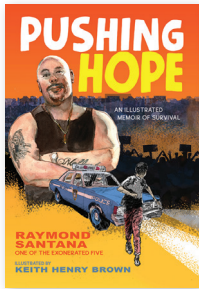
PÉREZ, Ashley Hope. **Banned Together: Our Fight for Readers’ Rights.** Holiday House. ISBN 9780823458301.

Gr 8 Up—Fifteen YA authors and illustrators, through fiction, memoir, poetry, and art, unite to confront the growing crisis of challenged and banned books. Part manifesto, part guidebook, this timely anthology celebrates the transformative power of stories and examines what is lost when books are banned.

ROBINSON, James. **Whale Eyes.** illus. by Brian Rea. Penguin Workshop. ISBN 9780593523957.

Gr 5 Up—Robinson’s enlightened memoir seamlessly integrates his life story with his experience living with strabismus with alternating exotropia, a disability of the eyes. He parlays his keen storytelling skills as a documentarian into an always accessible text, mixing humor, information, and visuals.





SANTANA, Raymond. *Pushing Hope: An Illustrated Memoir of Survival.* illus. by Keith Henry Brown. Astra/Calkins Creek. ISBN 9781662681400.

Gr 9 Up—Santana’s powerful and lyrical memoir presents his heartbreaking experience as one of the unjustly convicted Central Park Five, who were imprisoned for over 13 years for the alleged rape of a white woman. This stirring, highly illustrated work has bright, glossy pages filled with spare language, bold fonts, and Brown’s incredible graffiti-style art that will draw in aspiring activists and artists.

THOMPSON, Ben. *Putin vs. Zelensky: The Russo-Ukrainian War: Why It's Happening and How It All Got Started.* Roaring Brook. ISBN 9781250339560.

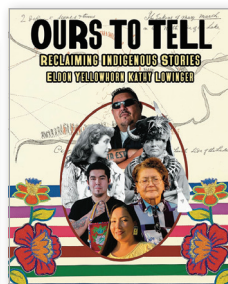
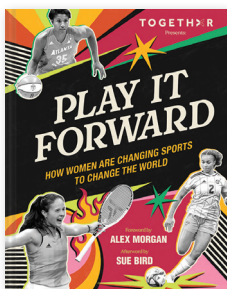
Gr 8 Up—Delivering a clear and accessible account of one of today’s most significant global conflicts, this narrative traces the lives and motivations of Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky. Well-researched and conversational, the story explores how history, politics, and identity shaped the 2022 invasion. History comes alive with vivid storytelling and historical insight.

TOGETHXR. *Play It Forward: How Women Are Changing Sports to Change the World.* Chronicle. ISBN 9781797232171.

Gr 9 Up—Twenty-five stories woven together to showcase women in sports make for a collective win as a collective biography. The book elevates the role of women’s contributions by effortlessly covering examples of their perseverance, strength, and ability to overcome systemic obstacles.

YELLOWHORN, Eldon & Kathy Lowinger. *Ours to Tell: Reclaiming Indigenous Stories.* Annick. ISBN 9781773219530.

Gr 7 Up—Through art, history, and tradition, this anthology spotlights 16 Indigenous storytellers and activists who share their experiences, creativity, and resilience. Featuring those from the Maya to the Inupiaq, the book reveals



how storytelling empowers and preserves culture. Challenging colonist narratives and illuminating achievement, trauma, and triumph make this book an essential resource on Indigenous life.

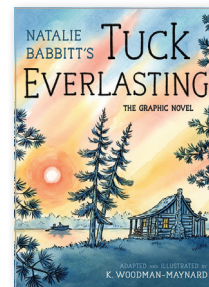
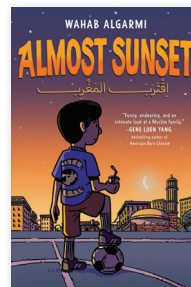
YONG, Ed. *An Immense World (Young Readers Edition): How Animals Sense Earth's Amazing Secrets.* adapt. by Annamarie Anderson. illus. by Rebecca Mills. Random/Bright Matter. ISBN 9780593810880.

Gr 4-8—Spectacularly adapted for young readers from its adult predecessor, Anderson takes Yong’s content and captures that book’s sense of awe and inspiration about the natural world with eye-catching visuals and a supportive, immersive text. The magic is alive within the pages of a book about animals’ senses.



Graphic Novels

Committee: Jasmine Amiri, Angie Jameson, Rosemary Kiladitis, Andrea Lipinski, Allison Tran



ALGARM, Wahab. *Almost Sunset.* HarperAlley. ISBN 9780063355675.

Gr 4-8—Hassan must learn to balance middle school life with family and religious traditions when he commits to fasting during Ramadan. Without Muslim peers, Hassan finds it easier to not explain Ramadan to his teachers and friends, adding to his stress and isolation. A heartfelt, winning look at Muslim identity and the struggle to find harmony with culture, faith, and the social and educational demands of being a tween.

BABBITT, Natalie & K. Woodman-Maynard, adapt. *Tuck Everlasting: The Graphic Novel.* illus. by K. Woodman-Maynard. Farrar. ISBN 9780374391850.

Gr 4 Up—Vibrant illustrations bring Babbitt’s beloved classic to life for a new audience to mark its 50th anniversary. The story of an immortal family and the girl who stumbles upon their secret is just as riveting in this graphical retelling, enriched by excerpts of the original text woven into the illustrations with stunning effect.



BASS, Guy. *Stitch Head*. illus. by Pete Williamson. Random House Graphic. ISBN 9798217026166.

Gr 4 Up—Stitch Head, the forgotten first creation of Professor Erasmus, has always longed for family, but when a traveling circus ringmaster shows up offering just that, he soon learns what real monsters look like. Dressed in whimsical, macabre art filled with creatures both scary and endearing, this tender story of a boy's wish to be seen will challenge readers' expectations of good and evil.

BENTON, Summer. *Zilbo's Forest: What's Up with That?* HarperAlley. ISBN 9780063460454.

K-Gr 2—Zilbo's bad attitude ripples through the forest until Mara the mouse takes the time and care to ask her friend Tango the turtle why she was so rude. Working to discover the root of the neighborhood's troubles, the friends learn the importance of empathy and helping one another.

CAMPBELL, Scott. *Cabin Head and Tree Head*. Tundra. ISBN 9781774885055.

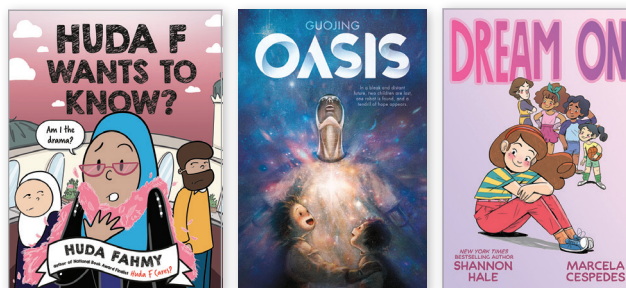
K-Gr 3—Cabin Head and Tree Head are the best of friends, living in a whimsical world where everyday objects sprout personalities and communities. The text explores themes, such as friendship, helping others, and appreciating life's simple joys, including tacos and art. A heartwarming, hilarious gem with exceptional, unique illustrations that young readers will return to again and again.

COLOSSAL, Eric. *Ghost Town*. Abrams/Fanfare. ISBN 9781419745843.

Gr 5 Up—The town of Crater is falling apart, but it's the only home Lily Cole has ever known. With an impending family move, Lily is determined to make this last summer with her friends worth remembering. When they discover that Crater is haunted by thousands of ghosts, she might get her wish! With all the fixings of a classic kids-on-bikes tale, this book bursts with visual gags and expressive illustration, punctuated with shimmery ectoplasmic spirits that deliver liberal doses of humor and chills.

COMBS, Alex L. & Andrew Eakett. *Trans History: A Graphic Novel: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*. Candlewick. ISBN 9781536219234.

Gr 9 Up—An encompassing overview of trans history, highlighting how, across cultures, continents, and time, trans people have always been here. Organized chronologically with vivid art, the book guides readers from ancient times to modern days, dispelling the myth that gender expression is a modern concept. Packed with an



impressive amount of information and with resources listed, this essential nonfiction title is attractive, accessible, and fun to read.

EMBERLEY, Michael. *Night Light*. Holiday House. ISBN 9780823458165.

PreS-Gr 1—A luminescent tale of a parent, a child, and the stars. When a blackout hits during bedtime storytime, a parent borrows some starlight to continue reading, only to encounter the ramifications of their actions. Breathtaking illustration, spare dialogue, and gentle storytelling make this an essential transitional reader.

FAHMY, Huda. *Huda F Wants to Know?* Dial. ISBN 9780593855614.

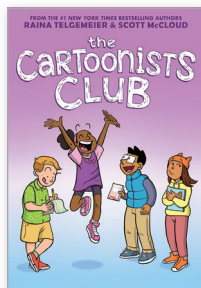
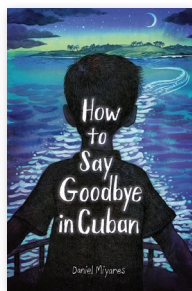
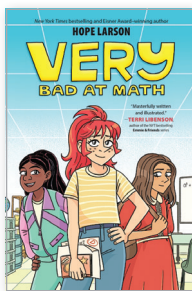
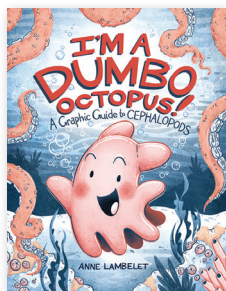
Gr 7-10—Third in the semi-autobiographical series that chronicles the ups and downs of the author's high school life as part of a tightly knit Muslim family in Michigan. Filled with humor, heart, and visual gags, this volume centers around Huda's parents' divorce announcement and will appeal to fans of the series and new readers alike.

GUOJING. *Oasis*. Macmillan/Godwin. ISBN 9781250818379.

Gr 3-8—Siblings in a postapocalyptic society repair an AI robot to keep them company while their mother toils in a futuristic city called Oasis. With the robot's "Mother Mode" activated, the three form a family unit, until the children's mother returns and must confront the role the AI has taken in their lives. Moody sepia artwork with splashes of color enhances meaningful narrative moments. A deeply moving story of technology, family, and survival.

HALE, Shannon. *Dream On*. illus. by Marcela Cespedes. Roaring Brook. ISBN 9781250843067.

Gr 3-6—When Cassie receives a generic sweepstakes mail flyer that states "you have already won," she takes it at face value and gets carried away dreaming about how the prizes could change her life and get her friends and family to stop



overlooking her. A sweet, poignant, and exuberant story that will touch the hearts of anyone who has ever been told they're too sensitive.

LAMBELET, Anne. *I'm a Dumbo Octopus! A Graphic Guide to Cephalopods.* Lerner/Graphic Universe. ISBN 9798765603055.

Gr 2-4—In this accessible and phenomenal celebration of cephalopods, Grumpy, a Dumbo Octopus, takes readers on an adventure to meet a range of different escape artists. Full of fascinating facts about the clever creatures and standout illustrations, this nonfiction book is lively, entertaining, and laugh-out-loud funny.

LARSON, Hope. *Very Bad at Math.* HarperAlley. ISBN 9780063311299.

Gr 4-8—Verity Nelson is popular enough to be class president and smart enough to have good grades, but despite her efforts, she can't improve her math grade, threatening her perfect image. Verity's path to understanding her dyscalculia is portrayed with care and nuance, inviting readers to see themselves in her story. A thoughtful and moving look at friendship breakups and learning disabilities.

MİYARES, Daniel. *How to Say Goodbye in Cuban.* Random/Anne Schwartz. ISBN 9780593568293.

Gr 5 Up—Rendered in graceful watercolor illustrations, this poignant narrative about a young boy and his family during the Cuban Revolution explores a historical moment that feels timely for today's readers. In a story based on the author's father's youth, the vivid depiction of normal life disrupted by political upheaval is sure to invite discussion.

MOREAU, Jérémie. *Alyte.* Milky Way. ISBN 9781990252471.

Gr 4 Up—Through liminal, profound storytelling, readers are guided by a small frog named Alyte on a journey through the cycles of life. Minimal text allows for an art-forward meditation on the natural world and humanity's impact on it.

Blending hard truths with moments of hope, this resonant work will remain with readers long after the final page.

PARK, Barbara & Colleen AF Venable, adapt. *Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus: The Graphic Novel.* illus. by Honie Beam. Random. ISBN 9780593706701.

K-Gr 2—Junie is back and just as spunky as ever! The graphic adaptation remains true to the original story, incorporating updates to bring the Jones family into the present day. The cartoon-style illustrations and hilarious dialogue bring Junie B.'s character back to life.

PERSICO, Zoe. *How to Talk to Your Succulent.* Tundra. ISBN 9781774883129.

Gr 4 Up—After the death of her mother, Adara tries to find her new normal, but her father's overprotectiveness feels suffocating. Adara discovers her gift of speaking with plants, and she delights in discovering her mother's plant family. With enchanting artwork and profound storytelling, this debut offers a window into the grieving process and will move readers to tears—in the best way.

ROBIN, Taylor. *Hunger's Bite.* Union Square & Co. ISBN 9781454950240.

Gr 7 Up—Neeta and Emery grew up on the *SS Lark* and are ready for a more exciting voyage. But when the ship's new owner, Mr. Honeycutt, is not what he seems, they must uncover the truth before Honeycutt's greed swallows them, and everyone on board, whole. From *Coraline*-level creepiness to blood-chilling horror, the story's mesmerizing progression and commentary on work culture will enthrall.

TAMAKI, Mariko. *This Place Kills Me.* illus. by Nicole Goux. Abrams/Fanfare. ISBN 9781419768460.

Gr 10 Up—Transfer student Abby is a shy, unpopular, and curious girl. These qualities combine to make her the right person to solve the mystery of why one of the most popular girls in school was found dead after starring in the school play. An intriguing whodunit for readers who enjoy stories about school, friendship, popularity, and hidden secrets.

TELGEMEIER, Raina & Scott McCloud. *The Cartoonists Club.* illus. by Raina Telgemeier, Scott McCloud, & Ray Baehr. Scholastic/Graphix. ISBN 9781338777222.

Gr 5 Up—Encouraged by their middle school librarian, four students form a club dedicated to creating comics. A brilliant blend of fiction and nonfiction, the story features character subplots and a common team goal and acts as a primer on comics and the comics industry for teens and young teens.



TERCERO, Rey. *Dan in Green Gables: A Modern Reimagining of Anne of Green Gables.* illus. by Claudia Aguirre. Penguin Workshop. ISBN 9780593385579.

Gr 8 Up—This uplifting graphic novel reimagines L.M. Montgomery’s classic orphan as a queer teen at odds with his estranged grandparents in 1995 Tennessee. Beautifully told, with themes of self-acceptance, friendship, and family, Dan’s story will be embraced by Anne devotees as well as readers unacquainted with the source material.

UKAZU, Ngozi. *Flip.* First Second. ISBN 9781250179517.

Gr 9 Up—Chi-Chi, one of the few people of color at her boarding school, keeps crushing on rich white boys. When her current crush, Flip, accidentally plays her promposal video in front of the whole class, that should’ve been the worst part of the day. But when they switch bodies, things get even more chaotic. This thoughtful spin on the *Freaky Friday* plot is a sweet and funny reflection on perspective, perfect for fans of awkward romances.

VAN LIESHOUT, Maria. *Song of a Blackbird.* First Second. ISBN 9781250869814.

Gr 10 Up—An omniscient blackbird weaves together the story of one young woman’s bravery in the Dutch Resistance in 1943 and another’s search for clues to her family history in 2011. Brought to life through eye-catching il-

lustrations and historical photographs, this gripping tale of risk, resilience, and hope invites readers to consider what impact they might make in their everyday lives.

WALZ, Jason. *The Flip Side.* Penguin/Rocky Pond. ISBN 9780593617991.

Gr 8 Up—After his best friend dies from cancer, Theo’s grief fractures reality itself, manifesting into a world turned upside down where he is hunted by the monstrous embodiment of his depression. Rendered in cinematic panels, this brooding supernatural adventure doubles as a highly relatable exploration of loss and how to survive it.

WILLIAMS-GARCIA, Rita. *One Crazy Summer: The Graphic Novel.* illus. by Sharee Miller. HarperCollins/Quill Tree. ISBN 9780062935595.

Gr 3-7—Bringing Williams-Garcia’s award-winning novel to a new generation, this graphic adaptation follows three sisters in 1968 as they travel from New York to California to visit their estranged mother, who sends them to a day camp run by the Black Panthers. Over the course of the summer, they are shaped by complex, funny, and sometimes difficult lessons about family and racial identity. Rendered in a youthful art style, this graphic adaptation captures a pivotal cultural moment in Black history, while remaining humorous and deeply moving.



Manga

Committee: Jasmine Amiri, Rachel Forbes, Joe Pascullo, Lisa Rowland

DORONODA, Inuhiko. *Spacewalking with You, Vol. 1.* Kodansha. ISBN 9798888774380.

Gr 7 Up—Kobayashi has trouble making friends, accomplishing school tasks, and believing in himself, but when new student Uno enters his class, the two boys gravitate towards each other in ways they’d never have expected. A fantastic look at neurodivergence, handled with care and accuracy, in the manga medium.

HIMEKAWA, Akira. *Kamudo, Vol. 1.* Viz. ISBN 9781974757800.

Gr 6 Up—As the pulse of the life-giving dragon dwindles, the demi-creatures of Hinoaruchi tremble. Ushering in this new



era is Kamuna, the first human in existence. The lore, individualized dragon designs, and plot of prophecy will enthrall fans of high fantasy. Yet it is Kamuna’s relatable quest for belonging that etches inward.

HYEON, A & Yu Han-ryeo. *My Life as an Internet Novel, Vol. 1.* Random House Graphic/Ink Pop. ISBN 9780593901281.

Gr 7 Up—Dani, 14, wakes to find herself in an internet

novel—but as the beautiful main character’s sidekick, destined to be used as a plot device and forgotten. As she navigates this world, readers are treated to a metafiction with attractive character designs and highly dramatic moments. With satirical humor at every step, this self-aware tale peels back the tropes to reveal a tender ode to friendship.

HYUUGA, Natsu. *The Failure at God School, Vol. 1.* illus. by Modomu Akagawara. Yen Pr. ISBN 9798855404593.

Gr 6 Up—Ordinary Nagi rescues a lost boy and suddenly finds herself with an invitation to god school. Discovering powers is a common trope, but Nagi’s journey is unique as her abilities stubbornly remain hidden, giving the narrative time to develop intriguing characters and rounded storylines.

IWAMUNE, Haruo. *The Color of the End: Mission in the Apocalypse, Vol. 1.* Yen Pr. ISBN 9781975397227.

Gr 7 Up—In a world ravaged by an unearthly pandemic, Saya and her creature companion drift through ruins, searching for life. When a research institute discovers a rare ability stirring inside Saya, her quiet survival becomes something far greater. Filled with intrigue and intricate art, this beautiful and haunting sci-fi is a slow-burn meditation on humanity.

KAMBA, Yuki. *Sheeta’s Little Big World, Vol. 1.* Kodansha. ISBN 9798888775479.

Gr 5 Up—When Sheetata and his friend Nala venture beyond their village of log-dwelling littlefolk, they discover a vast world brimming with danger and mystery. Kamba’s detailed artwork brings this miniature realm to life with a *Borrowers*-like charm as obstacles are overcome through ingenuity and cooperation.

KAWAMATA, Chiaki. *Dragon Quest: The Mark of Erdrick, Vol. 1.* illus. by Kamui Fujiwara. Square Enix Manga. ISBN 9781646094035.

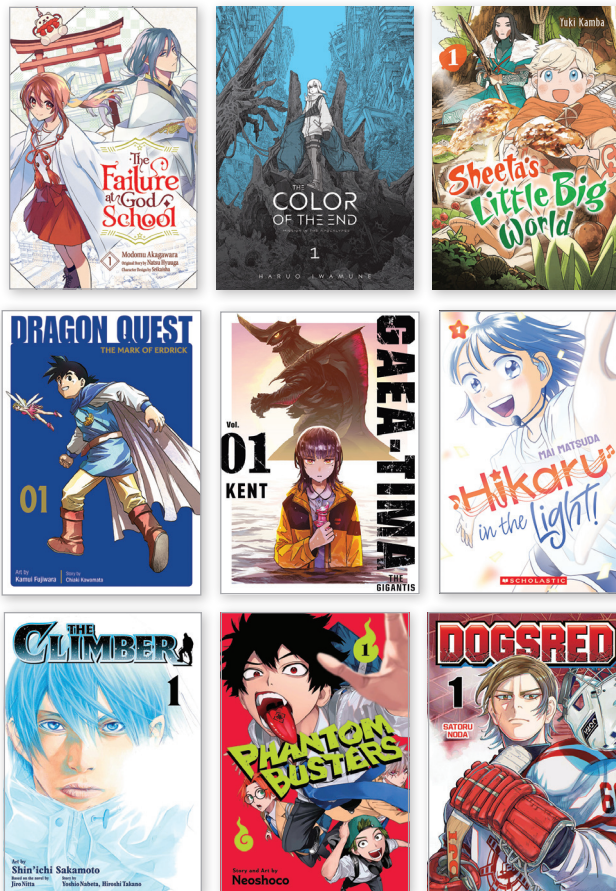
Gr 6 Up—A century after the legendary hero Erdrick defeated the forces of evil, the world’s hard-won peace is once again under threat. Now his descendant, Prince Arus, sets forth with his companions to challenge the darkness reborn. With kinetic action and a classic manga art style, this epic adventure promises to keep readers engaged and will resonate with fans of *Dragon Ball*.

KENT. *GAEA-TIMA the Gigantis, Vol. 1.* Kodansha. ISBN 9798888774366.

Gr 9 Up—Ten years after the giant monster GAEA-TIMA drowned her town and expelled a mysterious sphere, Miyako watches in terror as another kaiju strikes. Then, impossibly, GAEA-TIMA returns; but this time, it seems to be fighting on behalf of the town. With a compelling blend of unique kaiju designs, vicious action, and gorgeous perspective shots, the artwork captivates, while a lighthearted tone paired with deep human themes make this an instant classic.

MATSUDA, Mai. *Hikaru in the Light! Vol. 1.* Scholastic/Graphix. ISBN 9781546140993.

Gr 4 Up—Timid Hikaru has a great singing voice but only sings into a mop at her after-school job. When her



friend Ran, who already found fame as a member of a girl group, invites her to join a new singing competition, Hikaru steps toward the spotlight. A memorable and instantly endearing protagonist, Hikaru carries this funny and emotional manga as she conquers her nerves, showing bravery in daring to try. A perfect tale for middle graders who love stories about music, friendship, and stepping out of one’s shell.

NABETA, Yoshio, Hiroshi Takano & Jiro Nitta. *The Climber, Vol. 1.* illus. by Shin’ichi Sakamoto. Viz. ISBN 9781974751525.

Gr 10 Up—Buntaro is a withdrawn loner in his new school, attracting both curiosity and concern from his classmates, especially from the loud, obnoxious Miyamoto. When Miyamoto inadvertently introduces Buntaro to solo climbing, the sport becomes a reckoning that reshapes their lives. With dynamic art and relentless energy, this book is unputdownable.

NEOSHOCO. *Phantom Busters, Vol. 1.* Viz. ISBN 9781974757831. **Gr 7 Up**—This high-spirited, comedic story follows four boys who form an exorcist club. Each teen brings something unique to the table, from a curious nonbeliever to an exorcist who can consume spirits but cannot see them on his own. The quick pace, atmospheric artwork, and concerning final twist will draw readers to this quirky group.

NODA, Satoru. *Dogsred, Vol. 1.* Viz. ISBN 9781974748921.

Gr 9 Up—When champion teen figure skater Rou loses



both his mother and his reputation, he relocates from Yokohama to Hokkaido to live with his grandfather. There, he discovers an alternative to skating—ice hockey. And while he has no idea how to play, his extraordinary skating skills could be his redemption on the ice. High-impact, kinetic artwork propels this dramatic sports journey of pride, rivalry, and second chances.



POM. *Senpai Is an Otokonoko: My Crossdressing Classmate, Vol. 1.* Kodansha. ISBN 9798888773611.

Gr 9 Up—Just one classmate's confession of love gives Makoto, a cross-dressing boy, the nudge he needs to grow. While genuinely navigating the topic of gender identity and school life, Pom's full-color illustrations bubble with youthful moments, both silly and serious. Familiar

friendships comfort, bestowing hope that Makoto will find acceptance.

SETO, Kazuyoshi. *Minecraft: The Manga, Vol. 1.* Viz. ISBN 9781974747146.

Gr 3–6—Zombies attack Nico in the mine, awakening his family's mod power. With his abilities unleashed, it's finally time for Nico to start his own adventure, just like his father. Minecraft is always in demand, but this series can also be an introduction to the franchise, perfect for younger readers discovering manga.

SHINDO, Masaaki. *RuriDragon, Vol. 1.* Viz. ISBN 9781974738311.

Gr 8 Up—When Ruri wakes up with dragon horns, she must contend with the upheaval of her new half-dragon identity while wrestling the trials of being a regular high schooler. The horns spark little change beyond forcing awkward Ruri out of her shell with newfound attention and popularity from curious classmates. More slice-of-life than fantasy, Shindo's book sparkles with contemporary art and dry humor as each panel turns Ruri's (mostly) ordinary life into an irresistible read.



SOUP, Tomato. *A Witch's Life in Mongol, Vol. 1.* Yen Pr. ISBN 9798855414219.

Gr 7 Up—Ringing with wisdom, this volume imparts

how knowledge can change one's life. Soup's disarming blend of Tezuka and Satrapi tracks Sitara's journey from slave to witch, not shying away from tough realities. Drawing inspiration from 13th-century cultures and figures, this is a soundly researched and respectful gateway into Persian and Mongol history, featuring identities seldom seen in manga.

TAKASE, Umi. *I Wanna Be Your Girl, Vol. 1.* Random House Graphic/Ink Pop. ISBN 9780593902929.

Gr 7 Up—Hime has loved her best friend since childhood and was the first to know Akira identified as a girl. When Akira transitions publicly, Hime takes it upon herself to become Akira's protector, even dressing like a boy to support her friend. But Hime must untangle her complicated feelings and motivations to truly understand what it means to be an ally and friend. Big questions and deep conversations explore topics of gender identity, expression, and friendship in a safe space through this tender manga.

TAMURA, Ryuhei. *Cosmos, Vol. 1.* Viz. ISBN 9781974754649.

Gr 8 Up—A cosmically delicious dark horse! When aliens arrive on earth, there is one thing they need—insurance. It's up to Kaede, the Cosmos Insurance Agency's newest hire, to weed out fact from fiction with his unique ability to smell lies. Weirdness, thrills, and meditations on the meaning of life coexist in this sci-fi-set piece.

UMAR, Huzayfa. *Orisha, Vol. 1: With Great Power.* Quarto/Rockport. ISBN 9780760390320.

Gr 7 Up—Dynamic artwork powers Aboki's tale as he discovers an Orisha seed that merges with him, granting abilities and making him a target of both creatures and other Orisha. Nigerian author Umar crafts a robust, action-packed world based on West African mythology for Aboki to train and survive in, and shounen readers will devour it.

XIU, Mo Xiang Tong. *Heaven Official's Blessing (The Comic), Vol. 1: Tian Guan Ci Fu.* illus. by STARember. Random/Inklore. ISBN 9780593984369.

Gr 10 Up—Devotion drives the swoonworthy love story of this bestselling danmei series. For its abridged adaptation, STARember adorns the affable Xie Lian's third ascension to godhood with a gown of gorgeous paintings. The Crown Prince's first ghostly interference investigation is just a taste of the slow-burn romance, tragedy, and mysterious heavenly politics to come.