NON-FICTION
It’s All About The Facts

Jan Thornhill on the Pleasures of Researching Non-Fiction For Kids

Reviews of over 35 books by Jennifer Lanthier, Andrew Larsen, Kit Pearson, Kenneth Oppel and more
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Opinion: Sloths, Moths and Vulture Pee
Jan Thornhill discusses the pleasures of researching non-fiction books for kids.

News Roundup
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Keep Your Eye On... Kira Vermond

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Joel A. Sutherland profiles the witty Helaine Becker who has written over 70 books for children.

Focus: It’s All About the Facts
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The Seven Grandsons from the bestselling Seven (the series) and The Seven Sequels return in The Seven Prequels, along with their daredevil grandfather, David McLean.

7 Grandsons
7 Journeys
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As I write this, we are in the midst of a heat wave that has me seeking refuge in the air-conditioned house. So, what better way to spend a hot summer day than to curl up with some great Canadian children’s literature and a long, cool drink? While I enjoy great fiction like everyone else, after years of writing “The Classroom Bookshelf” column, I have come to appreciate the amazing non-fiction titles that Canadian authors, illustrators and publishers create each year. Having read my fair share of non-fiction books, I’ve been fascinated by the range of topics covered and thrilled to see the excellent quality that is being produced. In this issue, we hear from some individuals who have contributed to this wonderful body of work.

Jan Thornhill shares her story with us about her years of work in the field as both a writer and an illustrator. She regales us with tales of some interesting research she has undertaken and explains why she had to stop illustrating for a period of time. Joel A. Sutherland profiles the witty and prolific Helaine Becker, who has written over 70 books for children and has some savvy advice for those who are trying to break into the business. And, we talk to four individuals who give us insight into their varied experiences while writing, illustrating, editing and designing non-fiction books for kids.

Also in this issue, CCBC Library Coordinator, Meghan Howe, has created a list of some high-quality non-fiction titles in our “Bookmark!” column with books for students from the primary grades to high school; in “The Classroom Bookshelf,” Tracey Schindler reviews books about children who have had to fight for the right to an education, a timely topic for the back to school season; and we introduce you to four fabulous new non-fiction titles in “Book Bits.” We also have a wonderful selection of reviews of new Canadian books for you to enjoy this fall.

Venture into a new book today!

Sandra O’Brien

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I love my job. I can sit around all day reading about octopuses (which is why I know it’s octopuses and not octopi)... and call it work. I love researching. It’s an addiction of sorts, constantly searching for those ooh la la! moments when I discover something astonishing. Writing non-fiction for kids is just a fun way to get paid for reading about what interests me — the natural world.

I’ve been producing children’s non-fiction since I wrote and illustrated The Wildlife ABC and The Wildlife 123 in the late 80s. Researching a non-fiction book back then was a tad different than it is now. If I needed specific information — say, confirmation that elephant babies hold their mothers’ tails in the wild the way they do in circuses — I had to find the information somewhere other than on the Internet. First I’d go through whatever books I had at home, as well as my “Elephant” picture file. (My granddad was an artist, and when he died, I was given his “Bird” file, a folder bulging with 100 or so images that he had gleaned from magazines for over 40 years. This one old file folder inspired me to start my own picture collection, which I kept up until it filled a four-drawer filing cabinet and the Internet took over.)

If I couldn’t find the answer at home, I’d have to bike to the library where I’d Google the old-fashioned way: by flipping through the card index looking for books about elephants. Once I had a pile in front of me, I’d thumb through one index after another looking for “tail” or “baby” or “behaviour” in hopes of finding a fluke entry that would make the illustration for “11 Elephants” in The Wildlife 123 fact based, since all non-fiction needs to be accurate. Accuracy is the one absolute necessity in the field; no matter what age group you’re writing for, you can’t fudge or skimp or rely on your memory.

Of course, I found no such wild elephant information in the library. So, what did I do? I bailed up my courage, called the Toronto Zoo and asked to speak to the elephant keeper... who told me that, yes, indeed, he’d seen a baby elephant holding onto its mother’s tail in the wild. Yay! And then he told me a whole bunch of other stuff about elephants. This was a useful lesson: it taught me that people love to talk about their work.

Because research back then was such a different animal than it is now, it behooved authors to choose topics they either already understood, or ones that wouldn’t take years to research. For me, this became even more important after my husband and I left the city and its excellent library system.

A Tree in a Forest was what came out of the two weeks I spent in a sugar bush making maple syrup the old-fashioned way. Waiting for the sap to boil down over an open fire gave me lots of time to study the surrounding maple forest. Many of the trees were well over 100 years old and, to my uneducated eye, looked to be in rough shape. What I slowly realized, though, as I stared at these trees, was that they weren’t unhealthy, they simply had multiple scars — scars that tell part of a longer story. The concept for the book — the biography of a maple tree — was born.

For A Tree in a Forest, the forest itself became my library. I noted which wildflowers were blooming at the same time after the sap stopped flowing. I did life drawings of freshly germinated seedlings and yearlings. I sawed through the stems and trunks of dead maples to count the rings to find out how big a five-, 10- or 25-year-old tree would be. I followed tracks in the winter. I collected insects in the summer. I watched birds all year long. And I read. Still, there are mistakes in the book, mistakes (i.e., white chickens visible in an 1809 barnyard) that I could easily avoid today with a quick Internet search.
And so I continued, from one book to the next. Eventually, the Internet began being useful, then indispensable, for both research and for visual reference. But then things started going wrong.

As some people know, the pain caused by an undiagnosed tumour growing in my forearm eventually made it impossible for me to illustrate anymore. In 2004, my publisher came up with a solution: I should try something for older kids illustrated with photographs instead of art. If I could take at least some of the photos myself, I’d save money.

Looking around for possibilities, my eyes landed on my “museum-in-a-bag” — the collection of skulls, desiccated insects, dinosaur bones and mummified bats and hummingbirds that I haul around to schools. Kids love this part of my presentation. I looked closely at the bag’s contents. Almost everything it contained was either a dead animal or some part of a dead animal. It was a eureka moment — I’d write a book about dead things!

So I sat in front of the computer and immersed myself in all things death, which, more than once, caused consternation for dinner guests when I couldn’t help but share how vultures pee down their own legs to kill clinging bacteria. The result of all this entertaining research was I Found a Dead Bird: The Kids’ Guide to the Cycle of Life and Death.

I wrote two more books in the series, This Is My Planet: The Kids’ Guide to Global Warming and Who Wants Pizza: The Kids’ Guide to the History, Science and Culture of Food. The cancer in my arm was finally diagnosed and I underwent treatment, including successful limb-salvaging surgery. This left me with astonishing information that moths and other insects live in sloth fur. These moths are carried to the ground once a week when a sloth descends from the canopy to defecate. En masse, the hitchhikers flutter out from between hairs and lay their eggs on the fresh droppings, a smorgasbord for their young. And this: recent research has found that — along with the camouflaging algae that colonizes specialized grooves in sloth hair — sloths carry a previously unknown ecosystem of fungi, a large variety of species that are found nowhere else, some of which belong to whole new genera! How cool is that?

So we have to be willing to let a lot of things go. Though I understand there can be mild confusion for the youngest kids when information is presented this way, I think it’s more important for this audience to be able to engage with a book, with help from a loveable character who has lost his way, rather than to simply be bombarded by facts. I figure they’ll pick up at least some of the information and, in a couple of years, they’ll realize that birds don’t actually talk to snakes or hitch ride on other species.

I had an idea for a straightforward information picture book about a rainforest tree and the other lives it sustains, from top to bottom. I spent about a month researching the various animals I might feature in such a book. Then I started reading about sloths. The non-fiction, top-to-bottom rainforest-tree book instantly turned into Kyle Goes Alone, a simple fictional story of a young sloth who has to “go,” following him as he slowly makes his way to the ground for the first time. Again, I used talking animals in combination with facts, but this time in a more acceptable pure fiction form.

This year, I’m back to two non-fiction formats I’ve worked with before: a concept book for the very young — I Am Josephine (and I Am a Living Thing), and a pure non-fiction picture book for older kids — The Tragic Tale of the Great Auk.

I Am Josephine is extremely simple. Here’s its blurb: “Meet Josephine: a spirited and curious girl, a big sister, and a human being. She’s also a mammal, an animal, and a living thing — all identities she explores with readers in this simple informational picture book.” That’s it. The only research required was boning up on characteristics of humans, mammals, animals and living things for the notes at the back.

On the other hand, The Tragic Tale of the Great Auk, which is the first book I’ve illustrated in almost 15 years — all of it done on computer — required the usual excessive amount of research.

One of the tricks of writing non-fiction, especially for kids, is to distill your weeks of reading articles, books and scientific papers down to as few words as possible. Though it’s accepted that non-fiction picture books often need to be a bit wordier than a regular picture book, there still isn’t a lot of room for words. So we have to be willing to let a lot of things go.

While researching the bathroom habits of sloths, I came across the astonishing information that moths and other insects live in sloth fur. These moths are carried to the ground once a week when a sloth descends from the canopy to defecate. En masse, the hitchhikers flutter out from between hairs and lay their eggs on the fresh droppings, a smorgasbord for their young. And this: recent research has found that — along with the camouflaging algae that colonizes specialized grooves in sloth hair — sloths carry a previously unknown ecosystem of fungi, a large variety of species that are found nowhere else, some of which belong to whole new genera! How cool is that?

As far as I’m concerned, it’s a great tragedy that I could fit neither of these little snippets of wonder into the notes in the back pages of Kyle, but, sadly, there wasn’t enough room. There never is. So I’m left carrying these secret gifts I gain from writing children’s non-fiction in my head — until I have a way of letting one or two of them loose… as I’ve just done here.

Jan Thornhill is an author, illustrator and designer who brings her fascination with the natural world to her books for children. She spends her time in the woods collecting and cataloguing wild mushrooms and slime molds.
News Roundup

AWARDS, BOOK LAUNCHES, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND THE LATEST NEWS

William Bell (1945-2016)
Canada’s KidLit community experienced a great loss on July 30, 2016 with the death of YA author William Bell, aged 70. Winner of the 1991 Ruth Schwartz Award for Forbidden City, a Mr. Christie Book Award for Zack in 1999, the Belgium Award for Excellence, a CLA Young Adult Book Award in 2002 for Stones and then again in 2007 for The Blue Helmet, and, most recently, the 2015 John Spray Mystery Award for Julian. His many titles have been incorporated into Canadian high school curriculums, and translated into Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Spanish and Swedish.

Known for his ability to write historical fiction in an informative and relatable way, Bell’s works covered such challenging topics as the Tiananmen Square massacre in China, clear-cut logging in British Columbia, post-traumatic stress disorder in peacekeepers and Canada’s oft-overlooked history of racism against African Canadians. The search for identity is a prominent theme that Bell explored through distinctively Canadian characters and book settings. His books have enlightened many young minds and remain a powerful legacy for readers.

He leaves behind wife and fellow Chinese-Canadian author Ting-xing Ye, as well as his three children and step-daughter.

TD Canadian Children’s Book Week 2017 | The Tour Roster
Can you believe that almost four decades ago, 12 Canadian children’s book authors set off on the first-ever Children’s Book Week tour?

In 2017, the CCBC is celebrating TD Canadian Children’s Book Week’s (as it is now called) 40th anniversary, and 30 authors, illustrators and storytellers will visit schools, libraries and bookstores in communities across Canada to share a love of reading, stories and books. The national tour runs from May 6 to 13, 2017.

In honour of Canada’s sesquicentennial next year, the CCBC will be creating a booklist and encouraging young readers to discover Canada by reading books that are set in all of the different provinces and territories. Veteran artist Ian Wallace, who took part in the first Book Week tour, will be creating the special anniversary poster image.

Josée Bisaillon, illustrator
St-Hubert, QC

Mike Boldt, author / illustrator
Stony Plain, AB

Erin Bow, author
Kitchener, ON

Jason Chabot, author
Vancouver, BC

Geneviève Côté, author / illustrator
Montreal, QC

Charis Cotter, author
Western Bay, NL

Alan Cumyn, author
Ottawa, ON

Natasha Deen, author
Edmonton, AB

Marianne Dubuc, author / illustrator
Montreal, QC

Melanie Florence, author
Toronto, ON

Joan Marie Galat, author
Spruce Grove, AB

Beth Goobie, author
Saskatoon, SK

Linda Granfield, author
Toronto, ON

Joyce Grant, author
Toronto, ON

Karen Gummo, storyteller
Calgary, AB

Kate Inglis, author
Western Shore, NS

Kathleen Kompass, storyteller
Ottawa, ON

Diane Carmel Leger, author
Dieppe, NB

John Martz, author / illustrator
Toronto, ON

Stacey Matson, author
Vancouver, BC

Mireille Messier, author
Toronto, ON

Mahtab Narsimhan, author
Toronto, ON

Norman Perrin, storyteller
Toronto, ON

Gabrielle Prendergast, author
Vancouver, BC

Emil Sher, author
Toronto, ON

Kathryn Shoemaker, author / illustrator
Vancouver, BC

Judith Silverthorne, author
Regina, SK

Caroll Simpson, author / illustrator
Granisle, BC

Ted Staunton, author
Port Hope, ON

Kari-Lynn Winters, author
St. Catharine’s, ON

TD Canadian Children’s Book Week 2017 | Apply for a Reading
Celebrate TD Canadian Children’s Book Week by hosting an author, illustrator or storyteller. Information about who is touring in your area and how to apply can be found on the Book Week website. The deadline for applying is December 1, 2016. For further information, visit www.bookweek.ca.

New award created in memory of Joan Betty Stuchner
The Joan Betty Stuchner — Oy Vey! — Funniest Children’s Book Award was created in memory of this beloved children’s author and teacher. The award will honour Joan’s life-affirming humour and encourage other children’s writers to laugh it up on the page the way she did. The $1000
continued on page 8
Invite a Canadian children’s author, illustrator or storyteller into your classroom during TD Canadian Children’s Book Week!

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award will be presented biannually to a Canadian author or illustrator for a piece of work in juvenile fiction. The submission deadline is January 1, 2017. To make a donation and for more information, visit www.joanbettystuchneraward.org.

20 more books to receive Reading Lights plaques in Vancouver
In July, 20 more authors and their books were announced by the Reading Lights initiative to receive plaques in the Vancouver area. Please see the CCBC website for the complete list: http://bookcentre.ca/reading-lights/.

29th Helen E. Stubbs Memorial Lecture: David Day
On Thursday, November 3, 2016 celebrated author and critic, David Day presents “Let Us Compare Mythologies”, a lecture exploring fantasy literature and imaginary worlds, with a particular focus on J.R.R. Tolkien. The lecture will take place at the Lillian H. Smith Branch of the Toronto Public Library from 8:00 to 9:00pm.

Shar Levine named to Order of Canada
Congratulations to science writer and CCBC Board Member Shar Levine, who was named to the Order of Canada in June of this year. Shar was named for her contributions to making science easier for children to understand through her hands-on workshops and for her work to involve parents, teachers and librarians in science education. A surprise party, hosted by Jo-Anne Naslund (past president of the CCBC), was held to honour Shar at the University of British Columbia, and congratulations were received from The Writers Union of Canada and the Children’s Writers and Illustrators Society of British Columbia.

Tell us about your newest book. Oh, it’s a fun one! It’s about lies and deception, but looking at the topic in an honest — and sometimes hilarious — way. Humans lie. It’s just a part of who we are. So I wanted to figure out why we treat lying, which is as much a part of our lives as eating, sleeping and playing, as an ethical issue with plenty of grey areas.

Any kid who has ever been asked to say, “I love it!” when they receive an awful gift can relate.

Tell us about the process of writing. I’ve been a journalist for about 20 years, and my process is pretty entrenched no matter what I’m writing. Step 1: Research. Step 2: Interview the experts. Step 3: Transcribe the recordings. Step 4: Create an outline for each article, chapter or two-page spread based on what I’ve learned. Step 5: Get writing.

And there’s one last step. It involves a glass of wine and a bowl of Smartfood. At the end of the day, I feel like a sack of marbles.

How did you first get published? For my first three books, publishers asked me to write them. I know it’s usually a lot harder than that to break in — but hear me out.

I’m definitely not an overnight success story, despite writing five books in six years. I put in a lot of all-nighters over decades, built up some momentum, got better at my craft and made connections. Hard work pays off.

What do you like about writing books for young people? When a kid reader is shaking because she’s excited to meet you, that’s so super cool and humbling. But when an adult reader is shaking, that’s just creepy.

Tell us about writers who inspire you. There are so many fabulous Canadian writers who inject their writing with a whole lot of kid-level funny. But as for those who motivate me every day, I don’t have to look much further than a family reunion.

My mom was a writer, my uncle has written everything from published memoirs to Westerns and my cousin Katie Kennedy’s first book, Learning to Swear in America, is coming out this summer and getting fantastic reviews. We cheer each other on (and up) over Facebook.

Tell us about your newest book. Oh, it’s a fun one! It’s about lies and deception, but looking at the topic in an honest — and sometimes hilarious — way. Humans lie. It’s just a part of who we are. So I wanted to figure out why we treat lying, which is as much a part of our lives as eating, sleeping and playing, as an ethical issue with plenty of grey areas.

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My mom was a writer, my uncle has written everything from published memoirs to Westerns and my cousin Katie Kennedy’s first book, Learning to Swear in America, is coming out this summer and getting fantastic reviews. We cheer each other on (and up) over Facebook.
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Writing, fiction vs. non-fiction and selling sizzle (not steak)

By Joel A. Sutherland

The first two jobs Becker was fired from were, ironically, in publishing, but Becker was able to learn from these experiences. “Working in publishing, even if I failed at it, was still a great education for a wannabe writer.” She wrote advertising copy for Dover Books in New York City, where the copy chief taught her to “sell the sizzle, not the steak.” It’s advice she still applies to her writing. “Make it clear, make it punchy. Make it szzzzzzzzz.”

Then, after Becker moved to Canada, she was a copywriter at McClelland & Stewart. While learning the ins and outs of the business, she also began to understand how publishers make money (or don’t, as the case might be). “This has been critical to helping me understand what kind of books I should concentrate on, and how to convince publishers I’m a good partner to work with (in short: don’t be a jerk).”

When Stoddart Kids published Becker’s first book, a collection of poems with the catchy title, Mama Likes to Mambo, in 2000, she was excited by what the future might hold. But fate took a devastating turn when Stoddart went under and her book was all but forgotten. “They’re still sitting in a warehouse up north,” she says. It took four more years of hard work and perseverance before Maple Tree Press published Boredom Blasters, Becker’s first book to win the Silver Birch Award. It was a turning point in her writing career.

“Not that it’s been an easy road since then. Every single book I’ve written has been a tough, tough go to get published. This business is not for weenies — you need a tough skin and piles of persistence.”

You’ve written a lot of non-fiction books. Where do you get your ideas for those books?

Ideas are everywhere. For me, it’s just a question of being open to the world, being fascinated by it and asking, What if? I get my best ideas in the bathroom, reading magazines like The Economist. Truly. They have a great science section.

I also get new ideas from each book I write. A fact I came across when writing Top Secret: Uncover Your Inner Spy led to the idea for my YA novel. And another one I found while researching Everything: Space led to a picture book biography of an amazing lady.

Do you prefer writing non-fiction?

I find non-fiction easier to write than fiction. I love doing research and learning things; the rest, for me, is merely adding the sizzle. But that doesn’t mean I prefer it to writing fiction. Coming up with a good story, good characters, great
pacing, etc., is like the world’s greatest puzzle. Challenging, but satisfying. When I’m working on a novel, I am never bored. Terrified, yes. But not bored.

Do you feel non-fiction writers face any particular challenges or biases within the publishing industry?
It always strikes me that non-fiction is invisible within the publishing industry. When I tell people I write children’s books, they always assume I write “stories.” When I explain I write mostly non-fiction, they then assume I write “textbooks.” The truth is, though, that a significant number of non-fiction books are published every year, and they are the backbone of our industry. Non-fiction books may not become Globe & Mail bestsellers, but they keep ticking along, year after year, and provide for a very steady income for those of us who write them. As a Scholastic US editor said at a conference I attended, “We buy dinosaur books every single year.” That tells me there will always be a market for non-fiction.

I had the pleasure of watching your presentation when I hosted you at the Ajax Public Library a few years ago. It was abundantly clear how much you enjoy speaking to children.

When I started writing, I didn’t know that public speaking would be such a big part of this gig. Turns out I’m a huge ham, and have a very high tolerance for making a fool of myself (‘no shame, no pride’ is my motto). I feel very fortunate to get to talk to kids about the things I love — books and science and story — and maybe even inspire them. It’s truly a gift to get the chance to see how your work makes a difference. Like the time a boy came up to me, pointed to The Haunted House that Jack Built and said, “My sister learned to read with that book.” I still get goosebumps when I think about that.

Where have you visited when you’ve toured for TD Canadian Children’s Book Week?
I’ve been lucky enough to tour three times — first to the Yukon, then Nunavut and Manitoba. All three times were incredible. I love how wherever you go in the country, you meet great kids and awesome teachers and librarians. For me, personally, each trip introduced me to something amazing. In Nunavut, I saw the northern lights for the first time. In Manitoba, I got to operate a backhoe (this is a big deal for a city gal!). And in the Yukon, I went dog sledding.

How have you seen the publishing industry change over the years?
The Canadian children’s book scene has grown by leaps and bounds, and is now doing more amazing stuff than ever. It was so exciting to learn that Groundwood was named Best North American Publisher at Bologna this year. In my early days, our publishers were all pretty small and focused on publishing only in Canada. Now they are media corporations, like Corus/Kids Can Press, with international scope. It means there is much more opportunity to build a great career right here at home.

One negative change is that Canadian publishers are doing less for the Canadian market. This is, in no small part, I think, because of the destructive “fair dealing” clause in the new copyright act. Many institutions think it’s okay to photocopy any text they want, without paying for it, as long as it’s for educational use. I consider that not only immoral, but incredibly short-sighted. What publisher would produce a book for a market that won’t pay for it? So guess what kind of “educational” materials kids will be learning from in coming years? American ones. I imagine that the pendulum will swing back one day, but not before an entire generation of Canadian writers have stopped writing about Canadian topics for Canadian kids. What a loss for all of us.

What advice would you give to a new author trying to break in?
Get some basic business skills. I know, you’re doing a double take now, right? Because no one ever talks about this. But if you are starting out as a writer, you need to understand that you are starting a business as a sole proprietor, and you will be spending most of your time — or you should be, anyway — using business-related skills like sales, marketing and accounting/collections. Knowing how to sell your work is critical to success in this biz.

The other key is to get connected. Join every association you can, get out and meet people and talk to other writers. The more you learn, the more connected you are with others, the easier your path will be. And it will be sweeter, too — the friendships I have made with other writers are among my most cherished “successes” of this crazy career.

Tell us about your latest book and what you’re working on next?
This fall, Monster Science: Could Monsters Survive (and Thrive!) in the Real World? is coming out. It’s a look at the biology and other factors behind ‘popular’ monsters like werewolves, zombies, vampires, etc. It’s not a debunker; it lets kids learn the science and decide for themselves which monsters are more plausible contenders for RUN! Don’t Stress! How to Handle Life’s Little Problems is also just out. It’s a light-hearted DIY handbook for everyone, not just kids. And last but not least, out this fall is Deck the Halls, a sequel to A Porcupine in a Pine Tree and Dashing through the Snow.

What is your proudest accomplishment as an author?
I’m not done yet, am I? However, I think that little boy, saying, “My sister learned to read using your book,” might be it. How can you ever beat that? 😊

Joel A. Sutherland is the Silver Birch Award-winning author of Haunted Canada & More Terrifying True Stories and the Children’s & Youth Services Librarian at the Georgina Public Library.
Non-fiction books for kids are being produced at an astounding rate each year but rarely receive the hype that books of fiction do. In a desire to increase awareness of these books, we chat with writer Margriet Ruurs, illustrator Julie McLaughlin, editor Sarah Harvey and art designer Marie Bartholomew to give us some insight into the hard work that goes into the production of non-fiction titles.

A writer’s point of view
Margriet Ruurs

What topics do you enjoy writing about and how do you choose these topics?
I love to write about things I’m interested in, or curious about. So mostly I choose a topic that is close to my heart, like nature. My husband was a park ranger, and we always lived in parks when I wrote books like *When We Go Camping* and *Wild Babies*. Now I travel a lot (to do author visits in international schools) and I’ve been able to combine my love for travel with writing books like *Families Around the World*, *School Days Around the World* and, coming out in 2017, *Birthdays Around the World*. Meeting kids in different cultures allows me to talk to them, to find out what interests them and to ask them about their backgrounds. Usually, I pitch my idea to a publisher, but I have also been asked by publishers to write about a specific topic. I often ask children and teachers what kind of books they would like to have available. And it also helps to know which topics are needed in the curriculum, although a unique idea and strong writing are probably most important.

Tell us about the process you undertake when doing research.
Once I know a topic, I do preliminary research to make sure I know where to look, whom to ask and how to access the best, most reliable information. Sometimes that means reading lots of books from the library, doing online research or interviewing experts — whether that is a child in Kazakhstan or a biologist at a university. Especially when doing online research, you need to be very aware of who shared the information, what the source is and how knowledgeable that source is. I ask tons of questions. I record my findings and then need to write the information in my own voice, for the appropriate age level.

How do you convey the information clearly, simply and accurately in a non-fiction book while still appealing to the reader?
Cutting down the pages and pages of information that you’ve gathered during many months of research to the absolute essence is hard to do. But by staying focused on the original topic, by keeping the interest of a young reader as the focal point, the information will be written in such a way that it appeals to the reader. In the end, I am cutting words by deciding if each one contributes to the content. If it doesn’t, I probably don’t need it.

Tell us about some of the highlights/challenges you’ve experienced when writing particular books.
Writing non-fiction can lead to amazing, often unexpected, adventures. My next picture book is called *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family’s Journey*. It is an amazing book that came
An illustrator’s point of view
Julie McLaughlin

Tell us how you convey the information in a non-fiction book clearly, simply and accurately while still appealing to the readers.

I get a lot of help from my designers, art directors and editors, who often have more experience in this area and usually have suggestions on how to communicate ideas in the most straightforward manner. If I get stuck on something, I’ll refer to other illustrators/books to see how someone else has solved these problems. I really enjoy it when an element of humour is used with non-fiction to keep the concepts interesting and engaging! I think it also helps to include (or not) in an illustration, and other ways other artists have depicted it.

Do you do your own research on the topic or just rely on the text that is in the book?

Sometimes the information in the text is informational enough, but when necessary I’ll do a bit of research on a subject I’m not particularly familiar with to get a general understanding of how it works, what would make sense to include (or not) in an illustration, and other ways other artists have depicted it.

Tell us about some of the highlights/challenges you’ve encountered in the non-fiction books you’ve worked on.

Some of the topics can be challenging if I’m not familiar with them. It’s even more difficult when they’re not easily depicted in one simple (but interesting) image because it’s more of an idea or concept rather than a literal object; for example, “someone trying to navigate differing opinions,” in the context of children/youth getting involved in politics. (I ended up drawing a boy surfing on a wave of speech/thought bubbles that were different shapes and colours.) But the biggest challenge for me is with the tight publishing deadlines — there are a lot of books/illustrations I’d like to take my time on and put a lot of detail into, but press schedules don’t really allow for that. Every year, I get a little more efficient and faster with my work, though, so I’m getting better at making the illustrations look how I’d ideally like them to, while sticking to the timelines.

As I talked a bit about earlier, and particularly with non-fiction, I’ve been exposed to such a wide variety of topics and have learned so much as a by-product of illustration, it’s a wonderful (and unexpected) bonus to an already really fun and rewarding job! Because my studio is in my home and I often work long hours, illustration can be a little isolating at times, and I rarely get to meet the authors who write the books or the people who read them. However, this past year there were a few events where I was able to meet with the author of a book I spent a lot of time on (Kira Vermond, *Why We Live Where We Live*), and together we got to meet and talk to children who read the book. Seeing actual faces and hearing their feedback was a big highlight for me! It kind of brought the whole process full circle, and I hope to be able to do that more in the future.

An editor’s point of view
Sarah Harvey, Senior Editor, Orca Book Publishers

Can you explain how Orca acquires non-fiction titles and how they choose those titles?

Orca’s serious entry into non-fiction began a few years ago when photographer Ian McAllister and writer Nicholas Read were contracted to collaborate on three books about the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR). Orca president Bob Tyrrell edited those books, which have been very successful. Then publisher Andrew Wooldridge read an article in a local paper about a black bear breaking into a convenience store in northern BC. He contacted the writer, Caitlyn Vernon, who works for the Sierra Club, and asked her if she would like to write a book about the GBR. She said yes, and that book, *Nowhere Else on Earth*, which I edited, has won numerous awards. At that point, I became the de facto non-fiction editor. I had always wanted to edit non-fiction (I still edit fiction for middle grades and YA), so I was very happy when Orca decided to continue to expand their non-fiction list and let me be in charge of it.

One of our novelists, Michelle Mulder, came to me with a proposal for a book about cycling. In consultation with Andrew and Bob, we decided to publish *Pedaling It!* as the first of a series called Footprints, which would investigate all things environmental. That series now includes 10 titles, with more on the way. Authors submit proposals to me — if I like the idea, I present it to our editorial board. So far, there has been no shortage of ideas, and we are booked into 2019! Another series, called Origins, which explores worldwide cultural celebrations, is also my responsibility. With all Orca’s
non-fiction, the focus is on publishing books that reflect the personal experience and passion of the writer. This differentiates the books from the strictly educational non-fiction that is published elsewhere.

How do you convey the information in a non-fiction book clearly, simply and accurately while balancing the need to appeal to readers?
I had already worked with our first two Footprints authors (on fiction projects) so we had a great working relationship. We collectively came up with a template for the books and discussed the ratio of words to photos. As we move forward, I make sure that new Footprints and Origins authors communicate with the more experienced authors; we also discuss how much information is appropriate for the middle grade audience and how best to present it. We use a lot of visual elements, and I work very closely with the designers to get it right. As I said, these books are all passion projects for the writers—they are very motivated to get it right, and I provide as much support as I can.

Tell us about some of the highlights or challenges you've experienced when editing non-fiction books?
The biggest challenge is keeping the text simple, yet informative—there's so much that we don't have room for—and I work closely with authors deciding what to delete and what to keep. I love working on non-fiction—I learn so much, and the books are gorgeous and well received. What's not to like?

Why does Orca feel it's important to produce high-quality, non-fiction books for young readers?
There seemed to be a place in the market for the kind of books we wanted to do: socially responsible, diverse, informative, well-written and beautiful. We recently published Pride by Robin Stevenson, which is a great example of the kind of company Orca is: passionate about delivering high-quality, informative, heartfelt non-fiction to young readers (and the adults in their lives).

A designer’s point of view
Marie Bartholomew, Art Director, Kids Can Press

Can you explain how Kids Can Press acquires non-fiction titles and how they choose those titles?
The KCP editorial department is always on the lookout for new and interesting non-fiction book ideas. Some of the ideas are sent in by authors and some of the ideas for topics are generated in-house. The decision to publish various titles is made with input from every department, based on factors such as market research, school curriculums, interest level, etc.

As the designer, do you choose the illustrator or is that a decision made by a team of people?
The editor and the designer will work together to come up with a list of possible illustrators who would best suit the book based on how their individual styles will work with the content and tone of the writing. The suggestions are then circulated to gather feedback from the Sales, Marketing, International Rights, Editorial and Publishing perspectives to determine which illustration style will work best.

How do you convey the information in a non-fiction book clearly, simply and accurately while balancing the need to appeal to readers?
Illustrators who work on non-fiction titles have the wonderful talent and ability to visually describe facts and details with their own unique style and creative flair.
The editor and designer make a list of suggested illustrations, based on what will best help to inform the text. The designer will typeset and lay out each page, leaving space for art in the places where it would be good to have an illustration. In some places, specific illustrations are needed to explain the facts in the text, but in other places, the illustrator comes up with what would be the most engaging image to show.

Developing a balance between text and illustration begins early on in the process, with design layouts created to show how various text and typographic elements might work with the art. The process of finding the right balance evolves throughout the development of the book, and each spread is considered carefully to make sure everything is working well together. It's kind of like a giant jigsaw puzzle that comes into place piece by piece as the text and art become more clearly developed.

Tell us about some of the highlights or challenges you’ve experienced when designing non-fiction books.
Some of the highlights include that magical moment when we get to see the initial concept sketches and begin to see the artist's creativity in bringing the book to life visually; placing the sketches into the design document and getting that first sense of how the art and text are working together in the layout; it is always a delight when we move from sketches to the first colour art samples and get to see for the first time the palette that the artist is using.

Challenges include finding good visual references for all the little details: the author, editor, designer and illustrator all search for references and then we all check and re-check all the details to make sure we have not missed something. Sometimes it’s challenging to find a photo or good visual description of a certain object we want to illustrate. Another challenge is fitting everything in. Often there is so much of interest that we have to be careful not to try and include too much and end up with an overly busy layout.

Why does Kids Can Press feel it’s important to produce high-quality, non-fiction books for young readers?
We publish non-fiction because there are so many fascinating topics that we know young readers are very interested in learning more about. We feel it is important to help inform young readers about the world and hopefully inspire them while they are reading, learning and having fun.
We also know that teachers appreciate non-fiction books that help them in the classroom, particularly when the topic is tied to their curriculum. Many of our non-fiction books have supplementary teaching materials online.
Second Story Press is now proud to offer ESL GUIDES for many of our different and diverse children’s books, including these new titles:

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2016 TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award

The TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award honours the most distinguished book of the year. Two $30,000 grand prizes are awarded, one for a book in English and one for a book in French.

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FINALISTS

Missing Nimâmâ
written by Melanie Florence
illustrated by François Thisdale
Clockwise Press

The Nest
written by Kenneth Oppel
HarperCollins Publishers

That Squeak
written by Carolyn Beck
illustrated by François Thisdale
Fitzhenry & Whiteside

The Wolf-Birds
written and illustrated by Willow Dawson
Owlkids Books

A Year of Borrowed Men
written by Michelle Barker
illustrated by Renné Benoit
Pajama Press

FRENCH-LANGUAGE FINALISTS

L’arbragan
written and illustrated by Jacques Goldstyn
Éditions de la Pastèque

Aux toilettes
written by André Marois
illustrated by Pierre Pratt
Éditions Druide

Camille
written by Patrick Isabelle
Leméac Éditeur

L’épopée de Petit-Jules
written by Maryse Rouy
Éditions Hurtubise

Le prisonnier sans frontières
written and illustrated by Jacques Goldstyn
Bayard Canada

For more information, visit www.bookcentre.ca or www.tdreads.com
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FINALISTS OF THE

2016 Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children’s Non-Fiction

The Art of the Possible: An Everyday Guide to Politics
written by Edward Keenan
illustrated by Julie McLaughlin
Owlkids Books

A Beginner’s Guide to Immortality: From Alchemy to Avatars
written by Maria Birmingham
illustrated by Josh Holinaty
OwlKids Books

Child Soldier: When Boys and Girls Are Used in War (CitizenKid)
written by Jessica Dee Humphreys and Michel Chikwanine
illustrated by Claudia Dávila
Kids Can Press

Foodprints: The Story of What We Eat
written by Paula Ayer
Annick Press

Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book About Bodies, Feelings, and You
written by Cory Silverberg
illustrated by Fiona Smyth
Seven Stories Press

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FINALISTS OF THE

2016 Monica Hughes Award for Science Fiction and Fantasy

Clover’s Luck (Magical Animal Adoption Agency)
written by Kallie George
HarperCollins Publishers

The Scorpion Rules (Prisoners of Peace)
written by Erin Bow
Margaret K. McElderry Books

The Nest
written by Kenneth Oppel
HarperCollins Publishers

A Thousand Nights
written by E.K. Johnston
Disney-Hyperion

The Unquiet
written by Mikaela Everett
Greenwillow Books
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FINALISTS OF THE

2016 John Spray Mystery Award

The Blackthorn Key (Blackthorn Key)
written by Kevin Sands
Aladdin

The Case of the Missing Moonstone (The Wollstonecraft Detective Agency)
written by Jordan Stratford
Knopf Books for Young Readers

Delusion Road
written by Don Aker
HarperTrophy Canada

The Masked Truth
written by Kelley Armstrong
Doubleday Canada

Masterminds
written by Gordon Korman
HarperCollins Publishers

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FINALISTS OF THE

2016 Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award

In a Cloud of Dust
written by Alma Fullerton
illustrated by Brian Deines
Pajama Press

InvisiBill
written by Maureen Ferguson
illustrated by Dušan Petričić
Tundra Books

Sidewalk Flowers
storyline by JonArno Lawson
illustrated by Sydney Smith
Groundwood Books

Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox
written and illustrated by Danielle Daniel
Groundwood Books

The Wolf-Birds
written and illustrated by Willow Dawson
Owlkids Books
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FINALISTS OF THE

2016 Amy Mathers Teen Book Award

5 to 1 written by Holly Bodger Knopf Books for Young Readers

Trouble is a Friend of Mine written by Stephanie Tromly Kathy Dawson Books

The Scorpion Rules (Prisoners of Peace) written by Erin Bow Margaret K. McElderry Books

The Truth Commission written by Susan Juby Razorbill Canada

Young Man With Camera written by Emil Sher Arthur A. Levine Books

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FINALISTS OF THE

2016 Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People

Avis Dolphin written by Frieda Wishinsky illustrated by Willow Dawson Groundwood Books

The Farmerettes written by Gisela Tobien Sherman Second Story Press

Mad Miss Mimic written by Sarah Henstra Razorbill Canada

Uncertain Soldier written by Karen Bass Pajama Press

The Unquiet Past (Secrets) written by Kelley Armstrong Orca Book Publishers
“BOOKMARK!” HIGHLIGHTS BOOKS FOR A VARIETY OF GRADE LEVELS AROUND A PARTICULAR THEME. HERE IS A LIST OF ENGAGING, INFORMATIVE AND RECENTLY PUBLISHED NON-FICTION TITLES COMPILED BY CCBC LIBRARY COORDINATOR MEGHAN HOWE.

Non-Fiction Books that Educate, Inspire and Entertain

PICTURE BOOKS FOR KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 8

The Magician of Auschwitz
written by Kathy Kacer
illustrated by Gillian Newland
(Second Story Press, 2014)

This is the true story of Werner, a young Jewish boy in Auschwitz who shares his bunk with a kind, quiet man named Herr Levin. Levin seems like any other prisoner, until one night he performs magic for the guards, telling Werner that his life depends on his ability to entertain their captors.

The Red Bicycle: The Extraordinary Story of One Ordinary Bicycle (CitizenKid)
written by Jude Isabella
illustrated by Simone Shin
(Kids Can Press, 2015)

This is the story of how one ordinary bicycle — and a child’s desire to make a difference — can change lives across the world. When Leo outgrows his beloved bicycle, he donates it to an organization that sends bikes to faraway countries. In Burkina Faso, Leo’s bicycle helps a girl haul goods to market and then becomes a makeshift ambulance — proving that an ordinary bicycle can be truly extraordinary!

Sizing Up Winter (Math in Nature, Book 3)
written by Lizann Flatt
illustrated by Ashley Barron
(Owlkids Books, 2013)

In this title, poetic prose and eye-catching collages combine to introduce children to the concept of measurement. By observing the northern lights, ice floes and the habits of creatures in winter, kids learn math concepts like reading a calendar, identifying the passage of time and measuring length, distance and mass. Factual information about the animals in the book is also included.

Swan: The Life and Dance of Anna Pavlova
written by Laurel Snyder
illustrated by Julie Morstad
(Chronicle Books, 2015)

Everything changes the night young Anna’s mother takes her to the ballet. So begins the journey of a girl who will one day grow up to be the most famous prima ballerina of all time, and who will inspire Legions of dancers after her: the brave, the generous, the transcendentally gifted Anna Pavlova. This beautiful picture book biography is perfect for aspiring ballerinas of all ages.

Wild Ideas: Let Nature Inspire Your Thinking
written by Elin Kelsey
illustrated by Soyeon Kim
(Owlkids Books, 2015)

Bees calculate. Otters make tools. Orang-utans stop and think when they are puzzled. This stunning informational picture book celebrates the nature of creative problem solving by exploring how many animals show a capacity for innovation — and encourages young readers to seek inspiration from the natural world around them. Problems may be prickly, but they can spark marvellous ideas!

JUNIOR & INTERMEDIATE NON-FICTION FOR GRADES 2 TO 9

Baseballogy: Supercool Facts You Never Knew
written and illustrated by Kevin Sylvester
(Annick Press, 2015)

There is so much more to baseball than throwing, hitting, running and catching. Behind the game is a wealth of science, folklore, mathematics, psychology and fascinating, little-known facts. This entertaining, informative and highly visual book gives you baseball fans a front-row seat to colourful details, surprising insights and new discoveries in baseball knowledge.

Birchtown and the Black Loyalists
written by Wanda Lauren Taylor
(Nimbus Publishing, 2014)

In this title, young readers are introduced to the story of the Black Loyalists of Birchtown, from slavery to the American Revolution to settlement and struggle on Nova Scotian soil in Birchtown, and finally to mass exodus to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Their legacy, carried on through Black Loyalist descendants, is an enduring spirit despite a history marked by hardship and loss.
A Children’s Guide to Arctic Birds
written by Mia Pelletier
illustrated by Danny Christopher
(Inhabit Media, 2014)
With a simple layout and easy-to-follow headings for 12 birds that call the Arctic home, either for the whole year or for the summer, this beautifully illustrated book is filled with fascinating facts, including where each bird nests, what their eggs look like and their distinctive songs. Step inside and journey north — you may even spot a familiar feathered friend.

Colossal Canada: 100 Epic Facts and Feats
Written by Elizabeth MacLeod and Frieda Wishinsky
(Scholastic Canada, 2015)
Get ready to celebrate your country! From Chris Hadfield to Cirque du Soleil, peacekeeping to poutine, as well as mukluks, toques, grizzlies and chinooks, this fast-moving and eye-opening book will give young Canadians plenty to cheer about. Kids and adults alike will love learning all about their home and native land — and wowing friends and family with these fascinating facts!

5 Elephants (5 Animals)
written by Rob Laidlaw
(Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2014)
To truly understand elephants, we must get to know them as individuals. Through the illuminating stories of five famous elephants, young readers will discover intriguing facts about elephants and be introduced to some of the serious challenges wild and captive elephants face. The book encourages kids to make a difference, to become Elephant Guardians by helping to protect elephants from extinction.

Every Last Drop: Bringing Clean Water Home (Orca Footprints)
written by Michelle Mulder
(Orca Book Publishers, 2014)
In the developed world, we turn a tap for clean water; but for millions worldwide, finding clean water is a daily challenge, and kids are often responsible for carrying water to their families. This book looks at how the world’s water resources are at risk and the innovative ways nations and communities are finding to quench their thirst — from drinking fog in Chile to using biosand filters in Afghanistan. Every drop counts!

Stay Strong: A Musician’s Journey from Congo (Arrivals)
written by Natalie Hyde
(Clockwise Press, 2015)
Gentil Misigarro knew the world only as a place of loss, fear and death. For 15 years, his family moved from country to country to escape the violence that followed them from the Congo to Rwanda and Uganda. This is a timely and gripping story of a refugee who came to Canada and is using his music as a powerful force for positive change.

SENIOR NON-FICTION FOR GRADES 7 TO 12

In Your Face: The Culture of Beauty and You
written by Shari Graydon
illustrated by Karen Klassen and Katy Lemay
(Annick Press, 2014)
Rewritten and redesigned from the award-winning 2004 edition, this title has been updated to reflect the heightened pressures to be beautiful in the digital age. The appealing magazine-style format, stylish illustrations and conversational tone will draw readers into this empowering and critical exploration of the complex subject of beauty.

Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-Ending War
Written by Deborah Ellis
(Groundwood Books, 2012)
Author Deborah Ellis travels back to Kabul to meet with kids and find out what their lives have been like since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. The boys and girls in this book range in age from 10 to 17 and many still support their families by selling items like pencils and matches on the street. Although violence and oppression still exist all around them, they are weathering their lives as best they can.

Righting Canada’s Wrongs: Residential Schools (Righting Canada’s Wrongs)
written by Melanie Florence
(James Lorimer, 2015)
Over more than 100 years, the Canadian government took 150,000 First Nation, Métis and Inuit children from their families and placed them in residential schools where they were forced to abandon their cultures and languages and often subjected to psychological and physical abuse. This timely, important book tackles a neglected and painful part of Canadian history and the ongoing fight to have such official racism confronted and acknowledged.

Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery
written by Janet Willen and Marjorie Gann
(Tundra Books, 2015)
Meet 14 female abolitionists who took extraordinary risks in their struggles to end slavery from the 18th century to the present. From Alice Seeley Harris, whose photographs of mutilated Congolese slaves galvanized a nation; to Hadijatou Mani, who successfully sued the Niger government for failing to protect her from slavery — this is an inspirational, shocking and informative account of brave women who have devoted their lives to freedom for all.
Going back to school is a familiar ritual to many Canadians. Whether as a memory from childhood, or a present moment with our own children — the last days of summer leading into that first day back at school are filled with an equal measure of gloom and promise — sadness at the loss of summer’s lazy days tempered with the excitement of seeing friends again, of a new teacher and new grade, of learning new things. Most of us take school for granted. For the most part, we take getting an education for granted. But for many children around the world, including right here in Canada, education is a fight and schools are the battleground. The fight over the right to an education is historic but also contemporary. It is far away but also close to home. It affects others but it also affects us all. We are all diminished when education is denied to segments of a population because of gender or ethnicity or religion, or when schools are used not to uplift, but to beat down or exclude children. Exploring these fights for the right to be educated provides fantastic opportunities for learning about social justice, democracy, citizenship and human rights — it is, because it touches children directly, a wonderful window into citizenship education, a crucial element of elementary social studies curriculums. There are several superb new Canadian non-fiction books that examine the ways different communities across the globe have fought and continue to fight for the right to an education.

For primary students, Monica Kulling’s On Our Way to Oyster Bay: Mother Jones and Her March for Children’s Rights explains that, historically, children didn’t always have the right or even the opportunity to go to school. This inspiring and beautifully illustrated book, part of Kids Can Press’s CitizenKid series, is based on a real person and a true event and follows a young boy and girl who have joined the picket line at the cotton mill where they toil. Labour reformer Mother Jones arrives with the bold idea of taking the workers, many of them children, on a march all the way from Pennsylvania to President Theodore Roosevelt’s summer home in Oyster Bay, New York. While on the long walk, the children learn that Mother Jones wants to end all child labour. Even on a side trip to Coney Island, she tells all who will listen that children denied an education are no better off than animals trapped in a cage, that they are chained to the mill and to a cycle of poverty. Despite the President’s refusal to see the marchers in the end, Mother Jones tells the children that they have opened the eyes of many — showing them that children belong in schools, not factories and mills. Although Kulling does not go into detail about the kind of dirty, dangerous work children performed in factories, teachers could give students a glimpse into 19th-century factory labour. Most young students could not imagine the hardships faced by the young workers in the book. Barbara Greenwood’s Factory Girl might be read aloud in a third grade class. From there, students might consider what sort of work children today are expected to do. The difference between chores around the house and child labour could be discussed. Sadly, child labour is still a relevant issue. Why is it so important for children to go to school? Students might learn about Craig and Marc Kielburger and the organization they founded at a very young age: Free The Children. It is a great example of how one or two people — even young people — can make a difference as global citizens. They might also learn about Kailash Satyarthi who won the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize alongside Malala Yousafzai for his work freeing bonded labourers, and striving to rid India of child slavery or brainstorm how they, as global citizens, could help end child labour. Ideas and websites can be found at the back of the book.

While children who are forced to work are denied an education, there are other children who have been forced to attend school, not to be educated, as much as to be stripped of their identity. In Canada, thousands of First Nation, Métis and Inuit children were...
“All I want is an education, and I am afraid of no one.”
— Malala Yousafzai

On Our Way to Oyster Bay: Mother Jones and Her March for Children’s Rights
(CitizenKid)
written by Monica Kulling
illustrated by Felicita Sala
Kids Can Press, 2016
978-1-77138-325-7 (hc) $18.95
978-1-77138-752-1 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 1 to 3

Picture Book | Education | Mother Jones | American History | Children’s Rights | Labour Reform

forced into residential schooling where they were abused, belittled and stripped of their cultural identity. Residential schooling and its long-lasting implications are an essential part of Canadian history that is finally being acknowledged. Many incredible books have been published, both fiction and non-fiction, for a wide range of young readers and can be mined by teachers as classroom resources. (You can find the CCBC’s 2015 theme guide — Hear Our Stories: Celebrating First Nations, Métis and Inuit Literature — at this link: https://bookcentre.ca/files/ThemeGuide2015.pdf.)

One of the newest books for late primary and junior readers is I Am Not a Number by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer. Gillian Newland’s sombre illustrations, done with a muted palette of greys, greens and browns, beautifully capture the written words. Based on the life of Jenny Kay Dupuis’ grandmother, this is the story of eight-year-old Irene who is taken from her Nipissing First Nation home by an Indian agent and sent to a residential school far away. Her mother holds her close and implores her, “Never forget who you are!” Irene holds on to her mother’s words while she is stripped of her name and given a number, told to “scrub all the brown off” her skin, and has her beautiful long hair cut off. After a year of misery at the school, Irene, her brothers and classmates are allowed to go home for the summer. When her parents learn of the abuse the children suffered at the school, they hide them so they can’t be found when the Indian agent returns.

This book is a moving look into an injustice that continues to have ramifications for First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. Teachers and students might discuss what it would mean to be taken from their families against their will. How would it feel to be told you can’t speak your language? Talk to your siblings? Use your own name? What did students in residential schools actually learn? Many hours of each day were taken up with chores and heavy labour. Were residential schools set up to educate native youth or to assimilate them — make them more “white”? These stories of residential schooling are a significant part of Canadian history and, although the residential school system has been dismantled, its legacy lives on. First Nation and Inuit children continue to have less access to quality education, many reserves have decrepit school buildings, and many First Nations young people must leave their homes and families in order to attend high school. How could Canada do a better job of treating all children equally?

Going beyond Canada, and beyond the historical context, Laura Scandiffio has written Fight to Learn: The Struggle to Go to School, a compelling new title that provides a stark look at current global struggles for an education. This highly visual and clearly organized book, designed for junior and intermediate students, is broken into four sections: poverty, which focuses on child workers in India as well as the consequences of exclusion and poverty for the Roma; discrimination, focusing on girls in the Muslim world; and violence, which examines both gang violence in a Chicago suburb as well as Ugandan child soldiers. She ends with a section on protest movements: from Shannen Koostachin’s dream for a school in Attawapiskat, to a youth-led mass movement for affordable, quality education in Chile.

While many of the stories may seem far removed from a student sitting in a classroom in Canada, there are many ways to link what is happening in India or Uganda to our own students. Social justice is an issue kids are keenly aware of, and there are multiple entry points for discussion around educational inequality based on gender, age, ethnicity or economic status. Kids could discuss their taste for expensive phones, stylish athletic shoes or inexpensive clothes. Where are these things made and who makes them? Teachers could discuss implications of the cellphones we love so much… from the violent ramifications of mining coltan (metallic ore needed for cellphones, laptops, etc.) in the Congo, to the conditions in Chinese factories where cellphone parts are manufactured, often by child labourers. How is child labour linked to the cycle of poverty? Can we, as consumers, make different decisions about the products we buy? Students might also discuss the barriers so many girls face in getting an education. Malala Yousafzai is an obvious starting point, but there are others girls and young women fighting for the right to be educated. Do girls in Canada face any barriers to their education, visible or invisible?

From Pakistani girls banned from school by the Taliban, to India’s most impoverished untouchable girls, from Ugandan children brutally drafted into soldiering in a violent civil war, to Roma children ostracized and living in poverty, many children around the world face seemingly insurmountable barriers to learning. Yet many do overcome the odds, and there are those remarkable people reaching out to help them. Learning about these fights for the right to an education affords young Canadian students a chance to grapple with meaningful issues of global citizenship, social justice and human rights. The three books discussed here are just the most recent examples of the amazing Canadian non-fiction literature available that tackles these difficult issues. From the historical to the current, from here at home to abroad, these books are informative, accessible and timely.

Tracey Schindler is a book reviewer and former teacher living in Bethany, Ontario.
Non-Fiction: Opening Minds and Challenging Thoughts

BY SANDRA O’BRIEN

Non-fiction books come in many shapes and sizes, and cover topics as varied as social justice, animals and animal rights, food and cooking, fashion, war, fascinating people, exotic places — and the list goes on and on. Over my last few years writing for Canadian Children’s Book News, I have read many thought-provoking non-fiction titles and have been amazed at the things I’ve learned. From little-known historical facts about Canada to stories about young people who are making a difference in the world today; from innovative ways to protect the planet to protecting the planet’s endangered species; from what children eat at school for lunch to the methods they use to get to school, the titles I’ve read for young readers have fascinated, informed and entertained.

In the latest Book Bits, I will be reviewing four new titles that have been produced for a wide range of readers — from the youngest to those in the primary, junior and intermediate grades. The topics covered include major metropolitan cities in the world, discovering the secrets hidden in ponds and lakes, the history of women’s pro sports and the story of a young Canadian athlete’s journey to gold. These titles represent just some of the incredible variety of non-fiction being published for young readers in Canada today.

Benoit Tardif’s Metropolis, a geographical word book primer, introduces young children to 32 of the world’s major metropolitan cities. Each double-page spread is filled with bold and colourful illustrations revealing iconic buildings, local delicacies, favourite pastimes, natural wonders and famous landmarks from the cities featured. The illustrations are labelled with simple descriptive words so that children who are just beginning to read are not overwhelmed by extensive text. A world map found on the end pages allows children to locate the various cities.

Tardif has done a wonderful job representing cities on every continent, with the exception of Antarctica for obvious reasons. Children can learn about the cities they are interested in exploring one day or tell friends about places they have visited. The book could also be used to help students learn where classmates or family members have emigrated from and discuss the similarities and differences between these places and where they now live. Families might use the book while planning vacations or to introduce children to food they might be able to enjoy while there.

Next Round: A Young Athlete’s Journey to Gold written by John Spray Pajama Press, 2016
978-1-77278-003-1 (hc) $16.95
978-1-77278-001-7 (pb) $11.95
for Grades 5 to 9
Non-fiction | Biography | Arthur Biyarslanov | Athletes | Soccer | Boxing
wouldn't look forward to trying Turkish delight in Istanbul, gelato in Rome or pavlova in Auckland! This fascinating book is bound to initiate many conversations and encourage further learning and is a great example of Canadian non-fiction for the youngest of readers.

Peggy Kochanoff, author of Be a Beach Detective and Be a Wilderness Detective, delights us with a new title in the scientific non-fiction genre with Be a Pond Detective, in which she introduces primary students to the mysteries of plants, insects and animals that live in lakes, swamps and pools. Written in a question-and-answer format and very realistically illustrated, the book answers the types of questions young children would probably ask — Do dragonflies bite? What’s the difference between a frog and a toad? Are leeches dangerous to humans? Why do mosquitos bite? — and she does so in a very clear and concise manner. A glossary of terms is included, and references and websites are listed for students who wish to do further research or learn more.

Written for students in the late primary and early junior grades, this book is a wonderful introduction to fresh water studies. In her foreword, Kochanoff encourages students to look, listen, smell and touch the shore, the pond surface, under the water, on the pond floor and in the air above the pond to discover as much as they can about these fascinating areas. She also reminds children to put things back where they found them and cherish and respect the environment. This informative little book would be a wonderful addition to any school, classroom or home library and provides yet another excellent example of the type of non-fiction books being published for young readers in Canada today.

Level the Playing Field: The Past, Present, and Future of Women's Pro Sports, written by Kristina Rutherford, talks about the inequities that female athletes face in the sports arena today. It's a non-fiction book about sport, but more importantly, it's about social justice, inequality and women who have had to fight to "level the playing field." The book is chock full of interviews with top female players from around the world and across the sports spectrum. Canada's Cassie Campbell (hockey), Korea's Inbee Park (golf), America's Danica Patrick (car racing) and Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki (tennis) are but a few of the impressive women that helped Rutherford tackle the topic of why professional sport is such a different experience for a man than for a woman.

In this book, Rutherford discusses the progress that has been made over the years in women's sport, emphasizing the impact of Title IX (which granted equal rights and opportunities for women at schools) in the United States and how tennis player Billie Jean King fought for women's rights and equal pay and against prejudice toward gay athletes. She goes on to discuss how female athletes embody qualities like toughness, power and tenacity and, when given the time, resources and expert help, can be just as powerful as their male counterparts. A comparison of men's and women's salaries in various sports is made and a discussion is had about sponsors favouring men's teams due to the exposure granted to them on television. She talks about the influence that big sporting events have on sport and how women playing sport — professionally or recreationally — is relatively new in some parts of the world.

Finally, Rutherford takes a look into the future of women's sport and admits that, even though there's still a way to go, it is certain that women will get paid and recognized more for their athletic talent in the future. Things definitely look optimistic!

This book is an excellent guide to the history, legends, current stars and future trends of gender balance in sport. It is a book that every young woman, be she an athlete or not, should read. It sends a powerful message to young girls to fight for their place on the field, the court, the rink, the track, the pool or any other arena and it leaves readers with a very positive message — the future does hold more promise for female athletes around the world.

The final book I've included is another type of non-fiction book — the biography, Next Round: A Young Athlete's Journey to Gold, written by John Spray, is the story of a young athlete named Arthur Biyarslanov. Arthur began his life in war-torn Chechnya where, when he was three, he and his family were forced to flee to Azerbaijan as Muslim refugees. After six years and the loss of his father, Arthur's mother brought him and his siblings to Canada where he found refuge in sport and learned to speak English while playing soccer with his neighbours. Arthur excelled at the sport for many years but, after breaking his leg, he turned to boxing to stay in shape. At Toronto's Cabbagetown Boxing Club, he met mentors and coaches who taught him skills and discipline that helped him find his way to the 2015 Pan Am Games, where he won a gold medal for Canada. As I write this, Arthur should be preparing for the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

John Spray writes an engaging story that pulls us in from the first page as Arthur and his family attempt to flee to safety. Readers will find themselves cheering for Arthur as he faces one obstacle after another and will enjoy the personal photos that give us an even closer glimpse into the life of this young, ambitious athlete. The book also contains a glossary of soccer and boxing terms for those readers who wish to learn more about the sports discussed in the book. This biography, written for junior and intermediate students, is a must read for youngsters who are looking for inspiration, be it in the sports arena or in any other endeavour where they might be pursuing success.

As seen in these four books, Canadian non-fiction titles are fantastically diverse and offer children an array of topics to read about for personal interest or school projects. There are titles, like the first two in this article, that are written for younger children to teach and entertain, and there are titles, like the final two, that are written for older students to challenge the way they think, to educate and to inspire. I encourage parents, grandparents, teachers and librarians to seek out non-fiction titles when they visit libraries and bookstores to borrow or buy books for their young charges as the scope of information available is astounding and will open the minds and challenge the thoughts of our young people today. Congratulations to all Canadian children's publishers of non-fiction material for producing such high quality books!

Sandra O'Brien is the editor of Canadian Children's Book News.
Bear’s Winter Party
written by Deborah Hodge
illustrated by Lisa Cinar
Groundwood Books, 2016
978-1-55498-853-2 (hc) $18.95
978-1-55498-854-9 (eBook) $14.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Animals | Loneliness | Friendship

Deborah Hodge’s Bear’s Winter Party celebrates the trouble we all have with fitting in sometimes. We can all relate to Bear and his loneliness in a forest filled with animals. Instead of drowning himself in sorrow, Bear sends out invitations for a party, cleans, bakes cookies and prepares other treats with ingredients found in the forest. However, as the day turns to night, he worries that the animals may be too frightened to join him in his den. Soon, Deer and the other animals peek out from the bushes and everyone is eating, singing and dancing. Even the youngest readers will recognize the pride Bear feels when baking cookies, and the pleasure of sharing delicious food. The story is made more memorable for those that bake a batch of Bear’s honey-ginger cookies using the recipe included.

Lisa Cinar’s soft watercolour and pencil crayon illustrations illuminate Bear’s emotions and help young readers to understand the book itself is a recipe for friendship. Beautiful, large-spread illustrations throughout show that Bear is a large animal yet small in his own right. Bear takes on an almost human quality with cheeks that light up with happiness and eyes that fall with sadness. This book is meant to be shared with young children and would work well as a read aloud at the beginning of the school year when new students need reassuring that at the end of the day, like Bear, they “will have a forest full of friends,” too.

Krista Jorgensen is a former public librarian currently residing in Richmond Hill, Ontario.

The Branch
written by Mireille Messier
illustrated by Pierre Pratt
Kids Can Press, 2016
978-1-77138-564-0 (hc) $18.95
978-1-77138-569-1 (eBook) $9.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Picture Book | Intergenerational Friendships | Winter | Winter Storms | Nature | Transformation

Waking one morning after a severe winter storm, a young girl finds everything outside covered in ice. “It looks like the entire neighborhood has been wrapped in a heavy blanket of diamonds.” To her dismay, she discovers that a favourite branch has snapped off a tree in her yard. “That was the branch I sat on, jumped from, played under. It was my castle, my spy base, my ship...” Her sympathetic neighbour, Mr. Frank, helps the heartbroken child see the potential of the severed limb, and together they transform it into something new that the girl can appreciate well into the future.

What a marvellous writer Mireille Messier is! She introduces us to a most memorable character whose take on life is charming and refreshing. As the story is narrated in the first person, we experience the world through her eyes: “They [the neighbours] gather broken branches and carry them to the curb, making big heaps. Like beaver dams in the city.” “Mr. Frank’s workshop smells sweet, just like Sunday breakfast.” As they work together on a project over several seasons, the bond between the girl and Mr. Frank is lovely to witness, and the conversations flow naturally and easily throughout.

Pierre Pratt’s bright and animated illustrations, rendered in inks, gouache on paper and digital (Photoshop), abound with visual interest. The distinctive appearance of the two protagonists as well as the inclusion of numerous details, particularly inside Mr. Frank’s tool-filled workshop, will be examined and appreciated again and again.

Senta Ross is a former elementary teacher and teacher-librarian in Kitchener, Ontario.

Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois
written by Amy Novesky
illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault
Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2016
978-1-4197-1881-6 (hc) $22.95
978-1-6131-2916-6 (eBook) $22.95
for Grades 1 to 3

Picture Book | Biography | Louise Bourgeois | Tapestry | Art History

Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois is a creative biography of French artist Louise Bourgeois, who is best known for her giant sculptures of spiders, one of which (an edition of a work called Maman) sits outside the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. The story covers her idyllic childhood, growing up by a river, in a family that repaired damaged tapestries, and how, in adulthood, the death of her mother moved her to abandon her studies in mathematics and dive into art. At the end of the book, the author’s note provides a condensed biography of Bourgeois, two photographs of her and her work, as well as sources for the quotes and references in the story.

Isabelle Arsenault provides the story’s illustrations and hand lettering, and her work is simply beautiful to look at. Her illustrations flawlessly interpret Amy Novesky’s poetic words through lush depictions of flowers and tapestry patterns and cross-hatches, in mostly blue and red tones. Older children in particular will appreciate the nuances of the text and the concepts covered in the
Elliott’s Guide to Dinosaurs

**Elliott Seah**

978-1-77164-237-8 • HC

$19.95

A bright, curious eight-year-old dinosaur expert shares his passion for paleontology in this fun and informative guide to these fascinating prehistoric creatures.

The Hockey Song

**Stompin’ Tom Connors**

Illustrated by Gary Clement

978-1-77164-189-0 • HC

$21.95

“...it can’t be helped but to think this piece needs a singalong... Considerable fun, just like a game of shinny.”

—Kirkus Reviews
Elliot

written by Julie Pearson
illustrated by Manon Gauthier
translated by Erin Woods
Pajama Press, 2016
978-1-927485-85-9 (hc) $18.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Picture Book | Family | Foster Families | Belonging | Emotions

Elliot is a young rabbit prone to crying, yelling and misbehaving. Although his parents love him, they seem ill-equipped to respond to his needs. A social worker is contacted for assistance, and Elliot unexpectedly finds himself living temporarily with a foster family until his parents learn how to take better care of him. “In this new family everything was different... When Elliot cried, they understood he was hungry. When he yelled, they knew he was upset. When he misbehaved, they realized he needed attention.” Moving back and forth between his home and yet another foster home, Elliot is informed by his social worker that his birth parents can never look after him because they simply do not know how. Instead, Elliot will be living with a new family — “a forever, forever family”— that will love and look after him without reservation.

Author Julie Pearson introduces the complex issue of foster children and families to young children in a sensitive, non-judgmental manner. The spectrum of emotions young Elliot experiences — from anger, confusion and fear to happiness, hope and reassurance — will resonate with children as they witness his journey through the foster child system. Originally published in French by Éditions Les 400 coups in 2014, this text has been translated by Erin Woods.

Manon Gauthier’s muted illustrations, created from paper sculptures enhanced with pencil crayons, are childlike in their simplicity, yet evocative in mood and expression.

This very compelling tale about foster children and their families underlines the importance of belonging and finally feeling at home.

Senta Ross

A Family is a Family is a Family

written by Sara O’Leary
illustrated by Qin Leng
978-1-55498-795-5 (hc) $18.95
978-1-55498-795-5 (eBook) $16.95
Groundwood Books, 2016
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Picture Book | Family | Family Situations | Diversity

When her teacher asks all the children in the classroom to talk about their families, the narrator of A Family is a Family is a Family feels apprehensive. She is unsure of how to describe her own familial situation, and decides to wait and listen to her classmates instead. Soon she discovers that no two families are alike — they all have their own quirks. As the other children explain what makes their family special, our narrator gains the confidence to share her story with the rest of the class.

The story features and celebrates diverse characters and relationships — interracial families, blended families, families with LGBTQ parents, divorced parents, foster parents, grandparents and many more. Qin Leng’s illustrations are bright and sweet, and perfectly compliment Sara O’Leary’s text, which is written in the voice of each of the kids, warm and often funny — “We have a new baby in our house,” says one child. “I think my mom ordered him online.”

Parents will find this book useful in helping young children understand the different kinds of families they might encounter, while accepting and loving their own. For teachers, this is a great book to bring into the classroom to encourage inclusivity and embolden students to talk about their own families, without their worrying about not fitting in.

Camilia Kahrizi

Hurry Up, Henry

written by Jennifer Lanthier
illustrated by Isabelle Malenfant
Puffin Canada, 2016
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Picture Book | Family | Friendship | Observation | Time | Neighbourhoods

“Henry didn’t want to be late. But he didn’t want to hurry up, either.” Young Henry is fascinated by the goings-on in his neighbourhood and likes to take his time examining what others in his family fail to notice, including sidewalk art, flowers, insects and more. He is constantly being urged to hurry up in order to avoid being late. Henry’s best friend, Simon, is the exact opposite. Full of energy and speed, he is repeatedly told to slow down. With Henry’s grandmother’s help, Simon cleverly organizes a special birthday present for Henry to be enjoyed together with his family... the gift of time!

Author Jennifer Lanthier has written a gentle story about a child who observes and savours the small pleasures in the natural world while living in a bustling city filled with traffic, commotion and pavement. Henry’s family, frustrated by his constant dawdling, eventually learn an important lesson about the value of fully enjoying each other’s company.

Isabelle Malenfant’s soft pastel and graphite pencil illustrations, depicting the dichotomies of big city life, are cheerful and light — perfect for the tone of this book that reminds us to make every moment count.

Senta Ross
Geraldo Valério’s latest picture book, *Moose, Goose, Animals on the Loose!,* introduces young children to both the alphabet and Canadian wildlife. Each page or spread features a letter, in uppercase and lowercase, along with a corresponding Canadian animal illustrated in Valério’s distinctive style. A short line of text explaining the creature’s behaviour or highlighting a particular characteristic accompanies each illustration: “Frog feasting on flies” or “Beaver building branch by branch.” The final two spreads review the letters again, with an additional fact about each animal.

This book would be of great value in the classroom for many reasons. It presents the alphabet in a practical way: the alliterative words in each line of text emphasize the sounds of each letter and are simple enough for children to remember and repeat. The smiling animals in each spread, along with the short facts provided for each, are a memorable way to learn about Canadian wildlife from all around the country. But beyond the obvious educational elements of the book, Valério’s bright and colourful collage illustrations will catch the eye of young readers, who will surely be inspired to try and emulate his style with some paper and scissors, at home or in the classroom.

Camilia Kahrizi

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**Pablo Finds a Treasure**

written by Andrée Poulin
illustrated by Isabelle Malenfant
Annick Press, 2016
978-1-55451-867-8 (hc) $21.95
978-1-55451-866-1 (pb) $11.95
for Grades 2 to 4

*Picture Book | Poverty | Child Labour | Hope | Bullying*

Pablo and his older sister, Sofia, spend their days at Treasure Mountain, their town’s local dump. They search through garbage for items that might possibly be sold by their mother in order to support the family. This work is gruelling and hazardous, especially when a vicious bully, named Filthy-Face, regularly terrorizes them. Amid the broken glass, plastics and scraps of paper, the siblings’ spirits are occasionally raised when they unearth edible food or a picture book, even though they can’t yet read. One day, Pablo makes an exciting find that could offer some relief to his family. He spots a gold chain inside a garbage bag. “In his dirty hand, the precious metal shines like a sliver of sun.” His dreams of forthcoming prospects come to a shattering end when Filthy-Face arrives on the scene and demands the contents of his bag. What will the future hold for Pablo and Sofia?

Author Andrée Poulin has written a deeply poignant story about the adversity facing poverty-stricken children around the world who are forced to toil in dangerous conditions just to survive.

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Through her simple, yet evocative, text, one can see, hear, smell, taste and feel the miserable conditions Pablo and Sofia endure on a daily basis: “Pablo hears the rumble of the motor. The truck is coming... Pablo’s heart beats faster. He feels like reaching for his sister’s hand. He doesn’t. He won’t show his fear. The truck arrives, raising billowing clouds of dust. Everyone runs. Some people push. Some people pinch. Some people yell. Pablo hates this rush and crush. Quick as a flash, Sofia weaves through the crowd. The first ones to arrive have a better chance of finding treasures.”

Using a mix of watercolours, soft pastels, charcoal and graphite pencil, illustrator Isabelle Malenfant has created a dark and squalid environment depicting the reality of these children’s compelling plight. Bright colours and uplifting scenery are rarely on display, yet some rare shards of colour are used when glimmers of hope arise.

This book acknowledges the resiliency, courage and strength of the human spirit, no matter how dire the situation.

Senta Ross

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**A Squiggly Story**

written by Andrew Larsen
illustrated by Mike Lowery
Kids Can Press, 2016
978-1-77138-016-4 (hc) $18.95
978-1-77138-241-5 (eBook) $9.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Writing | Storytelling | Imagination*

A young boy wants to write a story, but he only knows letters, not words. When his sister encourages him to start with what he knows, he does so by choosing an easy letter, I. From there, he uses symbols and letters to build the story — a circle for a soccer ball, u for you, dots for sand. The next day at school, he reads his unfinished squiggly story to his peers. Despite suggestions from others, he still cannot find an appropriate ending for it. Only when he starts doodling some stars, exclamation marks and slanty lines does the ending begin to take shape.

Lowery’s artwork is rendered in Photoshop, the black lines thick and the colours bright and bold. Most of the story is presented in panels, with most of the text in speech bubbles. Larsen’s characters are engaging, the boy’s alternating frustration and inspiration complemented by his sister’s gentle guidance and encouragement. When the boy reads his unfinished story, Larsen’s text and Lowery’s illustrations — tinged in blue at this point — beautifully reveal the breadth and depth of meaning that even a few squiggles and swirls can have in a child’s imagination. As the boy finishes his story, the resolution to it not only launches him into his next one, but also into a life that will ever richly unfurl for him as both a reader and a writer, page after page, word after word.

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.
Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family’s Journey
written by Margriet Ruurs
artwork by Nizar Ali Badr
Orca Book Publishers, 2016
978-1-4598-1490-5 (hc) $20.00 for Grades 2 to 4

Picture Book | Syria | War | Refugee Families | Humanitarian Crisis | Stone Art | Hope

As the story begins, Rama is awakened by the crow of the rooster and to the sounds of her mother preparing breakfast. Rama and her brother Sami played, went to school, bought fruit and vegetables at the market and were free to laugh and chat, and drink tea with their neighbours. Her grandfather fished, her father worked in the fields and her mother sewed silk scarves. Life sounded idyllic for this little girl.

But one day everything changed. War came to their country. Soon there were food shortages, and people began to leave the village in search of a safer place, a better life. When bombs fell too close to their home, Rama and her family joined the throngs of people in search of peace. They sadly said goodbye to the flowers, the goat and the soil they called home and began their walk toward, what her father described as “a bright new future.” Carrying what they could on their backs, they walked and walked until they reached the “end of the earth.” There they made a treacherous sea crossing and then continued to walk until they reached a place they were welcomed with open arms, a place they could call home.

In this thoughtfully written book for young readers, Margriet Ruurs writes from the point of view of a young Syrian girl as she and her family depart their beloved homeland. The tale is both heartbreaking and full of hope as it tells the universal story of fleeing to freedom in times of war. A foreword is included that tells how the book came to be and is a testament to the author’s tenacity in seeing her vision brought to fruition. The text is written in both English and Arabic, so it can also be enjoyed by those families who have sought refuge in countries around the world. Ruurs’ beautiful words are twinned with the most stunning artwork by Nizar Ali Badr, a Syrian artist who uses stones as the medium for his art. I could not but be moved by Badr’s work, as it is unlike anything I have ever seen and conveys so much emotion. Carrying what they could on their backs, they walked and walked until they reached the “end of the earth.” There they made a treacherous sea crossing and then continued to walk until they reached a place they were welcomed with open arms, a place they could call home.

A Boy Named Queen
written by Sara Cassidy
Groundwood Books, 2016
978-1-55498-906-5 (eBook) $12.95 for Grades 7 to 12

Fiction | Friendship | Bullying | Conformity | Tolerance

The new boy in Evelyn’s Grade 5 class says his name is Queen, and he says it with a confidence that makes Evelyn take notice. Queen wears odd clothes, brings quinoa burritos for lunch and decides to start his own chess/environment club. While some of the children snicker and pick on him, he remains calm in the face of their taunts. Evelyn strikes up a friendship with Queen, and when she is invited to his home for a birthday party, she sees that there are different ways to live a life.

Sara Cassidy’s use of the present tense throughout is striking. She credits young readers with the imagination to appreciate her liberal use of metaphor. Through Evelyn — an observant child with a rela-

Bad Girls of Fashion: Style Rebels From Cleopatra to Lady Gaga
written by Jennifer Croll
illustrated by Ada Buchholc
Annick Press, 2016
978-1-55451-786-2 (hc) $24.95
978-1-55451-785-5 (pb) $16.95 for Grades 7 to 12

Non-fiction | Fashion | Protest | Rebellion | Self-expression

Over the centuries, women have struggled to find their place in a male-driven society. Confined to roles prescribed to them, fashion quickly became a way for women to be subversive, using clothing and style to change the conversation and turn the rules of convention on their head. From Cleopatra to Lady Gaga, each fashion icon featured in Bad Girls of Fashion has challenged the status quo, their innovative ideas casting them as goddesses, rebels and sex symbols, altering the course of women’s rights in the process.

Jennifer Croll is extensive in her coverage of women who have dared to question and push the boundaries of fashion — encouraging pride in natural beauty for women of African descent, introducing gender fluidity through women dressing in traditional male clothing, and presenting the idea of dressing for comfort instead of as the property of others.

With sections entitled Fashion Leaders, Fashion Spotlights and Iconic Looks, as well as brief sidebars explaining important concepts relevant to specific time periods, this informative book is interesting and accessible for teen readers to enjoy. Photographs and exotic illustrations provide a starkly visual and fascinating accompaniment to a thorough text.

Providing valuable role models and a solid grounding in feminist history, the stories of these 40 women will inspire a new generation of girls to live on their own terms, expressing themselves as necessary by creative means — even through the use of an ordinary material like cloth.

Amy Mathers is a columnist for the CCBC’s electronic newsletter and a YA reviewer for the National Reading Campaign.

Sandra O’Brien is the editor of Canadian Children’s Book News.

A Boy Named Queen
written by Sara Cassidy
Groundwood Books, 2016
978-1-55498-905-8 (hc) $14.95
978-1-55498-906-5 (eBook) $12.95 for Grades 4 to 6

Fiction | Friendship | Bullying | Environment | Conformity | Tolerance

The new boy in Evelyn’s Grade 5 class says his name is Queen, and he says it with a confidence that makes Evelyn take notice. Queen wears odd clothes, brings quinoa burritos for lunch and decides to start his own chess/environment club. While some of the children snicker and pick on him, he remains calm in the face of their taunts. Evelyn strikes up a friendship with Queen, and when she is invited to his home for a birthday party, she sees that there are different ways to live a life.

Sara Cassidy’s use of the present tense throughout is striking. She credits young readers with the imagination to appreciate her liberal use of metaphor. Through Evelyn — an observant child with a rela-
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tively strict mother — the author draws our attention to the details of childhood: the look of a cloud, the feel of a chestnut, the sound of a pencil doing sums.

Cassidy’s novella is a little gem. It is a story that touches on issues of tolerance, friendship and bullying. Above all, this book will help young readers explore the idea of conformity and how joy can be found in taking the road less travelled (riddled though it may be with difficulties). Teachers of Grades 4 to 6 will find this to be a lovely book with which to begin the school year, not only for the message of tolerance it conveys, but also for the beautiful language in which it has been delivered.

Illdiko Sumegi is a reviewer from Ottawa and the mother of two young readers.

Canada Year by Year
written by Elizabeth MacLeod
illustrated by Sydney Smith
Kids Can Press, 2016
978-1-77138-397-4 (hc) $21.95
for Grades 3 to 7
Non-fiction | Canada | Canadian Heritage & History | Canadian Trivia | Social Studies

With Canada’s 150th birthday approaching, this miscellany is chockablock with landmark historical milestones occurring since Canada’s founding in 1867. Some events, one for each year, are common knowledge. Many more are not. Divided into 10 broad chronological eras, complete with an overview of each (e.g., War-time and Beyond 1914-1928, Boom Years 1954-1966), the selection of events is varied. It includes a spectrum ranging from individual achievement to those with national and international impact. The book covers the arts, science, technology, politics, sports, military endeavours and more. Adding to this bounty are numerous quotes, profiles of famous Canadians and sidebar trivia, all tied together with an extensive index.

The challenge of selecting from so much material — some excerpted from existing Kids Can titles — must have been enormous, but the volume succeeds admirably. Every page is replete with detailed, colourful miniature illustrations that reflect and enhance the informative text. The layout, format and writing style invite casual browsing, cover-to-cover reading or project research.

From the invention of Superman and basketball, to the discovery of insulin, to military involvement in many arenas of war, to the Halifax Explosion, every entry is compelling. To provide balance, episodes that reveal Canada less favourably are included, such as the plight of the Japanese during World War II and the treatment of First Nation children in residential schools.

With such rich information complemented by its appealing visuals, children, adults, residents of Canada — old and new — and non-residents, will each find Canada’s unique story engaging.

Aileen Wortley is a retired librarian who lives in Toronto.

Clara Humble and the Not-So-Super Powers
written by Anna Humphrey
illustrated by Lisa Cinar
Owlkids Books, 2016
978-1-77147-147-3 (hc) $16.95
for Grades 3 to 5
Fiction | Superpowers | Friendship | School

When nine-year-old Clara Humble finds out that her elderly neighbour and best friend, Momo, is selling her house to move into a seniors’ residence, she is distraught. She also has to bear the frustration of sharing her school with students from R.R. Reginald — a school that has been temporarily closed due to mold in the walls. Unfortunately, R.R. Reginald is a rival school harbouring Clara’s arch nemesis, Bossy Becky. Luckily for Clara, she has noticed that she has certain powers, mundane though they may be. One such power is the ability to spill milk... without touching the glass! With the help of her friend Bradley, Clara hopes to harness her super powers and restore order to her world.

Anna Humphrey has created a character in which many children will recognize aspects of themselves. Clara’s worries, her wishful thinking and her super-powered mistakes give her a dimension and reality that will inspire empathy and keep the pages turning. Lisa Cinar’s black-and-white illustrations add humour and break up the text in a way that allows less proficient readers a chance to pause and take a breath.

This is a funny and touching story through which young readers may explore their own feelings of helplessness and frustration. It is a book about change, acceptance and friendship that will appeal to both girls and boys. The ending is satisfying, but not in the traditional sense: foes are not vanquished and wrongs are not righted. However, that is the point. Sometimes things cannot be fixed, but having a friend to lean on, can make all the difference.

Illdiko Sumegi

Convictions
written by Judith Silverthorne
Coteau Books, 2016
978-1-55050-652-5 (pb) $16.95
978-1-55050-889-5 (eBook) $8.95
for Grades 10 to 12
Historical Fiction | 19th Century | Female Prisoners | Prison Ships | Human Rights

In 1842, prison ships would carry women from England to a penal colony in Australia for crimes as petty as stealing garbage. What made it more tragic was that many children were tried for such crimes, and were convicted as adults.

Judith Silverthorne’s novel Convictions illustrates how justice has evolved in protecting the vulnerable. She focuses her story on 14-year-old Jennie, whose starvation had her tried and punished for stealing moldy oats. On the ship, she befriends 10-year-old Alice, and a grandmotherly protector, Sarah. Together, they band together to survive verbal attacks from hardened criminals and physical attacks from prison guards. Vivid descriptions of sadness and prisoner violence contrast sharply against the protagonist’s hopes.
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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016
PACKAGING YOUR IMAGINATION
This book may generate eye-rolls as little Alice remains unflinchingly selfless in the face of countless hardships. However, it may serve as a vehicle to discuss the advent of women’s rights and the changes that the Suffrage movement made for free and imprisoned women. Another theme for classroom discussion could revolve around how the criminal codes have changed, or not. Jennie’s ‘crime’ of extreme poverty has her lumped in with thieves and Prostitutes.

While the novel explores the issues of self-reliance, there is frequent mention of God and prayers, and the protagonists rely on male benevolence to survive. Though this may be a grim read for teens, Convictions’ characters had a better conclusion than the actual outcome for the real women who inspired this story, and can serve as a gateway to learning about human rights.

Some days have the power to change one’s life forever — strengthening character and self-resolve, building assurance in one’s abilities, and helping one deal with past grief that can’t be let go. Beloved children’s author Kit Pearson weaves a story about one such fictional day in the lives of two real girls — renowned author and artist Emily Carr and the independent Kathleen O’Reilly — in the time before they were grown adults, confidently pursuing their dreams.

Nine-and-a-half-year-old Emily and her sister Alice live with the nasty Crane family because their mother is sick. Fed up with pinafores and propriety, Emily steals away on her own one early morning and encounters a lonely, sobbing girl in the woods. Thirteen-year-old Kathleen is dealing with her own problems and surprised at the gall of this strange little girl who approaches her, but is quickly enamoured by Emily’s spirited nature and indifferent attitude toward convention. After spending the day together, the unlikely pairing turns out to be just what the other needs to continue on their separate paths in life.

Pearson has the ability to make her readers want to live in her books through setting depictions as vivid as Carr’s paintings and characters that easily find a place in a reader’s heart. As in Lena Coakley’s Worlds of Ink and Shadow, reality is molded into fiction creating an imaginative read, and leaving one to wonder if the line between the two is as impervious as it seems.

Amy Mathers
the most important, life-changing difference he never noticed.

Behind this seemingly simple, heart-warming tale lie arresting insights into how children handle grief, as well as the ability of a good story to bolster the soul. Richard Scrimger is at his finest with Fred’s imaginative and complex journey through his experience with loss, creating an alternate world all of us would give anything to visit at some point in our lives, and letting readers know it’s okay to mourn the pets and people they have loved.

Amy Mathers

Every Hidden Thing
written by Kenneth Oppel
978-1-44341-033-5 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 9 to 12

Fiction | Dinosaurs | Scientific Expeditions | Relationships | Romance

Samuel Bolt and Rachel Cartland are two teens who share a common passion and goal: to find the bones of the legendary “Black Beauty,” a dinosaur the likes of which has not yet been found. They are each part of an expedition with their respective fathers to the Badlands, and are each desperate to make what will inevitably be a monumental scientific discovery. But their fathers are bitter rivals, each one anxious to further his own career and to outdo the other. Yet as much as Sam longs to find this “ rex,” he also longs for Rachel. From the moment he laid eyes on her he felt a connection, he knew that he loved her. Rachel doesn’t know how to trust Sam’s feelings, or her own, and she is determined to prove herself a serious scientist so she can pursue her dream of attending university. Can these two teens find love without betraying themselves and their families, and sacrificing their futures?

Kenneth Oppel ventures into new territory with his latest work, but does so with all the elegance and artistry that he has brought to his oeuvre. His storytelling genius is on full display in this tale that combines the allure of its wild west setting with an intriguing scientific quest (for dinosaur bones!) and a unique and compelling love story. The Native presence in the story is handled sensitively yet realistically and the characters are believable, nuanced and sympathetic. While this book has been described as “Romeo and Juliet meets Indiana Jones,” it is that plus so much more.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager at Woozles in Halifax.

Freedom’s Just Another Word
written by Caroline Stellings
Second Story Press, 2016
978-1-77260-011-7 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 7 and up

Historical Fiction | Blues Music | 1970s | Travel | Self-discovery | Prejudice | Substance Abuse

Freedom’s Just Another Word is the story of how aspiring Blues singer Louisiana Merritt, a half-black girl from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, meets Janis Joplin and is offered a chance to audition if she can get down to Austin, Texas in time. One might think that this would be enough to fill a mere 230 pages, but Caroline Stelling gives us more than just your typical gal-pal road trip. Louisiana, Easy for short, has led a complex life as the only half-black girl in Saskatoon. Race, despite what Easy thinks, plays a part in her everyday life with micro-aggressions from neighbours and strangers alike, and outright racism from people she’s known all her life. Yet race isn’t really the focus of the story, though it helps to shape the world of the 1970s. The heart of the story centres on the difference between youth and maturity and the awakening to the reality that this shift can bring.

Easy knows that if she’s ever going to be a famous blues singer, she has to get out of Saskatoon. So, when the Festival Express, and most importantly Janis Joplin, pass through Saskatoon and Joplin asks Easy to come and sing in Austin — she knows that this is her chance. Leaving everything behind and hitching a ride with a couple of nuns, Easy embarks on a journey of self-discovery as her eyes are opened, not only to the prejudices of the world, but to her own as well.

During the course of the story, the author discusses racism, religion, being judgmental, and drug and alcohol abuse. There’s nothing too heavy, and the focus remains strong with Easy and her coming of age, but the topics are not taken lightly or downplayed. With this book, Stelling gives us a fantastic piece of historical fiction that takes us from one extreme to another with a strong and relatable character.

Stephanie Dror holds an MA in Children’s Literature from the University of British Columbia and is a book blogger and reviewer on The Book Wars.

Heir to the Sky
written by Amanda Sun
Harlequin Teen, 2016
978-0-373-21191-3, (hc) $20.99
978-1-45929-393-9 (eBook) $16.99
for Grades 7 to 9

Fiction | Fantasy | Adventure | Monsters | Romance

Kali is the daughter of the reigning Monarch of Ashra, and heir to a kingdom of floating continents. She agrees to an arranged marriage with a political ally, but secretly she yearns for freedom. After overhearing a rebellion plot, Kali and her friends set out to warn her father. Events do not go as planned, and Kali falls off the edge of Ashra, plummeting to the Earth below. There she discovers that she is not alone and that there are still humans on Earth, along with a plethora of monsters. She finds aid and support in Griffin, a young monsterhunter, and the two begin a quest to return Kali to her home. During the journey, Kali discovers terrible truths about Ashra’s past that make her question everything she thought she knew.

Kali suffers a culture shock when she lands on Earth, and she must learn to adapt quickly or die. Her transformation from a good-hearted and naive princess to a more pragmatic hunter isn’t easy. She realizes that there is more for her to learn and accomplish, and her self-confidence rises accordingly. Griffin is almost too good to be true, with a relentlessly positive attitude that never falters. While there is a brewing romance between the two, it is Kali’s development into a self-reliant and confident young woman that is best portrayed. As Kali begins to learn of the genocide in her...
people’s annals, as well as the true origins of the mythology behind her religion, she is forced to make some difficult decisions. Amanda Sun’s detailed descriptions of the floating and Earth-bound kingdoms are rich in history. Secondary characters, such as Griffin’s sisters, are more than just plot devices, and provide a solid counterbalance to Griffin and Kali’s point of view. The ending raises more questions than it answers, but Sun’s ability to throw twists and turns into the story right until the final pages means the reader may not be too concerned with loose threads.

Jenn Hubbs is a reviewer, bookseller and librarian.

**How It Ends**
written by Catherine Lo
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, 2016
978-0-544-54006-4 (hc) $24.95
for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Friendship | Bullying | Peer Pressure | Prescription Drug Abuse | Abortion | Anxiety

When Jessie and Annie meet, it’s friends at first sight. Shy, anxious Jessie would give anything to have Annie’s confidence and boldness, and Annie envies Jessie’s tight-knit family and grades. They’re instant BFFs until they’re not. Told in alternating points of view, this is the story of friendship from first meeting to breakup, set against a tumultuous sophomore year of bullies, boyfriends and backstabbing.

In Catherine Lo’s first novel, she sensitively and realistically portrays complexities of teen-girl friendship. Jessie is shy and quiet, and suffers from severe anxiety as a result of being bullied at the start of high school. If she can manage to focus on getting good grades and keeping her head down, she’s sure she can ignore everything else and survive. And if she can’t? Well, she’s got pills for that. Everything changes when new student Annie befriends her. At first, everything is great and the girls are as close as sisters. But when Annie also befriends the very girls who made Jessie’s life miserable the year before (and the source of her anxiety), and they both fall for the same guy, tensions arise and their friendship deteriorates.

Lo, who has a history of working with at-risk teens, realistically captures the nuances and the challenges of girls’ friendships and high school. Annie and Jessie are both highly relatable characters, and readers will recognize familiar scenarios. The alternating points of view present both sides of the story, and it is clear that while they both share blame for what happens, they are not villains.

Without ever over-simplifying or sugar-coating, themes such as peer influence, prescription drug abuse, sex and abortion are deftly handled. Overall, this is a thoughtful and thought-provoking book that does an excellent job of showing how friendships start and end, and all of the messiness in-between.

Rachel Seigel

**Inside Your Insides: A Guide to the Microbes That Call You Home**
written by Claire Eamer
illustrated by Marie-Ève Tremblay
Kids Can Press, 2016
978-1-77138-332-5 (hc) $18.95
for Grades 3 to 7
Non-fiction | Microbes | Human Body | Health | Life Science | Science & Technology

Each of us is inhabited by unique populations of tiny organisms — bacteria, viruses, fungi, archaea, protists and mites — that consider our bodies home. We are each a complete biome with individual organs being preferred landscapes for specific types of microbes. Commonly called “germs,” microbes are essential to our survival, although some, in fact, cause illness. How these invisible organisms were discovered and subsequent efforts to control harmful microbes through antibiotics or vaccines are discussed, as well as their consequences. These populations are so precious, individuals must protect them through healthy living and avoidance of products destructive to them. All this and so much more are included in this buoyant introduction to the intriguing topic of microbes.

Fifteen chapters with such teasing titles as ‘The Skinny on Skin Microbes’ and ‘Down the Toilet’ are each allocated a double-page spread. These also contain easily absorbed facts in sidebars (e.g., adults carry 100-200 trillion organisms!) and “groaner” “microbe jokes, perfect for the age group! The text was read for accuracy by professorial staff at the University of British Columbia and the title contains a useful glossary and index.

It is impossible not to be amazed at this compelling world, and children will pore over it with fascination, no doubt exclaiming, “Ooh, gross!” at frequent intervals! With its attractive layout and many delightful whimsical illustrations, its physical appearance alone will entice. Add to this the accessible text, presented in a chatty, humorous style, and we have a title that is a great addition to public, school and personal libraries.

Aileen Wortley

**Lightning Lou**
written by Lori Weber
Dancing Cat Books, 2016
978-1-77086-462-7 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 5 to 8
Historical Fiction | Hockey | World War I | Opportunities for Women

When a coach arrives in town to recruit players for an all-girls hockey team, 12-year-old Lou can’t resist trying out. The only problem? Lou is a boy. Disguising himself as the shy girl Lou Lou, he is taken from his rural Quebec home to play hockey in the big city, determined to beat the unstoppable Albertine Lapensée. But Lou finds out that playing against the girls — and living as one — might be harder than he thought. Meanwhile, he must worry about his brother, who is fighting in Belgium in World War I and may not make it home safely.

Inspired by the true story of Ada Lalonde, *Lightning Lou* is grounded in history. The story is framed by the contemporary
problems of the time — the spectre of war in Europe, the cultural divide between French and English Canadians, the growing opportunities for women — and this book could be used when teaching one or all of these topics. Lori Weber skilfully weaves these issues through the backdrop of Lou's journey, while leaving room for the fun parts (the hockey!) to drive the story.

Weber creates complex and full-bodied characters, like Lou's teammate Claire, who is caught between her passion for hockey and a life destined for the convent. The thoughtful portrayal of Lou lets the reader root for his success on the ice, even as he struggles with the thought that he may have taken a spot from a deserving girl. Both the quiet village of Saint-Christophe and the thriving city of Montreal feel vibrant and alive, and Weber manages to deal with some serious issues while balancing this against the giddy exuberance of the hockey scenes.

Lightning Lou is an exciting and quietly educational book that will be loved by any hockey fan, boy or girl.

Ian Usher studies English at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

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The Mask That Sang
written by Susan Currie
Second Story Press, 2016
978-1-77260-013-1 (pb) $9.95
for Grades 4 to 8
Fiction | First Nations History | Iroquois Nation | Residential Schools | Bullying | Friendship | Poverty | Abuse | Spirituality

Cass is a sweet and shy 12-year-old who lives with her mother in a tiny apartment. She is frequently bullied at school, and she and her mother struggle to make ends meet. Cass dreams of escaping to a place with green trees and calm lakes that is far away from the troubles of the city. When the pair receive a letter, informing them that Cass's grandmother has left them a house in a nicer part of town, her mother inexplicably refuses the offer until Cass is able to convince her otherwise. Once settled, Cass discovers a "false face," or ceremonial Aboriginal mask that begins to sing to her, and she begins to have strange dreams. At school, Cass rescues a young First Nation boy, Degan, from the class bully, and the two become friends. Exploring the history of the dreams and the mask, together they learn more about Cass's own heritage and the secrets the mask wants to share.

Cass's journey towards the truth allows her to come out of her shell and to develop confidence and strength in her beliefs. She learns to find the strength to stand up to a bully, only to find that he may not be as horrible as she first thought. Ellis has his own bullying situation with which to contend, and the different variations of bullies provide multiple opportunities for discussion. Conversations with Degan's aunt allow for a natural introduction to the history of the Iroquois people, and Cass's questions are authentic, mirroring those of the reader. Secondary characters, such as Degan and Mr. Gregor, are used as foils to the more horrible characters, and each has a role in helping Cass and her mother to open up and accept friendship and support.

Readers will identify with Cass's desire to know more about where she comes from, and Susan Currie's deft touch ensures that the often traumatic events are presented gently and in context.

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A snappy, affecting YA-centered novel ... Poulsen handles heavy material with sophistication.”
— Publishers Weekly, for Old Man
Cass encounters prejudice and bullying in her own daily life while discovering her mother’s troubling history of foster homes and the long-lasting impact of the residential school program on her ancestors.

Deceptively light and sometimes simplistic writing counterbalances the heavier subjects of bullying, poverty, spirituality and abuse. While the reveal at the end of the book may be obvious to some, younger readers will appreciate how the story comes full circle and how the dreams provided by the mask become a natural part of Cass’s own history. Currie, a previous winner of the Second Story Press Aboriginal Writing Contest, has crafted a haunting and sometimes bittersweet novel that touches upon the lost generations of First Nation children.

Jenn Hubbs

Once, in a Town Called Moth
written by Trilby Kent
Tundra Books, 2016
978-1-101-91811-1 (hc) $21.99
978-1-101-91813-5 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 7 to 12
Fiction | Mennonite Religion | Mystery | Coming of Age | Separation

Part Mennonite coming-of-age story and part modern teen mystery, Trilby Kent’s novel captures the voice of Ana, a teenage girl who is looking for her mother while hiding from an unknown threat.

Kent captures Mennonite life with authenticity and warmth; her research with the Mennonite community has paid off. The narrative flashes back to a Bolivian Mennonite farm, and forward to Ana’s current life in downtown Toronto, where she navigates high school with no religious restrictions but encounters subtle, confusing rules.

Once, in a Town Called Moth straddles the two worlds and their equal, but different tensions effectively. Ana recalls a few disturbing events from her time in Bolivia, and readers will want to continue reading, if only to see if the holes in her memory will yield clues. Ana’s friendship with non-Mennonites helps her navigate the modern world, leading to her eventual connection with her estranged mother via computer.

Ana’s narrative seems genuine, as she observes urban life and compares it to her rural upbringing. Her interactions with her father, classmates and lapsed Mennonite mother ring true. The mystery behind her family’s flight from Bolivia is a bit drawn out but comes across as plausible. Suspension of disbelief is more tenuous with Ana’s mother’s 10-year avoidance of her daughter, especially after living with access to telephones and the Internet.

Teens with separated parents might be intrigued by this story, while students who feel “different” may relate to the square-peg-in-a-round-hole theme. This book can be recommended as a way to discuss secluded cultures and religious restrictions.

Naomi Szébeni

The Pain Eater
written by Beth Goobie
Second Story Press, 2016
978-1-77260-020-9 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 8 and up
Fiction | Rape | Self-Harming | Bullying | Self-Esteem | Friendships | Family Relationships | Siblings | Peer Relationships | Identity

After the spring performance of the school play, 14-year-old Maddy Malone is raped by three boys from her high school, held down by a fourth while a fifth acts as lookout. Devastated by the attack, she’s overwhelmed both by her shame and the fear that her assailants might strike again and withdraws deeper and deeper into pain and silence, isolating herself from her loving family, no longer able to even take refuge in drawing, which has always offered her solace. She does hold herself together, barely, by cutting and burning herself with cigarettes, but what little control she has seems as if it will shatter when she’s forced to face two of her attackers in her Grade 10 English class. Things begin, however, to shift when the class begins working on a collaborative novel project, “The Pain Eater,” a fantasy novel about an outsider, a teenage girl, who is as vulnerable and isolated as Maddy herself. Over the course of the fall term, Maddy begins slowly finding ways to heal herself, and prepares to confront the pain that has threatened to overwhelm her.

The Pain Eater is exquisitely written but is also devastating. Beth Goobie has created a heroine who is plunged into the very darkest places of the human soul, but who gradually discovers that she has the inner strength, the courage and the resilience to confront the brutality and violence of the rape. That journey out of the darkness is handled brilliantly, allowing readers to see how Maddy turns to her drawing and to the class novel project to find ways to make sense of the emotional pain that has enveloped her. Goobie leaves readers with an experience that is both poignant and profound and leaves Maddy on the verge of moving forward, no longer the victim of her fears. Goobie uses the creation of the class novel to great effect to explore the ramifications of being ostracized and excluded both in the fictional story and in the portrait of Maddy’s classmates. She beautifully balances this with Maddy’s creation of a mural that tells the story of the attack. This is a truly brave and powerful novel that will touch readers deeply.

Jeffrey Canton teaches in the Children’s Study program at York University.

Watching Traffic
written by Jane Ozkowski
Groundwood Books, 2016
978-1-55498-846-4 (eBook) $14.95
for Grades 9 to 12
Fiction | Small Towns | Abandonment | Friendship | Life Changes

It is the summer after graduation, and Emily doesn’t know what to think or how she should feel. With some combination of sadness, jealousy and admiration, she watches her two best friends prepare to leave their small Ontario town for new adventures: Lincoln to embark on a trip to Australia, while Melissa is bound for university...
in Halifax. Even when Emily starts spending time with Tyler, the new boy in town, she still wrestles with uncertainty. One thing she does know, however, is that she wants to be her own person and not just the girl that everyone knows from the life-changing event that took place when she was three. So in the hopes of stepping out from the shadow of her past, she makes the decision not to tell Tyler about any of it. But as the summer winds down and Emily starts to see that others have doubts and fears of their own, she begins to see things differently and the possibilities that the future might hold.

Introspective and insightful, this novel perfectly captures both the excitement and the ambivalence of that particular time in one’s life, the heady feelings of being on the cusp of something new, of being on the verge of plunging into ‘real life.’ The author aptly depicts the beauty and frustrations of small-town life, and her characters are believably flawed and quirky. The life lessons are subtle and meaningful, and the story is satisfying even as it leaves you wondering. It is an unassuming treasure with beautiful prose and lingering resonance.

Lisa Doucet

With Malice
written by Eileen Cook
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, 2016
978-0-544-80509-5 (hc) $25.99
for Grades 9 to 12
Fiction | Murder | Amnesia | Media | Public Opinion | Psychological Thriller

When Jill wakes up in a hospital bed with no idea how she got there, she’s shocked to learn that her best friend Simone was killed in a car crash during their ‘Adventures Abroad’ trip to Italy, and everyone is telling Jill that she was the driver. Worst of all, the media believes Simone’s death might have been murder, and that Jill was responsible. Until she can remember what happened in Italy, she can’t be certain of anything. However, guilty or not, Jill will learn that it doesn’t matter what the truth is, what matters is that it’s fun to talk about.

In her new novel, loosely inspired by the Amanda Knox case, author Eileen Cook creates a psychological thriller centred around the ideas of truth, memory and perception. Told through various points of view, the story keeps us guessing as to whether or not Jill is guilty. The media has already convicted her, painting a picture of a popular cheerleader murdered in a jealous rage by her sociopathic best friend. Jill, suffering from retrograde amnesia, only knows what she reads, sees or is told. As pieces of her memory slowly come back, Jill and the reader are thrown even more off balance, because she can’t tell what’s a real memory and what’s been influenced by outside information. The author also raises some interesting points about the impact of media on how we are perceived, and reminds readers that the court of public opinion is a more powerful force than we realize.

The novel is well paced, suspenseful and gripping, and from the first page to the shocking conclusion, readers will be completely hooked on this novel, being left with a great deal to consider.

Rachel Seigel

Drop in for a look

CCBC Collections Across the Country
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THE CLASSROOM BOOKSHELF

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Laura Scandiffio

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Jenny Kay Dupuis, Kathy Kacer, Gillian Newland

On Our Way to Oyster Bay: Mother Jones and her March for Children’s Rights
Monica Kulling, Felicita Sala

BOOK BITS

Be a Pond Detective: Solving the Mysteries of Lakes, Swamps, and Pools
Peggy Kochanoff

Level the Playing Field: The Past, Present, and Future of Women’s Pro Sports
Kristina Rutherford

Metropolis
Benoit Tardif

Next Round: A Young Athlete’s Journey to Gold
John Spray

WE RECOMMEND

Bad Girls of Fashion: Style Rebels From Cleopatra to Lady Gaga
Jennifer Croll, Ada Buchholz

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