Monique Gray Smith talks about *My Heart Fills With Happiness*

Richard Van Camp
Prolific Author,
Dynamic Storyteller

**Bookmark!**
Celebrating Indigenous Voices

Reviews of 35+ books by S.K. Ali, Tanaz Bhathena, Marianne Dubuc, Ashley Spires and more
Books Matter.
Feature: My Heart Fills With Happiness
Monique Gray Smith’s My Heart Fills With Happiness, illustrated by Julie Flett, has been chosen for the 2019 TD Grade One Book Giveaway. Monique shares where her inspiration for the book came from and ways in which teachers have used it in the classroom.

Hackmatack 2019 winners: Diane Carmel Léger, L’Acadie en baratte (French Fiction), Joanne George (with Sunny the therapy dog), Smiley: A Journey of Love (English Non-fiction), Charis Cotter, The Painting and Daphne Greer for Camped Out (tied in the English Fiction category). The French Non-fiction winners, Karin Gottot and Maxim Cyr for Les Dragouilles en vacances! were not in attendance.

Feature: Lived Realities Inhabit Northern Reflections
Inhabit Media, based in Iqaluit, Nunavut on Baffin Island, is the first Inuit-owned, independent publishing company in the Canadian Arctic. It has become the ultimate creation story for founders Neil Christopher, his partner Louise Flaherty, and brother Danny Christopher. Chatting with Marylynn Miller Oke, Neil reveals what it’s really like to work and survive in the challenging terrain of Northern publishing.

 Bookmark! Indigenous Titles
In this issue CCBC Library Coordinator, Meghan Howe, has compiled a list of books with Indigenous themes for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

We Recommend
Reviews of the latest Canadian books for kids. Titles given Red Leaf Literature status are indicated with a red maple leaf. These books are thought to be of the highest quality and signify titles of exceptional calibre.

Profile: Richard Van Camp
Richard Van Camp is one of the most dynamic storytellers and prolific authors in Canada and he is a proud member of Dogrib (Tlicho) Nation from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. He started his career as a writer for the CBC television series North of 60 and now has 23 books published in several languages. Learn more about Richard and the many genres he writes in this interview with Colette Poitras.


Medium: Gouache on paper and digital media.

About the Illustrator: Julie Flett is a Cree-Métis author, illustrator and artist. She studied fine arts at Concordia University in Montreal and Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver. Julie has received many awards including the 2017 Governor General’s Literary Award for Children’s Literature (Illustration) for her work on When We Were Alone by David Robertson, the 2016 American Indian Library Association Award for Best Picture Book for Little You by Richard Van Camp and she is the three-time recipient of the Christie Harris Illustrated Children’s Literature Prize. For more information, visit julieflett.com.
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Our Thanks
We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.
Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien.

We acknowledge the support of the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an agency of the Government of Ontario. In 2018-19, the OAC invested $61.1 million in 238 communities across Ontario through 2,352 grants to individual artists and 1,424 grants to organizations.

Thank you to Friesens for generously sponsoring the printing of this magazine.

As 2019 has been designated the International Year of Indigenous Languages by the United Nations, I am thrilled to present you with an issue that features some of Canada’s fabulous Indigenous writers, illustrators and publishers.

*My Heart Fills With Happiness* was chosen for the 2019 TD Grade One Book Giveaway. The book will be given to students this fall and it will be written in English and Plains Cree or French and Plains Cree. There will also be room under the Plains Cree to translate the book into another language should families wish to do so. Author Monique Gray Smith tells us where the inspiration for *My Heart Fills With Happiness* came from and shares how the book can support literacy and connection at home, as well as in classrooms. She explains how it can be used to create a sense of happiness, a sense of community and can also be used as a tool to foster social and emotional literacy. I am so grateful for the wonderful piece Monique wrote for us and I hope you’ll enjoy reading it as much as I did.

Richard Van Camp is one of Canada’s most prolific Indigenous authors and dynamic storytellers. Starting his career as a writer for the CBC television series *North of 60*, he has written books in many different genres, has taught creative writing courses and has been the Writer in Residence for the University of Alberta, MacEwan University and the Edmonton Metro Libraries. Many of Richard’s stories include themes of love, forgiveness, healing and the power of redemption. Colette Poitras caught up with Richard between screenings for his new movie *Three Feathers* (based on his popular graphic novel) and we are happy to share their discussion with you.

Neil Christopher, his partner Louise Flaherty, and brother Danny Christopher opened Inhabit Media in 2006. Based in Iqaluit, Nunavut on Baffin Island, the company became the first Inuit-owned, independent publishing company in the Canadian Arctic. Their mission is to preserve the North’s language, legends and oral history and to honour the lived realities of the Nunavummiut community, elders and storytellers. In a chat with Marylyn Miller Oke, Neil reveals what it’s really like to work and survive in the challenging terrain of Northern publishing.

We’d also like to introduce you to Jay Odjick, illustrator of Robert Munsch’s *Bear for Breakfast/Makwa kidji kijebà wìsiniyân*, in our ‘Keep Your Eye On…’ column. We have a great list of Indigenous titles in our ‘Bookmark!’ section and we’ve reviewed 39 new titles for you to enjoy this fall.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

Sandra O’Brien

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My Heart Fills With Happiness

BY MONIQUE GRAY SMITH

My Heart Fills With Happiness was inspired by witnessing the love between a kookum (grandmother) and her grandson. It was the fall of 2015 and I was facilitating a workshop for parents, grandparents and staff at Future 4 Nations Aboriginal Head Start in Mission, BC. The workshop was on trauma, Canada’s history and our resilience as Indigenous people. At lunch time, the children came running in to join us and I could feel the whole energy in the room change. I was smiling to myself and enjoying the energy as I watched the reconnection between the children and adults in the room. I saw a little guy, maybe about four, come running in looking for someone. When his eyes landed on his kookum, he ran right over to her and stopped in front of the chair where she was sitting. Kookum reached out and took his face in her hands. She smiled at him, tipped her head slightly and looked at him with so much love. His whole body changed. His shoulders went back, his chin jutted out, his eyes widened and his smile matched hers. What I felt like I saw, was her heart fill with happiness at seeing him and his heart fill with happiness at the way she looked at him. Tears welled in my eyes. That moment remains one of the most beautiful exchanges of love between two people I’ve ever seen! It also inspired me to think about what fills my heart with happiness. I thought about it on the ferry ride home to Victoria and off and on for the next couple of weeks. Every time I thought about the question, I noticed that none of what filled my heart with happiness cost any money. Rather, it was always about relationships, experiences, love and culture.

A couple weeks after witnessing that love exchange between Kookum and her grandson, I was in a meeting and the whole book came. Literally, it was like a gift that poured out of me and onto the page. A story reminding us of the simple ways we can fill our hearts, and the hearts of those we love, with happiness. Acts like holding the hand of someone we love, walking barefoot in the grass, the smell of bannock baking in the oven and dancing are just a few of the heart happiness examples in the book.

The last words that came were the question — What fills your heart with happiness? When writing those words, I imagined children cozied up to and being read to by someone they love. I wanted children to think about happiness, especially before bed. I wanted them to fall asleep with happy thoughts in their mind and floating around them. In having My Heart Fills With Happiness end with the question, I hoped that children would not only answer it for themselves, but would turn to whomever was reading and ask that question of them. I saw this as one way to support intergenerational connectedness, wellness and healing.

I wasn’t sure what to do with the manuscript when it was done, but I knew I had to do something. I went to Munro’s Books and spent a couple hours in the children’s section looking at books, making a pile of the ones that I liked and who the publishers were. I honestly had no idea how to put a submission together or what to include, I just knew I needed to send it out. While I had one novel that was released in 2013, Tilly: A Story of Hope and Resilience, I had never submitted anything to a publisher before. The publishing of Tilly came from Diane Morriss at Sono Nis Press reading the self-published version of that book. What I also didn’t know was how long it can take to hear back from publishers!

I am grateful to have chosen Orca Book Publishers to work with and be published by and am blessed to have respectful relationships with Andrew Wooldridge, Ruth Linka and the extraordinary pod at Orca. They have been true champions of My Heart Fills With Happiness and the subsequent books I’ve had the privilege to publish with them — You Hold Me Up and Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation.

When I learned that Julie Flett would be illustrating My Heart Fills With Happiness, I was over the moon with excitement. I have immense respect for her as an illustrator, writer and human being. I also think of Julie as the matriarch of Indigenous illustrators in North America. So, to work with her on my first children’s book was far beyond anything I could have ever imagined.
It is not always common in the publishing world for the author and illustrator to communicate, but Julie and I worked differently on this book. We spoke a number of times about the story, the feelings we wanted the children to experience, the potential healing between child and reader and how her illustrations were a powerful tool to foster emotions. I think that synergy, our collaboration and her gorgeous illustrations are integral to what makes *My Heart Fills With Happiness* enticing to children, families and educators.

While I love all the illustrations Julie created for this book, I have two favourites. One is the image of the gentleman holding the little person on his lap and he’s drumming. A couple years ago, I was in Kamloops doing a presentation and the hosts had organized for a drum group to open the evening. I saw this illustration unfold before me. As the drummers sat down to the drum, one of them hoisted his toddler up onto his lap. It was exactly as Julie had drawn it, except the little one didn’t have a ponytail on top of their head. When they were done singing, I gifted the drummer a copy of *My Heart Fills With Happiness* and showed him the illustration. He giggled and shared with me that usually they put their daughter’s hair in a ponytail on top of her head, but that night he was running late so no ponytail. We both had a good laugh.

My other favourite illustration is the little girl in the blue dress twirling. In the book this illustration accompanies the words, *My heart fills with happiness when I feel the sun dancing on my cheeks*. I love that Orca chose this illustration for the cover! I especially love after a reading when little girls come up to me and with glory and joy announce, “I’m on the cover of your book.”

*My Heart Fills With Happiness* is dedicated to the families, staff and elders of Aboriginal Head Start programs and my niece Brianna, for filling our family’s hearts with happiness. One of the most beautiful responses to the book was from Brianna. She was in Grade 3 and it was the day when students were to come to school dressed as their favourite character from a book. Brianna went to school dressed like the little girl on the cover... oh my heart!

Not only has Orca Book Publishers been champions of the little girl on the cover… oh my heart! not only has Orca Book Publishers been champions of the little girl on the cover… oh my heart!...
books with classrooms and educators around the world.

I love hearing from educators the various ways they are using *My Heart Fills With Happiness* with their students. I have heard from educators that they especially pull this book out on rainy days or days when it is too cold for the children to go outside. The focus on happiness helps change the energy of the children and the classroom. Happiness can foster environments where children are settled, engaged, creative and their motivation to learn expands. Cultivating happiness is not a one-off activity with the hope that it helps motivate and create a culture of learning for the week, month or year. Focusing on happiness is a daily activity. It requires a time commitment that in the end has a much bigger pay off than we can anticipate. Perhaps, one of the biggest benefits is supporting children in the development of their emotional intelligence.

There are a variety of creative projects that educators can do with *My Heart Fills With Happiness*. For example, a teacher sent me a beautiful heart she designed for students to draw inside or write words. She said that no matter how many times she does this activity with the students, they almost always come up with something different that fills their hearts with happiness. This is also beneficial when we think about the skill of learning how to reflect. It’s important in this fast-paced world, filled with technology, that we help raise up children who are familiar with the art of reflecting.

Another example was instead of sharing Valentine’s Day cards, the teacher had the students create a heart for each classmate. On the heart they wrote, sometimes with help, what it was about that student that filled their heart with happiness. The teacher then assembled each child’s hearts onto popsicle sticks and tied a ribbon around them to hold them all together. On Valentine’s Day, each child left with a bouquet of hearts. I absolutely loved this as it rules out any chance that a child will be left out of the celebrations.

I’ve visited classrooms where teachers have put various sized hearts up around the room and as part of morning check in, each student gets up and walks to the size of heart that represents how they are feeling that day. It provides an opportunity for the students to pause, reflect and think about how they are feeling. This activity can provide clues to the teacher and support staff of who might need a little extra loving and tenderness that day. Activities like this also provide opportunity for students to care for each other and foster their empathy, as not only do the teachers and support staff see who needs tenderness, but so do the classmates.

I’ve also visited classrooms where the educator reads *My Heart Fills With Happiness* on Monday morning and then each morning for the next month, the day starts with quiet time. The teacher asks the students to close their eyes and think about what is filling their hearts with happiness that day. A form of meditation.

I am always in awe of where books go, whose hands they end up in, whose hearts they weave into and how they can transform us. I honestly never thought *My Heart Fills With Happiness* would continue to be as popular as it is, but I am immensely grateful.

Monique Gray Smith is a mixed-heritage woman of Cree, Lakota and Scottish ancestry. She is an accomplished consultant, writer and international speaker.
News Roundup

AWARDS, BOOK LAUNCHES, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND THE LATEST NEWS

Budge Wilson, a cherished Atlantic Canadian author, celebrated her 92nd birthday on Thursday, May 2nd, and we, the Nova Scotia Reading Circle for Project Bookmark Canada, wanted to help her celebrate.

Members of the Nova Scotia Reading Circle for Project Bookmark Canada have been meeting and discussing possible passages for future Nova Scotia Bookmarks since 2015, and we have recommended several passages from Budge Wilson’s fiction and poetry to the board of Project Bookmark Canada for consideration for a future Bookmark. We feel her contribution to Canadian literature is worthy of such an honour.

As Sarah Emsley pointed out to the 35-40 of us gathered at Woozles: “There are strong ties between Budge Wilson’s writing and the cities, towns, villages, coastlines and landscapes (and weather) of Nova Scotia, as many (or probably all) of you know. The “slow, labouring springs” and the “quick, grudging summers” on the South Shore in her story “Be-ers and Do-ers,” for example, “the razzle-dazzle colours of the low-lying scarlet bushes in the fall, blazing against the black of the spruce trees and the bluest sky in the world,” and the “winters — greyer than doom, and endless.” The “ducks and seagulls and sandpipers” at Point Pleasant Park that make the 11-year-old heroine of the story “Mothers” “feel free, like I had wings, too” — though her mother forbids her to go to the park alone.

The “retreating coastline” that Anne Shirley watches from the ferry as she leaves Nova Scotia for PEI in Before Green Gables, “bewitched by the limitless expanse of sea, the galloping whitecaps, the wheeling gulls, the smell of salt and seaweed,” thinking, “This is what I’ve been waiting for my whole life.” And “the music of the sea on the rocks” in Cape Breton, which inspires a young boy to think of a brand-new tune in his head, in the picture book A Fiddle for Angus. In vivid, memorable detail, Budge Wilson’s words give us these places and the characters who shape or are shaped by them — characters who are settled in these places, or visit, or long to leave or return to them.

We hope someday there will be a Budge Wilson Bookmark in Nova Scotia. In the meantime, we wanted to celebrate Budge and her work now and invite others to celebrate with us.

What better place to celebrate Budge and her work than at Halifax’s cherished children’s bookstore, Woozles, the oldest children’s bookstore in the country. The evening began when Budge arrived with her husband Alan Wilson, as well as her daughters Glynis Wilson Boulbee and Andrea Wilson, her grandson Lucas Jarche, and close family friend Kirsten Franklin. Liz Crocker, one of the founding owners of Woozles, started things off with a warm welcome to everyone. This was followed by an introduction to Budge and her contribution to children’s literature, given by Carol McDougall.

In her remarks, Carol reminded us that, “When Budge began her writing career in the early 1980s the Canadian children’s book industry was in its infancy, with just a handful of children’s books being published each year. Budge has been a pioneer — paving the way for the vibrant Canadian children’s book industry we have today. Budge helped put Canadian children’s writing on the world stage — contributing 34 titles with 30 foreign editions in 15 languages.” Carol describes Budge as “generous and kind, wise and wild, brilliant and brave”, walking through life “with a child’s curiosity and an open heart”.

Sarah Emsley read a passage from Budge Wilson’s story The House on High Street, in which the characters journey from Halifax to Dartmouth on the ferry. She also spoke about Project Bookmark Canada and its vision of a “literary trail” across the country.

Grade 12 student Katherine Shore came up next to read an excerpt from the middle grade novel The Christmas That Almost Wasn’t and Alexander MacLeod read an excerpt from The Leaving. As a professor of Atlantic Canada Studies, Alex considers Budge Wilson one of the great writers of this region and has taught her material in his classes, as has Andrea Schwenke Wyile, professor of English at Acadia University, who read an excerpt from the novel Before Green Gables.

The Nova Scotia Reading Circle received many birthday greetings for Budge from friends who could not attend, some of which were read to Budge by those who were present. The readers — friends and fellow writers living in or near Halifax — included, Carole Langille, Janet Barkhouse, Susan Kerslake, Jill MacLean, Joanne McCormick, Nina Waite, Gwen Davies, Norene Smiley and Sylvia Gunnyer. Greetings were sent by Hughena Matheson, President of the Board of Directors, Project Bookmark Canada, as well as friends from as far away as Banff and as close to home as Cape Breton.

Carol McDougall came up again at this point to read an excerpt from a poem in After Swissair, followed by Budge herself, who read the poem Epiphany. Epiphany is a poem that reflects on Budge’s own heartache over the Swissair disaster. She read the poem with courage and warmth — a perfect way to end the evening.

Sixth-grade student Gail Emsley presented Budge with flowers and we all sang “Happy Birthday.” There was cake and conversation and Budge was kind enough to stay a little longer to sign books.

There is no doubt that Budge Wilson has fans the world over, but here in Nova Scotia, the province Budge calls home, she is truly treasured.

The Members of the Nova Scotia Reading Circle for Project Bookmark Canada
Tell us about illustrating Bear for Breakfast/Makwa kidji kijebà wisiniyàn written by Robert Munsch.

Bear for Breakfast was just a ton of fun to draw! The bear, in particular, was great fun — how he moves, runs, figuring out those things and finding ways to present him in a fun/funny light; a great opportunity.

How we’ve worked so far is that I get the manuscript from Scholastic Canada and Robert and I propose what I’d call a shot listing — I pick out visuals that I think best present the action and or comedic elements on any particular page and Robert and our editors have a chance to make suggestions and from there I’m off to the races to get drawing!

Tell us why it’s important to you to see it published in Algonquin.

For me, and I can only speak for myself, it means a chance. It means hope, the possibility that maybe we can do something to help preserve our languages. I don’t have access to numbers, but in my community, Kitigan Zibi, we are losing our language speakers at a very quick rate.

The hope for me is that educators both on and off reserve can use books such as this to give kids an entryway into the language and that’s why it being not only so readily available, but successful, means everything to me.

Tell us about your process of illustrating and who inspires you.

I am incredibly lucky in that as a kid I drew on paper at a kitchen table, all hunched over but today I work entirely digitally! I work on an iPad Pro and usually colour on an iMac. I can bring my work with me wherever I go.

I like to start with a nice big blocky pencil and just rough sketch out a page — generally rarely lifting my pencil off the page, just blocking out shapes, refining till I find the truest lines and then create a new layer over top of what I have and doing a tighter drawing. I come from a back ground in comics so I use that same approach with picture books — pencils, then inked lines and finally colour on layers beneath the inked layers. It’s what I know and can accomplish most quickly.

My biggest inspirations growing up were comic artists like John Byrne, Todd McFarlane — artists who I’d find out as I got a bit older were Canadian and that made me feel like maybe I could actually become a professional artist someday! Made it feel more possible, if that makes sense, to know there were people here doing it, even if Canada is a pretty big ‘here!’
The world is both much bigger and far smaller when you’re a kid, maybe. :)

Today I’m most inspired by people who are pursuing their passions artistically in any medium — people who aren’t bound to a single genre or medium. I’ve been blessed to work in comics, picture books/children’s books, TV, design and I enjoy all those things. The idea of doing only ONE thing forever is preposterous to me. Sing your song — no matter the genre.

How did you first get published?

I started out in comics and the best way I could think of to kind of break in was to go to comic cons and show my work, network and meet people.

They used to say that you should go and get your portfolio reviewed by artists and editors, but I never really saw that result in anything, and more often than not it seemed like more of a method to drive sales than scout talent.

It kind of felt like a bit of a reach. I started self-publishing and prepared a business plan, applied for grants and took out a small business loan and began attending comic cons as an exhibitor and just... summoned up the guts to hand my books out to everyone in the industry who would take them!

It was hard, especially for a young kid from the Rez who wasn’t formally trained in art, but I had nothing to lose. I’d quit my day job and was working in a bar to pay the rent while I drew and wrote in the daytime... and I landed a deal to bring my comic Kagagi: The Raven to an established publisher who was pretty hot at the time. This ultimately resulted in an animated series adaptation that I produced, which airs internationally!

You never know what can happen if you can find the courage to try and believe in yourself.

What do you like about illustrating for a younger audience?

This is corny and will sound cliché but honestly... its so hard NOT to feel like a kid again when you’re drawing something like Blackflies or Bear for Breakfast!

Honestly, there were points when I was drawing Blackflies, drawing the expressions on characters when they were being sprayed for example, where I’d be sitting in my studio laughing out loud. You can’t beat THAT! It’s work, at times it can be challenging because of deadlines or because you want these to be as good as they can be — but what a job to have.

I’m truly blessed.

The other thing that’s a lot of fun is seeing kids enjoying the books and reading them, looking at the art. It’s just really humbling to see something you’ve worked hard, long hours on make someone’s eyes light up!
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Richard Van Camp is one of the most dynamic storytellers and prolific authors in Canada and he is a proud member of Dogrib (Tlicho) Nation from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. After graduating from the En’owkin International School of Writing, he completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Creative Writing Program at the University of Victoria. He then went on to obtain a Master’s Degree from the University of British Columbia in Creative Writing.

Starting his career as a writer for the CBC television series *North of 60*, he now has 23 books published in several languages. Not sticking to one genre, his titles include children’s board books, graphic novels, young adult novels, poems and short story collections.

World renowned, readers will probably recognize titles such as the award-winning *Welcome Song for Baby: A Lullaby for Newborns*, available in English and dual language English/ Nêhiyawēwin (Plains Cree), as well as *Nighty-Night: A Bedtime Song for Babies*. Both titles feature beautiful photos of parents with their babies. He collaborated with the well-known Nêhiyawak (Cree)/Métis illustrator and artist Julie Flett for his best-selling third book for babies, *Little You*. It is available in English and also published in the dual languages of English/Dene Yaté (South Slavey), English/Nīhithawīwin (Bush Cree), English/ Nêhiyawēwin (Plains Cree) and English/ Dëne Dedline Yaté (Chipewyan). The highly recommended title *We Sang You Home* was his second collaboration with Julie Flett and is available in English as well as dual English/ Nêhiyawēwin (Plains Cree). Another of his baby books, with full colour photos, is *Kiss by Kiss* which is also available in English and dual language Nêhiyawēwin (Plains Cree) and English. His latest photo board book for little ones is called *May We Have Enough to Share* and it is a wonderful testament to beginning and ending each day with a sense of gratitude.

In addition to the board books, Richard has two highly acclaimed children’s books *What’s the Most Beautiful Thing About Horses?* and *A Man Called Raven*, both illustrated by Nêhiyawak (Cree) celebrated artist George Littlechild.

You can also access all 23 of Richard’s books in Braille format through Accessible Resource Centre-British Columbia (ARC-BC) and the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired (PRCVI).

In addition to his own writing, Richard has taught creative writing courses at the University of British Columbia and at the Emily Carr Institute, and has been the Writer in Residence for the University of Alberta, MacEwan University and the Edmonton Metro Libraries.

Many of Richard’s stories include themes of love, forgiveness, healing and the power of redemption. Known for his positivity and kindness, he is very popular with children, youth and adults at the many community presentations, author talks and writer’s workshops that he is invited to speak at.

I caught up with him in between screenings for his new movie *Three Feathers* (based on his popular graphic novel).
Three Feathers is the second of your books to be turned into a feature film. Can you explain the process and how much input you have had in ensuring they are keeping the spirit of the book within the film?

That’s a great question. I’ve had three short stories turned into short movies (Hickey Gone Wrong, Dogrib Midnight Runners and Firebear Called Them Faith Healers) and two feature films: Three Feathers and The Lesser Blessed. I love collaborating with other artists and I’ve learned that the best way to help is to get out of the way and let directors do what they were born to do — and that is envision the story their way. I’m proud of each movie and look forward to doing more.

2019 is the International Year of Indigenous Languages. As noted in your introduction, some of your titles are in several different languages such as Tlicho, Dene, Dënde Dedlîne Yâté (Chipewyan), Dene Yâté (South Slavey), Nêhiyawêwin (Plains Cree y dialect), Nîhîthawîwin (Bush Cree th dialect), Braille and English. Can you speak to the importance of having your own titles available in these languages?

As you know, so many of us never had a chance to learn our languages growing up so I’m proud to be using children’s books, graphic novels, social media and movies to celebrate our languages and culture in ways that celebrate just how beautiful we are as Indigenous people.

How did your journey into writing start and what is your process?

I get up at 4:00 AM just about every day to get to work on the stories that are waiting to be written down. Today I worked on my novel The Grass Dancer before and I combed through 50 pages and tweaked a few lines. I’ve been working on this novel for a few years now and it’s still blooming every morning, just waiting for me to dive back in.

I realized when I was 19 that no one was telling our story of growing up in the Northwest Territories in the 1980s. Oh, it was a golden time. We had so much fun. In fact, I think my new novel captures that. My first novel, The Lesser Blessed, took me five years to write. I showed it to Carolyn Swayze and she became my agent. She sold it to Douglas & McIntyre and it came out in 1996. My new short story collection, Moccasin Square Gardens, will arrive any day here at the house. I was able to work with Barbara Pulling, my editor of The Lesser Blessed, 23 years later. I can’t wait to hold my new collection. It’s funny and we deserve to laugh and celebrate all the reclaiming happening right now.

You have shared a story about working with George Littlechild on your book What’s the Most Beautiful Thing You Know About Horses? Can you tell the readers a little about it?

George Littlechild was one of my biggest heroes growing up. When I was attending Paul William Kaeser High School in Fort Smith for Grade 8 through 12, there were these Health Canada posters promoting Honesty, Integrity, Bravery, Humility, etc., and I had never seen artwork that spoke to my soul so completely. I saw my mother in his artwork. I saw my grandmother. I saw my aunts. I saw my brothers. I saw my uncles. I saw us as Dené people and I was so astonished. I am still so grateful to have two books out with Mr. Littlechild — A Man Called Raven and What’s the Most Beautiful Thing You Know About Horses?

Of all of the books you have written, do you have a favourite? Why/why not?

Each one of my books is my favourite for different reasons. I work with great editors and publishers to create the most beautiful books that I can. I’m proud of each one. Twenty-three books in 23 years. Wow! Each one is braided with such great memories and personal victories in terms of pushing craft and trying new techniques.

Little You has an acknowledgement to Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam. Can you tell us why?

My wife and I were at a Pearl Jam concert years ago and Mr. Vedder stopped the concert mid stream and asked us all to sing “Happy Birthday” to his daughter. He literally held up his phone and thousands of us all sang “Happy Birthday” together. As we sang, Little You came to me. I thumbed it out on my phone as I sang my heart out.
It’s a reminder that a song, a poem, a short story, a lullaby can come to you anytime anywhere and you have to be ready. It’s the sweetest lightning strike when it does happen and I’m so grateful every time it does.

How might teachers use *The Journey Forward: A Novella on Reconciliation*, which you co-wrote with Monique Gray Smith, to teach about reconciliation?

I was just saying that reconciliation is about taking little steps together. Reconciliation is about listening, sharing, learning. There’s a great teacher’s guide by Alison Gear in *The Journey Forward* that supports teachers in exploring reconciliation. I think students today are plugged into what’s happening globally and locally and really want to understand why and how residential schools were allowed to happen. My mom and uncles went and we are all trying to reclaim so much of what was almost lost so long ago.

Julie Flett has illustrated two of your books, *Little You* and *We Sang You Home*. Tell us about that experience. Did you get to collaborate with Julie on the artwork or did you write the text and then hand it over to Julie to illustrate?

I had wanted to work with Julie Flett for years before I wrote *Little You*. I was so happy when I learned she had agreed as she was one of my dream artists of all time. To work with her a second time with *We Sang You Home* was a slam dunk. Her work captures innocence so wonderfully. I just simply adore all that she does. My goodness what a talent and force she is, hey?

Can you share who else has inspired you along your career path?

I was the Handi Bus driver in Fort Smith for a while and I had the privilege of driving our matriarchs around. Irene Sanderson, Maria Brown, Helena Mandeville, Rosa Mercredi — they all took me under their wings and I’m a better man because of this. I also grew up reading *The Warlord, Heavy Metal, CARtoons, Savage Sword of Conan*. I love Stephen King, Judy Blume, Pat Conroy. They all continue to inspire me, even the memory of growing up in Fort Smith. We were rich because we knew what we had — the beauty and strength that comes from the land, the Slave River, each other.

The most recent books that have inspired me are *Son of a Trickster* by Eden Robinson, *The Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice, *Indiscretion* by Charles Dubow, and *Sara* by Garth Ennis, illustrated by Steve Epting and coloured by Elizabeth Breitweiser. I think about Ted May’s *Injury* comics all the time. They’re so funny and so slacker. I love them. Did you all read *Cobra: The Last Laugh*? Oh My God, Antonio Fuso’s artwork is jaw dropping. Christos Gage and Mike Costa co-wrote this and someone needs to make this into a TV series or movie yesterday. *The Girl with the Botticelli Face* by W.D. Valgardson will always haunt me. I’m grateful to Stephen King, as well. What a force!

You do a lot of presentations with children. What is your most memorable question from these presentations?

To make kids laugh with their families is the best job on the planet. I can’t think of any just now, but I always love walking into a room knowing that the stories that are about to be told will bring light and laughter and hope. To pass along the stories that were shared with me by my friends and Elders is such a joy. It keeps me young.

You have many titles which focus on the struggles of youth. Do you have any advice for young people?

Hang in there and ask for help when you need it. I’m 47 now and have never been happier. To be a husband, to be a father, to have a safe home, to read soul-inspiring books and to listen to great tunes and to cook for family and friends, to write the stories of my dreams and to help others with their own: it’s a sweet life. The universe wants us to be happy.

Speaking of advice, do you have any for aspiring writers (particularly Indigenous writers)?

Read and listen. Read the literature out there that lights your spirit on fire and listen with your blood for the stories that make your whole being roar. Take all of that and put your own words together to tell the stories only you can. Tell the truth — your truth — and don’t hold back. Write something that you would like to read. Give’er!

What is next?

I’m looking forward to finding the right publisher for *The Grass Dancer* and I’m working on a graphic novel series for WheeTago War that complements the WheeTago War stories that are in my short story collections. I want to work with my dream artists like Antonio Fuso, Christopher Shy and Menton3.

We’re working on a number of movie projects right now and I’m excited about that. Most of all, I just want to be the best father and husband that I can and I just want to spoil everyone who comes over for supper.

That’s a pretty sweet life, hey?

Last but not least, what are you most grateful for?

I’m grateful to my wife, Keavy Martin, who supports my writing and touring. I live to spoil her and make her laugh. I’m grateful to our son who came to me in a dream before he was born. Edzazii, I love you so. You and Mommy make my heart so happy. You’re growing so fast and I am so proud of you. I’m grateful to my family and friends. I’m grateful for this life. I’m so happy we’re all healthy. I honestly live now to help others because I’ve been given so much.

The one thing I continually am reminded of, in all of the storytellers I’ve met, is we are here for others. We’re here to help. We’re here to serve.

I do my best to do exactly that, every day.

Mahsi cho.

Colette Poitras is a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, holds a Masters in Library and Information Science and is the Manager of Indigenous Public Outreach for Public Library Services Branch, Alberta.
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Lived Realities Inhabit Northern Reflections

For Inhabit Media, the passion for telling stories of the North comes straight from the heart and from those who lived them.

BY MARYLYNN MILLER OKE

Inhabit Media has become the ultimate creation story for founders Neil Christopher, his partner Louise Flaherty, and brother Danny Christopher. Based in Iqaluit, Nunavut on Baffin Island, the company became the first Inuit-owned, independent publishing company in the Canadian Arctic.

With that distinction, their drive to preserve the North’s language, legends and oral history far exceeds any commercial venture. The mission to share and honour the lived realities of the Nunavummiut community, elders and storytellers has become a personal crusade.


Neil Christopher reveals what it’s really like to work and survive in the challenging terrain of Northern publishing.

To see it is to know it

Trained as professional educators, the team combined their creative talents to form Inhabit Media in 2006 and began publishing books about the Inuit way of life for children, young adults and adults. The company also produces films and spawned Inhabit Education.

Nearly two decades ago, Neil and Louise trained candidates to teach in an Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun and English setting within the Nunavut education system. After witnessing the difficulties faced by students and teachers who had few resources, they decided to make children’s books in the Inuktitut language that reflected the lives of their students.

“We realized that Nunavut children didn’t have that,” recalls Neil who is also an author and filmmaker. “They were always reading about someone else’s culture. It looked like
that was the special place to be, not their home or the things they did with their families."

For Neil, Louise and Danny, it was imperative that the lives of Nunavummiut children were respected and protected in books and that Inuit children would be inspired by their own stories.

“That’s what inspired Inhabit Media to come into being. Educators sitting down and thinking, ‘How do we serve our community and create something that is reflective of everyone, the culture, the lifestyle, the sensibilities and the values of the place that we live?’”

A monster story brings it home
As a child, Neil loved a good monster story like mahaha. The character was initially found in a limited number of printed books by Elder, teacher and translator, the late Mark Kalluak who eventually became an author and illustrator with Inhabit Media. The company has since published several books on the character, transforming the once obscure mahaha, into a well-known cultural icon.

“Mythic characters are almost becoming part of popular culture in the North, which is wonderful to see. I can see how important it is to locally create books and how influential they are. Now you can refer to the book and everyone knows it. It’s part of everyone’s childhood.”

Through the release of the mahaha book, Neil feels he was targeting the boy in him who didn’t want to read.

“We had teachers telling us that little boys who don’t like to listen at story time were, all of a sudden, asking for that book. One teacher had a rule that they could only read that book three times in a week. It was hilarious.”

He adds, “They were little kids who were hungry for stories about where they’re from. We really saw that.”

Can’t stop the contagion
The team from Inhabit Media often see people carrying their books around town. They even run into starring characters in unexpected places, such as the local kids’ cooking class where Danny was doing a cookbook photo shoot. He came across several students who had inspired children’s books authored by their parents and were featured in the stories.

“These stories are tied to real people and it comes from such an authentic place. That’s what’s really exciting to me. It’s so good for role modelling in our community and it seems to be almost contagious.”

According to Neil, many local kids assume that everyone’s in a book now.

“It’s funny when I see Leah from Leah’s Mustache Party, it’s kind of like, ‘Yeah, that’s me in the book.’ It makes the book real and normalizes it. It takes away the distance between publishing. They are part of that literary world and anyone can be part of it.”

Authentic or bust
Although the North’s authenticity still exists amongst southern influences, Neil believes that Iqaluit and the North are in a time of transformation.

“We decide for ourselves what is a Northern story. That’s the most important thing.”

In turn, Inhabit Media often ventures where publishers from the South dare not. He refers to a story of a hunter that must blind a polar bear in order to survive.

“We’re a hunting culture in the North. The Giant Bear by Jose Angutinngurniq is a traditional story about someone being resourceful and trying to survive against a far more powerful being.”

While he feels no one in Nunavut would object, he acknowledges that many, outside of the Arctic community, would deem such stories as inappropriate for children.

“Then we’ll say, fine don’t buy it. But we’re doing things with our sensibilities. Sure, it’s not appropriate for you and that’s fine.”

The company also publish books with wider commercial opportunities. Neil is proud of their work and wishes that all Canadian communities could have a publishing company dedicated to representing their authentic voice.

“To have all of that contributing to the diverse voice of Canadian literature, we’re all the richer for it.”

Neil is encouraged by the community support for their publications, including the Nunavut Department of Education which is developing novel studies on some of their books.

Keeping it real
Currently, Inhabit Media has the capacity to create stories from Nunavut. While they are exploring expansion into a Yellowknife office, they are focussed on Nunavut stories that can be verified firsthand. As Northern publishers, they feel this is vital.

In addition to oral histories and centuries-old legends, Neil feels the authentic Inuit voice can be found in modern tales such as Leah’s Mustache Party about a little girl who wanted to have a mustache party for her birthday.

“If you look at that book, you might think that’s not an Inuit book, but it is. It’s written by an Inuit parent and her daughter. It’s a contemporary story that’s an authentic Northern story because it happened to a little girl in Iqaluit.”

Working so hard to get it right
Neil’s team agonizes over the details. For a sensitive topic such as residential schooling, they require that the author has a personal connection, a personal investment and the authority and sensitivity that comes with lived experience.

“I feel the storytellers that remember the old stories are the people who should be recognized for recalling and publishing their original stories, not someone who heard it once and wants to write it down.”

Neil remembers asking Mark Kalluak how he knows these stories so well.

“He said, ‘You have to realize my mother told me this story almost every day of my life growing up. I’ve heard it 10,000 times. Every word of this story is burned into my brain.’”

As a publisher, Neil still recalls the advice elders have given over the years.

“Most of them are not with us anymore, but I hear their voices in my head when working on a project. We feel accountable to them, to their families, to everyone.”
**Strong connections through stories**

It seems storytelling has magnetic powers to bring generations together. Neil remembers reluctant students from a past Traditional Stories course. According to them, their family didn’t have traditional stories. As teacher Neil suspected, they were wrong.

“As soon as they started asking their elders, they just started flooding them with stories. They had been holding them in for so long. That kind of intergenerational conversation is so exciting.”

Now, Neil points to award-winning singer-songwriter and Inhabit Media author, Susan Aglukark. Her book made CBC Books’ List of Top 25 Canadian YA and Children’s Literature of 2018. *Una Huna?: What is This?* depicts a girl and the impact felt by her Northern community after encountering a trading ship from the South. According to Neil, Susan told him that she connected with her own mother in a different way while writing the book and learning about what her life must have been like at contact between North and South.

“Unfortunately, after that generation is gone, we won’t remember the pre-contact time or the early time in communities. We’re working hard to record them so that those lived experiences will not be forgotten. We are also recording our community’s history and in a real way, becoming a part of popular culture in Nunavut.”

Neil also feels a strong cultural identity can broaden the community and aid with issues such as high suicide rates that can be associated with the dislocation of culture.

“It’s important that [each of us] realize who we are and be proud of who we are.”

**Discovering stories, searching for pictures**

In the beginning it was tough to coax people into sharing their story. Now, they are reaching out and sending in manuscripts.

However, Neil thinks book illustrators are harder to find. In addition to using international illustrators, he credits Babah Kalluk, Germaine Arnaktauyok, Celina Kalluk and Megan Kyak-Monteith as successful Nunavut artists who practice the demanding discipline.

“People think that the North is full of artists, and it is, but it’s not full of illustrators. Illustrating is a very different animal. We made a decision early on that we were not going to be limited to publish one book a year because that’s all we could get illustrated in Nunavut at the beginning. So, we reached out to the whole world. However, we art direct the books in Nunavut to make sure that the cultural details are accurate.

**Publishing in traditional language**

A big part of Inhabit Media’s publishing initiative is Inuktitut literacy. Their goal is to have every book available in Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun followed by English. Some are also available in French.

“There aren’t a lot of books in the world that are in Inuktitut. Elders and proficient speakers often say that the language spoken by young speakers is not as strong. So, we need to have books that model strong, rich language, rich vocabulary and proper grammar.”

**Inhabit Education**

Created initially by Inhabit Media, Inhabit Education works separately to provide educators and families with educational resources that feature Northern perspectives, ways of life and imagery. In addition to counting skills and social emotional learning, their books, such as the Nunavummi reading series, support children at various reading levels.

“We saw there was a real need. If not, all the resources would be coming from the South.”

**Challenging Responsibilities**

Aside from balancing work, family and getting enough sleep, Neil feels that getting the books to the people who want to read them is a big challenge. In a publishing world known for its small profit margins, he is encouraged to see a resurgence of small bookstores who carefully curate their collections.

“We’ve been going into foreign rights sales because that’s the responsibility as a publisher. We’re responsible to those authors, to protect their work and to help them derive an income from it. As we expand, our responsibility increases because we are trying to help an industry in the North to take off.”

**Lucky Nunavut, lucky everyone**

“I think Nunavut is lucky to have an independent publisher working on its behalf. I feel so fortunate, so lucky to work with the community and authors.”

Neil values opportunities such as the Association of Canadian Publishers, for small publishers to get together to share stories.

“It’s great when we can all sit down, realize that we’re all on the same team and figure this thing out together.”

Marylynn Miller Oke is a freelance writer. With experience in broadcast and public relations, she covers a wide range of today’s intriguing topics.
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Bookmark! highlights books for a variety of grade levels around a particular theme. CCBC’s Library Coordinator, Meghan Howe, has compiled a list of Indigenous titles that would make great additions to public, school and home libraries.

**INDIGENOUS STORIES**

**PICTURE BOOKS FOR PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 4**

**The Girl and the Wolf**
written by Katherena Vermette
illustrated by Julie Flett
(Thetys Books, 2019)

While picking berries with her mother, a little girl wanders too far into the woods. When she realizes she is lost, she begins to panic. Adding to her perceived fear, a large grey wolf suddenly appears and begins asking her a series of questions in an effort to help her find her way home.

**Go Show the World:**
**A Celebration of Indigenous Heroes**
written by Wab Kinew
illustrated by Joe Morse
(Tundra Books, 2018)

Celebrating the stories of Indigenous people throughout time, this beautiful and inspiring picture book is a tribute to historic and modern-day Indigenous heroes, featuring figures such as Tecumseh, Sacagawea, Canadian goalie Carey Price and former NASA astronaut John Herrington.

**Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox**
written and illustrated by Danielle Daniel
(Groundwood Books, 2015)

In this introduction to the Anishinaabe tradition of totem animals, children, wearing masks representing their chosen animal, explain why they identify with different creatures. The author’s note explains the importance of totem animals in Anishinaabe culture and how they also act as animal guides, instructing and protecting children.

**Sukaq and the Raven**
written by Roy Goose and Kerry McCluskey
illustrated by Qin Leng
(Inhabit Media, 2017)

Sukaq loves to drift off to sleep listening to the story of how a giant raven created the world. But this time, as his mother begins the story and his eyelids become heavy, he is suddenly whisked away on the wings of the raven to ride along as the entire world is formed!

**When We Were Alone**
written by David A. Robertson
illustrated by Julie Flett
(HighWater Press, 2016)

A young girl is curious about her grandmother’s long braided hair and beautifully coloured clothing. Why does she speak another language and spend so much time with her family? Nókom (grandmother) explains about life in a residential school long ago, where everything was taken away. A story about a difficult time in history and, ultimately, of empowerment and strength.

**JUNIOR & INTERMEDIATE FICTION AND NON-FICTION FOR GRADES 3-9**

**The Chief: Mistahimaskwa**
(Tales from Big Spirit)
written by David A. Robertson
illustrated by Scott B. Henderson
(HighWater Press, 2016)

Sarah is relieved to find the book she’d dropped the previous day, but when she opens the book, the story, about the Cree chief Mistahimaskwa, comes alive. Sarah is taken back to the Saskatchewan Plains of 1832, where the young boy who would become the great chief first learns the ways of his people, and through to the final days of his life.

**He Who Dreams**
(Orca Limelights)
written by Melanie Florence
(Orca Book Publishers, 2017)

John stumbles into an Indigenous dance class and, after he attends his first powwow, he is hooked. But if he really wants to dance, he’ll have to stop hiding it from his friends, teammates and family.

**My First Métis Lobstick**
written and illustrated by Leah Marie Dorion
translated by Norman Fleury
(Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2014)

This book, written in both English and Michif, takes young readers back to Canada’s fur trade era by focusing on a Métis family’s preparations for a lobstick celebration and feast in the boreal forest.
**Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation**  
written by Monique Gray Smith  
(Orca Book Publishers, 2017)

Canada's relationship with its Indigenous people has suffered as a result of both the residential school system and the lack of understanding of the historical and current impact of those schools. Readers will learn about the lives of survivors and learn from the allies who are putting the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada into action.

**Turtle Island: The Story of North America’s First People**  
written by Eldon Yellowhorn and Kathy Lowinger  
(Annick Press, 2017)

Native legend has it that the Americas were formed on the back of a turtle. This book fills a gap in history by going back as far as the Ice Age to explore what life might have been like for North America’s Indigenous people thousands of years pre-contact.

**The Marrow Thieves**  
written by Cherie Dimaline  
(DCB, 2017)

In a future world ravaged by global warming, North American Indigenous people are hunted and harvested for their bone marrow, which holds the cure for recovering something the rest of the population has lost: the ability to dream. Frenchi, 16, and his companions survive by staying hidden… but one of them may hold the secret to defeating the marrow thieves.

**Strangers**  
(The Reckoner, Book 1)  
written by David A. Robertson  
(HighWater Press, 2017)

When Cole, 17, returns to Wounded Sky First Nation, he finds his community in chaos. With the aid of an unhelpful spirit, a disfigured ghost and his two oldest friends, Cole tries to figure out his purpose and unravel the mysteries he left behind a decade ago. Teens will also want to read the sequels, *Monsters* and *Ghosts*.

**Those Who Run in the Sky**  
written by Aviaq Johnston  
(Annick Press, 2017)

A strange and violent blizzard leaves Pitu, a young shaman, stranded on the sea ice in the world of the spirits, a world populated with terrifying creatures. When he finds a fellow shaman, Pitu must muster his shamanic powers to return them to the world of the living.

**Dreaming in Indian: Contemporary Native American Voices**  
edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale  
(Annick Press, 2014)

This collection of writing, artwork and photographs showcases the lives of Indigenous people, providing an opportunity to tell their stories, their way. Insightful, thought-provoking and honest, this book will shatter commonly held stereotypes.

**Fire Song**  
written by Adam Garnet Jones  
(Annick Press, 2018)

Shane is reeling from his sister’s suicide, but he can’t turn to his friend David for comfort because they must hide their relationship from everyone on the rez. His mother’s grief and David’s refusal to move to the city threaten his dream of going away to university. But when another tragedy strikes, Shane and David are forced to make difficult choices.

**Fire Starters**  
(The Debwe Series)  
written by Jen Storms  
illustrated by Toma Felzo Gas  
colour by Donovan Yaciuk  
(HighWater Press, 2016)

Looking for a little mischief after discovering an old flare gun, Ron and Ben find themselves in trouble when the local gas bar on Agamiing Reserve goes up in flames, and they are wrongly accused. As the investigation goes forward, community attitudes are revealed, and the truth slowly comes to light.
Twenty poems in all, they are as unique as a group of kindergarteners can be. Subject matter shifts from page to page as does mood. Bramer plays with form and length, from minimalist as in “Little Yellow House”:

Poem
lives
inside
a little
yellow
house.

Come visit her with me?

to dense as in “Owl Secrets”:

I love an owl with eyes
that see to the bottom of me.
I am an ocean, I whisper to my owl,
I am old inside my body.

... and everything in between.

The subjects can be ordinary as in “The Snow Is Melting” or emotional as in “afterschool” or thoughtful as in “The Envelope” (“... My mommy is a pearl / My mommy is a bear...”) or rambunctious as in “My Cars Never Sleep” (“My two best cars are Crashout and Powerdog...”) or even scientific as in “Three Hearts and No Bones at All” (“Did you know that octopuses have three hearts?...”). This is a rich, potent and poignant collection.

Illustrator Cindy Derby treats each of the poems with sensitivity, individuality and whimsy. Small poems are matched by equally minimalist images. For example, there is a tiny yellow house opposite the text of “Little Yellow House”. For longer poems, illustration and colour spill over the page. Tones of the watercolour, India ink and digital collage illustrations are muted and dreamy, reflecting the fanciful and surprisingly pensive world of young children.

This gentle and thoughtful collection of poems can be enjoyed quietly with a parent and child or in a classroom. Dive in, reader, and enjoy. You never know where you will find the perfect poem for yourself.

Theo Heras is an author and a former children’s librarian living in Toronto.
Cooking with Bear: A Story and Recipes from the Forest
written by Deborah Hodge
illustrated by Lisa Cinar
Groundwood Books, 2019
978-1-77306-074-3 (hc) $19.95
978-1-77306-304-1 (eBook) $16.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Cooking | Foraging | Recipes | Forest Animals

When Bear wakes up in the spring, the first things on his mind are his friends. Before he goes around the forest to see how everyone is faring after the winter, however, Bear gets to work in the kitchen. The soup he makes from forest-gathered ingredients smells so good it draws Fox in for a visit, and the two friends take a culinary stroll through the forest, gathering favourite ingredients from Squirrel, Chickadee and others, so that Bear can help Fox learn to cook.

With friendly, colourful illustrations and a thoughtful cast of characters, this story charmed me in every way. And, a bonus — Hodge intersperses recipes within the narrative, providing a story that can be read (and used) in multiple ways. Kids can cook along with Bear and the recipes themselves encourage conversations about using seasonal, local ingredients to prepare a variety of foods. The recipes are kid-friendly (with instructions to ask adults for help with stove top or oven directions) and each recipe includes suggestions for modifications depending, for example, on which berries a reader might want to mix together for a parfait. I’m particularly looking forward to trying the nut burgers (Squirrel’s favourite) and my daughter loves all kinds of muffins, so Bear’s Blueberry Muffins are sure to make an appearance in our house, too.

Jen McConnel

Fairy Science
(Fairy Science, Book 1)
written and illustrated by Ashley Spires
Tundra Books, 2019
978-0-77526-425-0 (hc) $21.99
978-0-77526-426-7 (eBook) $10.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Science | STEM | Fairies | Fairy Magic

Anything by Ashley Spires goes to the top of my reading list (I adore The Most Magnificent Thing and The Thing Lou Couldn’t Do), so I was particularly excited to read Fairy Science.

With bold illustrations and her characters’ signature resilience, Spires tells the story of Esther, a fairy who prefers to put her faith in the scientific method rather than fairy magic. Throughout the book, Esther tries (without much success) to convince her fairy friends and teacher that science holds the answers they are seeking. But when a favourite tree in the forest falls ill, Esther knows that science is the solution… or is it? Esther uses science to identify what might be hurting the tree, but her scientific action comes at the same moment when the fairy teacher, Ms. Pelly Petal, employs her fairy magic to help the tree.

Although the tree is saved, and Esther’s work inspires two other fairies to begin exploring science with her, the narrative does not definitively give credit to Esther (and none of the fairies do). Despite Spire’s tendency to write endings that are not tidy, happy wrap-ups, the ambiguity of Fairy Science feels a bit challenging to me for the intended age group. With careful unpacking, a young reader will hopefully recognize that Esther’s determination and persistence are worthwhile, regardless of who is ‘right.’

Jen McConnel

How Emily Saved the Bridge: The Story of Emily Warren Roebling and the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge
written by Frieda Wishinsky
illustrated by Natalie Nelson
Groundwood Books, 2019
978-1-77306-104-7 (hc) $19.95
978-1-77306-322-5 (eBook) $16.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Non-fiction Picture Book | Biography | Emily Roebling | Brooklyn Bridge

Emily Roebling, nee Warren, was born when higher education for women was rare. She, however, embraced learning, receiving high honours in her studies. Her husband, Washington Roebling, together with his father, would design and supervise construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, commencing in 1869. When the elder Roebling died and Washington became disabled due to a disease common to bridge workers, Emily stepped in, one woman amongst thousands of men. She relayed Washington’s instructions to workers, maintained the books, studied bridge construction, met with manufacturers and became the face of the project while still caring for her family.

Emily’s achievements are enthusiastically recounted by a mother, herself inspired to become an engineer by Roebling’s example. As she and her child cross the bridge, we simultaneously learn the parallel story of the bridge itself and the triumph of its completion, despite many hurdles. This narrative device is involving and effectively brings the subject’s influence into the present day.

Despite the lighthearted approach, the book clearly demonstrates Roebling’s achievements as a woman before her time, also recognizing her later law studies and concern for women’s rights. In an age when women’s successes were often discounted, Emily’s efforts were recognized in her lifetime.

The playful approach of the text is matched by the cheerful, offbeat, collage illustrations. The pictures are otherwise authentic, charming renditions of the past, wherein imagined conversations are humorously depicted in speech bubbles.

A page featuring facts about the bridge and a substantial reading list complete this portrait of a compelling personality.

Aileen Wortley is a retired children’s librarian from Toronto.
Louise loves playing with words, eating them up and swallowing them whole. Though she does well at school, she feels constrained by expectations to write “words that lined up like schoolgirls in starched uniforms.” Instead, she wants her words to sing with the “bend dung low dung” of street workers’ shovels and to tickle people’s ears with the “Spread out youself deh, Liza” of the market women’s voices. When the teacher notices Louise’s secret words in her notebook, Louise is reprimanded. However, her mother later sends Louise to a new school, one where poetry is appreciated and encouraged. And here, Louise finds a “safe place to share her beloved words,” ones she will one day share with the world.

This is a gorgeously illustrated, beautifully written book inspired by the early life of celebrated Jamaican poet and performer, Louise Bennett Coverley, popularly known as Miss Lou. Fernandes’s illustrations are vivid, expressive and full of life, visually representing the culture, stories and Jamaican patois that enriched Louise’s ‘other voice’ which initially struggled against the “clacking wheels” approach of those prior teachers. Hohn’s text is engaging, completely drawing in the reader with its embedded Jamaican patois words and expressions, traditional folksongs and samples of Louise’s early poetry. This is a great tribute to an amazing artist who found and trusted in her own voice and who later influenced many others to do the same.

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.

A Little House in a Big Place
written by Alison Acheson
illustrated by Valériane Leblond
Kids Can Press, 2019
978-1-77138-912-9 (hc) $18.99
978-1-5253-0282-4 (eBook) $9.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Growing Up | Small Town | Trains | Countryside | Wonder | Poetry | Free Verse

A nameless girl lives in a small house outside a small town in the midst of abundant pastures, fields and open sky. Every day as the train passes by, she waves to the engineer, who returns her wave, and wonders about where he’s coming from and going to and whether she’ll go away herself one day. On the engineer’s last day of work, he throws something out the window for her — his engineer’s cap! After that, the girl doesn’t always wait by the window for the train to pass. Instead, she paints pictures, dances or makes up songs to play on the guitar. When she has grown up, she leaves the little house and little town, travelling away by train “but ending up somewhere.”

Acheson’s free verse text is spare and rich in meaning. Leblond’s illustrations, rendered in gouache, oil pastels and coloured pencils, beautifully weave together the bigness of the setting with the intimacy of each moment. Despite being strangers, the relationship between the girl and engineer is touching, the simple act of waving to another so impactful that it makes a home in our own hearts.

As the girl, now grown, embarks on a train to ‘somewhere,’ she wears the cap as much in honour, perhaps, of the engineer to whom she once waved, as in wonder of the path her own life will take.

Ken Kilback

Me, Toma and the Concrete Garden
written by Andrew Larsen
illustrated by Anne Villeneuve
Kids Can Press, 2019
978-1-77138-917-4 (hc) $18.99
978-1-5253-0285-5 (eBook) $9.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Picture Book | Community Garden | Friendship | Environment | Civic Engagement

As his mother recuperates from surgery, Vincent spends the summer away from his home with his Aunt Mimi. Her neighbourhood is so dreary that the young boy feels deflated and homesick, until he meets a boy living nearby named Toma. They play ball, eat ice cream and find youthful satisfaction in disposing of a box of dirt balls, which have very mysteriously arrived in Mimi’s apartment. The boys throw them into an empty lot. Weeks later, much to everyone’s surprise and delight, the vacant property is transformed into a rainbow of colourful flowers. “There’s even some milkweed,” exclaims an elderly neighbour who assists the boys with watering the garden every morning. “Butterflies are going to love it here!” It transpires that the entire community comes to love this once-forlorn small tract of land, too. It becomes a happy focal point in many lives. When the time comes for Vincent to return to his own home, he asks, “But who’ll take care of the garden?” “We all will,” declares Mimi... “I promise.” And sure enough, when Vincent returns for a visit the following year, the garden is waiting for him and his special hand-made dirt balls, ready to thrive once again.

Andrew Larsen has written a captivating story involving friendship and the positive outcome a community garden can have on activating civic engagement and a culture of caring. Accentuating his text are Anne Villeneuve’s spirited ink and watercolour illustrations which portray a neighbourhood’s evolution from drab and depressing to vibrant and welcoming, much like the vacant lot itself.

Senta Ross is a former elementary teacher and teacher-librarian in Kitchener, Ontario.
Mine. Yours.
written by Marsha Diane Arnold
illustrated by Qin Leng
Kids Can Press, 2019
978-1-77138-919-8 (hc) $18.99
978-1-5253-0288-6 (eBook) $9.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Asian Animals | Selfishness | Sharing | Inclusivity | Belonging | Humour

While out walking, Little Panda comes across Big Panda’s den. When he asks whether it could be ‘ours,’ Big Panda declares that it’s ‘mine’ and sets Little Panda on a rock with a pointed ‘yours.’ Little Panda continues to be a bother, so Big Panda gives him a kite and sends him away. Little Panda immediately runs into problems, with the kite’s string consistently getting entangled in things belonging to other animals, each of whom crankily reminds him of what’s ‘mine’ and what’s ‘yours.’ After the kite pulls Little Panda up off the ground, however, the other animals jump one-by-one onto the kite’s string. However, only with the help of Big Panda is there hope for everyone to be saved.

Leng’s pen and ink and watercolour illustrations are gorgeous, full of whimsy and natural humour. From the pangolin and raccoon dog to the red panda and from the Chinese jumping mice and yellow-throated martens to the golden snub-nosed monkey, a variety of animals from Asia appear alongside the giant pandas. Large parts of Arnold’s story are wordless, with the characters only ever speaking one of three words — Mine. Yours. Ours. — their tone revealed by the scene’s context and by the illustrations. The responses of the other animals are very child-like, as quick to be annoyed by Little Panda as they are to be concerned about his safety and to forgive him.

Ken Kilback

The Moon Watched It All
written by Shelley A. Leedahl
illustrated by Aino Anto
Red Deer Press, 2019
978-0-889955-37-0 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 2 to 4

Picture Book | Orphans | Homelessness | Loneliness | Alternative Families

A woman who has lost her family and a young boy who struggles alone on the outskirts of society find each other in this story of second chances and intergenerational connections. The woman, known as Mirada, for she is always gazing, prefers the company of the moon to other people; she consults the moon and sings its praises until she feels she is becoming like the moon. In a nearby village, a boy with no name, abandoned by all, struggles to survive until he stumbles upon Mirada’s farm. Their relationship develops from one of mutual benefit to companionship until they become like family, always following the rhythm and guidance of the moon.

In this advanced picture book, Aino Anto’s haunting watercolours beautifully complement Shelley A. Leedahl’s poetic text. Both the illustrations and the text contain many subtleties that will reward perceptive and patient readers. The images of Mirada in her rocking chair to symbolize the lunar phases are particularly original and stunning. Readers will sympathize with the plight of the nameless boy, particularly when he is attacked by a ‘wicked man,’ represented in the illustrations by a strong fist clenching the rags off the boy’s back. Young readers would benefit from this book being presented within a supported reading model as many descriptions and themes, such as time and memory, are complex. It is greatly rewarding when the two characters find each other and build a family of sorts and it will satisfy the reader’s desire for a happy ending.

Amanda Halfpenny is a librarian at École Élémentaire Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau in Toronto.
A section on beginner tree-watching will encourage kids to take a closer look at the trees in their own backyards, schoolyards and communities, while the final page entices young readers to plant a tree of their own.


Tracey Schindler is a book reviewer and former teacher living in Bethany, Ontario.
young girl’s work. Sadly, everything changes when Ojiichan becomes frail and can no longer live in his own home, let alone look after their beloved natural oasis. Grieving this loss deeply, Mayumi presents him with a miniature replica rock garden in a bento box, creating one for herself as well. “Now I’ve made you a garden,” she says.

Although Chieri Uegaki’s words are tranquil and understated, much like the zen garden she writes about, the images she creates are vibrant and quietly strong: “She [Mayumi] learned that moss on a rock was a gift of time, not to be washed away with a hose... She loved how the tiny rocks chattered as they passed through the rake’s wooden teeth.” The poignant emotions which accompany change are explored with great sensitivity. Japanese words used in this story are referenced on the final page.

Rendered in watercolour on paper, Genevieve Simms’ colourful and detailed illustrations depict the contrasts between Mayumi’s Canadian and Japanese environs. Portraying the gradual aging of the two protagonists with the passing years serves as a moving portent of the change to come. However, the bond of their love remains, steadfast and unbroken.

Senta Ross

Otto and Pio
written and illustrated by Marianne Dubuc
Princeton Architectural Press, 2019
978-1-61689-760-4 (hc) $25.50
for Kindergarten to Grade 2
Picture Book | Friendship | Sharing | Conflict Resolution | Responsibility

A squirrel, Otto by name, lives alone in a tree. Pio is an odd-looking furry, white creature which emerged from a strange green ball just outside of Otto’s front door. Rather than leave this vulnerable hatchling outside, Otto cautiously invites Pio into his home, offering him space in his hammock. Much to Otto’s alarm, the creature grows at an astounding rate until he can barely fit inside the house.

Believing the creature to be lost, Otto’s search for Pio’s mother becomes urgent. In the meantime, Pio tries to be helpful by making soup and cleaning the house. It is only when Pio rescues his host from an eagle attack that Otto decides home renovations are in order.

Marianne Dubuc has created a touching story about an odd friendship. Although Otto is set in his ways and relishes his independence, he makes a monumental decision which will affect two lives... his own and Pio’s. The squirrel’s inner journey, from “Whose idea was it to dump a big furry creature at my house? I was fine on my own!” to “All the same, his soup is so good... And he’s nice too... And he’s not that furry. Maybe I just need a bigger house...” reveals that Otto needs Pio as much as Pio needs Otto.

Dubuc’s charming pencil and watercolour illustrations portray an idyllic domestic scene in a woodland setting. One can’t help but admire Otto’s excellent taste in home decor, from his polka-a-dot curtains, bedsprad and dishes to his welcoming outdoor lantern. The tree in which Otto and Pio reside looms large in several double-spreads, always reminding readers that it is the domicile of a most unlikely pair. (First published under the title Je ne suis pas ta maman in 2017.)

Senta Ross

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Simon Jackson, spirit bears and how young readers can make a difference.

In this beautifully illustrated non-fiction picture book, Carmen Oliver offers young readers a compelling and engaging story of perseverance, strength of conviction, and overcoming fear. Simon Jackson’s life is a testament to the power of one — how one person can help change the world.

A great introduction to biography, to youth activism, and to the spirit bears of the Great Bear Rainforest, this book is well suited to young animal lovers. It would also be a wonderful classroom resource. Back matter includes more information on Simon Jackson, spirit bears and how young readers can make a difference.

Tracey Schindler

**A Voice for the Spirit Bears**

written by Carmen Oliver
illustrated by Katy Dockrill
Kids Can Press, 2019
978-1-77138-979-2 (hc) $18.99
978-1-77138-979-2 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 1 to 4

Non-fiction Picture Book | Bears | Biography | Spirit Bears | Youth Activism | Endangered Animals | Making a Difference

Simon Jackson was happiest in the woodlands behind his house. School was difficult, his stutter made him a target of teasing and ridicule; public speaking was a torture. A trip to Yellowstone National Park at age seven sparked a love of bears that came to define his life. As a young teen Simon discovered spirit bears — rare black bears born with creamy white fur found only in British Columbia’s Great Bear Rainforest, a few hours from Simon’s home. He also learned that these beautiful creatures were under threat from deforestation.

Simon had learnt an important lesson from an earlier effort to help protect Alaskan brown bears: that each person — no matter their age — can make a difference. He took this lesson to heart in his quest to protect the spirit bear and its habitat. At 13, Simon created the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition, determined to give a voice to the spirit bear. But first, he had to find his own.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

**An Owl at Sea**

written by Susan Vande Griek
illustrated by Ian Wallace
Groundwood Books, 2019
978-1-77306-111-5 (hc) $19.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Non-fiction Picture Book | Owls | Short-eared Owls | Wildlife Rescue

This story, based on a newspaper report of a real incident, depicts the plight of a short-eared owl, lost over the North Sea, far from its natural habitat. “A weary owl, a silent owl, flying and flying, mile after mile.” With no place to land the desperate creature, exhausted and hungry, finds a resting place on an industrial oil rig, its unfamiliar environment as cold and foreign to it as the sea. The surprised riggers care for the bird until it can be carried via helicopter to a bird rescue team on land and an eventual release to freedom.

The text, written in a lyrical prose poem form, is dramatic in its simplicity and directness. The splendid water-colour illustrations vividly capture the owl’s plight, against the stark turbulence of the ocean. Equally skilled but in complete contrast are the depictions of the harsh man-made metallic oil rig where workers in colourful garb prove the owl’s salvation. The layout of the book is dramatic… the text bold against a pure white background opposite a full page dramatic visual.

Adding to the richness of the story experience is a one-page description of the habits of the short-eared owl that includes conjecture as to how this particular owl might have veered off course. It also includes brief source and reading lists. The beauty of prose and illustrations, the handsome layout and real-life drama make this book both emotionally and visually haunting, staying in one’s memory long after reading.

Aileen Wortley

**What Are You Doing, Benny?**

written by Cary Fagan
illustrated by Kady MacDonald Denton
Tundra Books, 2019
978-1-77049-857-0 (hc) $21.99
978-1-77049-859-4 (eBook) $10.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Picture Book | Family | Friendship

Little ones in a family love joining in the activities of their older siblings. That is true in this tale of two fox brothers as well. The younger fox’s first-person voice is honest and full of admiration for his big brother, Benny. No matter what Benny is doing, his sibling wants to be a part of it. The little one is sure he can enhance every pursuit… if only Benny will agree.

Agreement is not on Benny’s mind. No matter what he is doing and what the enticement promised, Benny has a pat answer — NO! Each time Benny walks away, the little one follows, always wanting to be part of the fun. Each time Benny responds to the request for participation with one word — NO! Deciding to entertain himself with puppets, the little one is content until Benny shows up with a new pursuit. Benny knows just what he is doing.

Kady MacDonald Denton, as she is so cleverly known to do, provides an engaging setting, rich details and gentle expressions that allow readers a clear look at the devotion the little one feels for his brother and the disdain and indulgence of the older for the younger sibling. Created with watercolours, ink and gouache, she places delightful images in boxes and on single-and-double page spreads to add humour, empathy and awareness for every exchange.

Sally Bender is a retired teacher-librarian and an avid blogger about books for toddlers to teens.
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Second Story Press
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The Absence of Sparrows
written by Kurt Kirchmeier
Little, Brown and Company, 2019
978-0-316-45092-8 (hc) $22.00
for Grades 4 to 8
Fiction | Plague | Tragedy | Hope | Family | Faith

Eleven-year-old Ben Cameron is excited to spend a relaxing summer bird watching, but that’s before the plague arrives. It turns people around the world into glass statues, and nobody knows what caused it or how to stop it, or who it will affect next. When his dad becomes one of the victims, his mom shuts down and his brother starts listening to a voice on the radio who is proposing a drastic plan. Now Ben must hold onto his belief that the missing sparrows will bring back the souls of the townspeople before he loses everyone he loves.

In his debut novel, author Kurt Kirchmeier puts a fresh spin on the post-apocalyptic genre with his exploration of hope, family and faith in the face of tragedy.

Ben is a carefree boy with two parents, a beloved uncle and a brother who is close in age. Through his mother, he’s developed a love of bird watching, and it’s the absence of sparrows (where the book gets its name) that first suggests something is wrong. Then the dark clouds appear, and people start changing.

Ben believes that with time, the people will change back, but others aren’t so sure, and time is running out before everybody is affected.

Who is the voice on the radio? What makes him an authority on the plague, and how can they even be sure his solution is right? Also interesting is how faith and religion play into the decisions that are ultimately made.

While the author fails to resolve many of the book’s central questions, the book is still a thought-provoking read that leads readers to draw their own conclusions.

Rachel Seigel is the Adult Fiction Specialist at Library Services Centre.

A Box of Bones
written by Marina Cohen
Roaring Brook Press, 2019
978-1-250-17221-1 (hc) $22.50
for Grades 4 to 8
Fiction | Fantasy | Family | Friends | Stories | Truth | Lies | Bones

Twelve-year-old Kallie is a clever, logical girl with no time for foolish endeavours like fiction or art. One day, her grandfather insists on taking her to the Festival of Fools where she encounters a man without a face. He hands her a small wooden box before disappearing back into the crowd. The box, Kallie soon realizes, must be a puzzle box — find the right sequence of movements and it should open. Upon opening the box, however, odd things begin to happen. Kallie’s life appears to have become entangled with some other reality and the foreshadowing is ominous at best.

Marina Cohen gives readers what they want — a creepy fantasy with all the right ingredients. But she expects something from her audience as well — a bit of thought and time taken to tease apart the woven strands of a curious tale. Are fact and fiction separate entities or simply two sides of the same coin? It is in this light that Cohen effectively juxtaposes the cool and logical Kallie with the character of Anna, the new girl at school, who manages to cope with her difficult circumstances by re-framing her own story with imaginative flair.

Alternating with the accounts of Kallie’s life is another story about a bone carver’s apprentice named Liah and an evil empress. It seems this story might be the story of the puzzle box itself. Is the tale true? Is it a lie? Can it be both? In the end, Kallie realizes that she has the power to determine the conclusion of her own story.

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

Broken Strings
written by Eric Walters and Kathy Kacer
Puffin Canada, 2019
978-0-73526-624-7 (hc) $21.99
for Grades 4 to 8
Fiction | The Holocaust | World War II | Music | Family | Tradition | Prejudice | Survival

After winning a lead role in her junior high school play, Fiddler on the Roof, Shirli Berman searches through her zayde’s (grandfather’s) attic to find props and costumes. What she finds is a violin — in a home in which music has always been shunned. Shirli’s grandfather becomes enraged at the mere sight of the instrument, which leads Shirli to want to know more. Little by little, her zayde reveals the long-hidden truth about his life before and during World War II.

If you’ve ever heard violinist Isaac Stern’s title music for the film version of Fiddler on the Roof, you know that a single violin can stir feelings of loneliness and longing, passion and joy; it can capture the highs and lows of life. That the violin is the instrument of choice in Broken Strings is no coincidence and it makes this novel all the more bittersweet.

Like that violin, Broken Strings is both jubilant and haunting. The rehearsal scenes are filled with teen angst, from jealousy over assigned roles to budding relationships, but also demonstrate teamwork and unity — the multiracial cast perform together not long after 9/11. Interspersed are zayde’s stories about the Holocaust: survival, death, war, music. When he opens up and lets the music in, we understand how the past affects us all, we witness how education is what will lead the next generation forward, together.

Fiddler on the Roof is not a ‘Jewish’ musical. Likewise, Broken Strings is not a ‘Jewish’ novel. They share the timeless and universal themes of tradition, prejudice, survival and family — all set to moving musical numbers. With a powerful punch through its juxtapositions, revelations and simple message, Broken Strings reminds us that we become our best when we talk to each other, listen to each other and lend a helping hand.

Heather Camlot is a journalist, editor and translator and the author of Clutch.
**City on Strike**
written by Harriet Zaidman
Red Deer Press, 2019
978-0-88-95574-5 (pb) $14.95
for Grades 4 to 8

**Historical Fiction | History | War | Bravery**

*City on Strike* takes place in the city of Winnipeg in the year 1919. Upon returning from the First World War, thousands of workers and soldiers strived to find a better life for their families by demanding better jobs and decent wages. When their demands were not met, they decided to organize a general strike. Police, politicians and business leaders condemned the strikers which led to the use of deadly violence, commonly known as Bloody Saturday.

This riveting novel focuses on a 13-year-old boy named Jack. He comes from a poor hard-working immigrant family and helps earn some income by delivering newspapers. However, when both his parents and his older sister decide to take part in the general strike, he soon realizes how difficult life will get without the income that provides his family with food. As Jack and his family get drawn deeper into the chaos of the strike, he does everything in his power to display bravery and compassion in order to help his family survive.

Harriet Zaidman writes about a key moment in Canadian history. It deals with the raw emotions that come from the poverty that workers and soldiers had to deal with after the war. Additionally, this novel teaches us the lengths that people are willing to go to in order to earn a better quality of life for their family. Written for students in the middle grades, this is an excellent novel that can be used as a read aloud in Language Arts or Social Studies. Students everywhere, particularly students from immigrant families, will relate to Jack and his willingness to do anything he can in order to help his family live a better life.

Michelle Snowden is a teacher and learning coach at St. Catherine Catholic Elementary Junior High School in Edmonton, Alberta.

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**The Collected Works of Gretchen Oyster**
written by Cary Fagan
Tundra Books, 2019
978-0-75526-621-6 (hc) $19.99
978-0-75526-622-3 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 5 to 8

**Fiction | Art | Collage | Family | Adolescence | Loss | Self-expression**

Ever since Hartley Staple’s older brother Jackson ran away nine months ago, his family has been grappling with their new reality. Hartley seems to be floating through his days without definition or purpose. One day at the library, Hartley finds a card sticking out of a book. It is a collaged artwork of water, fish and a Jolly Roger. Typed words read: “I hate all kinds of flags except pirate flags.”

The card is mysteriously signed g.o. Hartley’s interest is piqued. As he continues to encounter more of these cards around town, he is determined to find their intriguing author.

Cary Fagan has written a touching story of a boy trying to make sense of his family’s circumstance. The tale is told from Hartley’s perspective interspersed with parallel glimpses into g.o.’s life — one that holds difficulties of its own. It is easy to connect with Hartley as a narrator. He is funny and heartfelt with the emergent self-awareness typical of a middle-school student. This is a book about the power of art to shine a light in dark places. It is about the human ability to express oneself, not simply for the sake of emotional or philosophical expression, but for the sake of connection as well. While readers are left without a perfectly tidy ending, they are left with hope, and that is a very buoyant feeling.

In a classroom setting, this book could be used as part of an integrated studies unit combining literature and visual arts.

Ildiko Sunegi

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**Stinky Science: Why the Smelliest Smells Smell So Smelly**
written by Edward Kay
illustrated by Mike Shill
Kids Can Press, 2019
978-1-77138-382-0 (hc) $18.99
for Grades 4 to 8

**Non-fiction | Science | Smells | Humour | Human Body | Sense of Smell**

“Do you smell it? That smell. A kind of smelly smell. The smelly smell that smells... smelly.” — Mr. Krabbs (SpongeBob SquarePants)

Ah, stinky humour. Poop, smelly feet, farts... smells are a ‘ripe’ source of middle school hilarity. In Stinky Science, Edward Kay and Mike Shill have tapped into that youthful enthusiasm for all things malodorous and combined it with fascinating scientific knowledge about smell. The result is a fun, informative book that plunges into the world of stink and reveals the secrets of smelliness.

Kay delves into how our olfactory system works, how we detect odours and how smells can trigger memories and emotions. Moving to the natural world, readers learn how some animals and plants employ foul smells and why sharks, albatross and moles are ‘super sniffers.’ Plenty of fun (and slightly disgusting) factoids are included — did you know that farts and swamps full of rotting vegetation smell alike because they share a similar chemical make-up? Or that the microorganism responsible for stinky feet is the same one used to ferment milk in Limburger cheese?

Engaging and humorous, Kay’s text focuses on the science behind the smells. Mike Shill’s over-the-top cartoon illustrations however, go straight for the guffaw. Green clouds of stink waft through the pages which are splattered with mustard-yellow blotches. His people and critters, depicted in acts of either grossing out others or being grossed out, are lurid and hilarious (I especially like his depiction of the filthy sloth in a cloud of bugs and emitting a foul green haze). Definitely kid-pleaser material.

This delightfully disgusting title exploring the science of stench is sure to hook young readers with yuck-appeal!

Tracey Schindler
Starting her final year of high school in a new school and a new country is a challenge for Susan Thomas, despite her excellent grades and her strong desire to please her parents. While the course work is fine, she struggles to fit in and make new friends and she misses her best friend back home in Saudi Arabia. But no one is more surprised than she is when notorious troublemaker Malcolm Vakil starts paying attention to her and becomes an unexpected distraction from the other aspects of her life. While Susan tries to live up to her parents’ expectations and also worries about the increasing tension between them, Malcolm has family issues of his own and he struggles to put the more troubling aspects of his recent past behind him. Yet somehow this unlikely duo find strength and solace in one another and conspire to bring out the best in each other, until Malcolm betrays her trust and they are both left wondering where to go from there.

In her second novel for young adults, Bhathena has crafted a tender, heartwarming romance that also explores family relationships in a compelling and realistic way. The narrative shifts back and forth between Susan and Malcolm, giving readers the chance to see both perspectives and to understand the complex emotions that each of them wrestles with as they attempt to navigate the different circumstances of their lives. Their unexpected romance is touching and sweet, and they both emerge as believably flawed and relatable characters, despite the fact that the dialogue occasionally feels somewhat forced.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager at Woozles in Halifax.

Before the Broken Star
(The Evermore Chronicles, Book 1)
written by Emily R. King
Skyscape, 2019
978-1-5420-4378-6 (hc) $24.99
978-1-5420-4376-2 (pb) $14.99
for Grades 7 and up
Fiction | Fantasy | Romance | Penal Colonies

Everley Donovan narrowly escaped death when her family was assassinated, surviving only because of a clockwork heart crafted for her by her uncle. When Admiral Killian Markham, the man who left her for dead, enters her uncle’s clock shop, she sees her chance to get justice for her family. Her quest takes her to a penal colony on a cursed island where treasure is unearthed, secrets are buried and where she learns that the path to truth is tied to redemption and love.

In this new fantasy romance series, author Emily King creates a unique and ambitious story with a compelling heroine. Everley is a strong and likeable heroine. She’s adept with a sword, stubborn, crafty and opportunistic. At night she sneaks out onto the streets to take part in underground fights for money, enjoying the adrenaline rush she gets from it.

When Everley allows herself to get sentenced to seven years on penal colony Dagger Island, her plan for revenge seems to be working out. Markham is in charge of the island and she intends to kill him at her first opportunity.

The first part of the novel is largely devoted to introducing the characters and getting them to Dagger Island. On the island, the action picks up and the author has a few surprises up her sleeve that readers won’t see coming.

Overall, this is a fun and light novel with adventure, romance and a complex storyline that will have teens eagerly awaiting the second book in the series.

Rachel Seigel

Break in Case of Emergency
written by Brian Francis
HarperCollins Publishers, 2019
978-1-4434-5770-5 (hc) $22.99
for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Mental Illness | Suicide | Grief | LGBTQ+ | Father/Daughter Relationships

Each day, Toby struggles to pretend — for her grandparents, her best friend Trisha and even the boyfriend who she recently broke up with — that everything is fine. Five years have passed since Toby’s mother died by suicide, since she came home and found her mother behind that closed bedroom door. Now she believes that she is meant to follow in her mother’s footsteps, that everyone in her life will be so much better off without her.

Then, her long-absent father announces that he is coming to visit for the first time since she was born. Not the ‘traditional’ father she has yearned for all her life, she discovers that he is gay… and a highly-successful female impersonator. Also, disappointingly self-absorbed. Yet somehow, in spite of his quirks and awkwardness around her, she eventually finds some measure of comfort in forging a connection with him. She also begins to see all the people who love her in a different light and to recognize hope and possibility where previously she saw only pain.

In his YA debut, Francis sensitively and unerringly depicts the thoughts and feelings of a teen who skillfully hides her many layers of guilt, self-loathing and pain. While her suffering is palpable, the story is also filled with warmth and moments of humour as she navigates the relationships in her life. The author adeptly portrays the secondary characters in ways that enable them to emerge as realistic, yet surprising, reminding both Toby and readers that there is always more to people than meets the eye. While Toby’s father may be unique in many ways, his clumsy attempts to connect with her are believably depicted and heartwarming and her gradual shift in perspective feels natural and satisfying.

Lisa Doucet
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The Candle and the Flame
written by Nafiza Azad
Scholastic Press, 2019
978-1-338-30605-7 (eBook) $20.99
for Grades 7 and up
Fiction | Fantasy | Family | Friendship | Diversity | Romance

When Fatima unexpectedly becomes the new Name Giver for the Ifrit Djinn, she is thrust into a world of scheming. Forced to confront the chaotic events of her past in order to save the city of Noor from the murderous Shayateen, Fatima’s high expectations of herself are complicated by her feelings for Zulfikar, the Emir of Noor. With assistance from her good friends, the Alif sisters, and her own sister, Sunaina, she untangles the politics of the maharajah and his family in an effort to save them from rebel groups who have now colluded with the dreaded Shayateen.

Nafiza Azad’s narration of this fictional Silk Road city and its diverse cast of characters, who co-exist amicably regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds, is particularly enjoyable. The food descriptions were compelling enough to make this reader’s stomach growl! In addition, the blend of strength, wisdom and femininity in the female characters was both refreshing and affirming. Azad paid particular attention to the emotions and logic of each character in a way that lent authenticity to this fantasy story. The genuineness was also assisted by the language choices: the story was chock-a-block with Arabic, Hindi and Urdu words, many of which were found in a handy glossary.

The Candle and the Flame would especially appeal to young women in multicultural communities who are searching for fiction which reflects the diversity of their own lives. The strong themes of loss and transition would appeal to young adults attempting to determine their values and define their own lives.

Robin Ahamed is a library technician living in Ajax, Ontario.

The Grey Sisters
written by Jo Treggiari
Penguin Random House, 2019
978-0-735-26299-7 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 8 and up
Fiction | Grief | Tragedy | Survivalists | Conflict | Trust | Hope

D and Spider, bonded by a shared tragedy, are finally seeking closure. The two, joined by their friend Min, set off on a road trip to the site of a horrific plane crash from two years earlier, where they both lost siblings. Meanwhile, Ariel has never lived anywhere but the mountain, where she survives by her wits and trusts very few. Her life has been controlled by the man she and her ‘family’ call Big Daddy; the leader of their small survivalist community.

Everything changes, for all of them, when someone close to Ariel is attacked, sending her down the mountain for help. On her way, she comes across the three girls — a chance encounter that will have catastrophic consequences for them all and challenge everything they thought they knew.

Jo Treggiari’s multiperspective novel is captivating, and mildly unnerving. The way she describes the girls’ complicated lives and the conflicts they face, as well as how they rise against them, highlights each of their individual personalities, along with that which drives them.

I wish this unique story had lasted longer. It mixes common with uncommon themes, adding dark dimensions, while still leaving room for hope in the end. It brings insight into the livelihoods of small and isolated communities and shows how the world you were raised to see, and the world you choose to see, are two very different things. Anyone who has ever struggled with grief and tragedy, questioned the lessons they were taught, or wrestled with trust and loyalty, can find a relatable character in this story. Written for high school students, this book is an excellent reminder that any battle is survivable and that there is always a reason for hope.

Sara Rigotti is a student of St. Stephen Catholic Secondary School in Bowmanville, Ontario, and youngest member of the Writers’ Community of Durham Region.
Or is she already in too deep?

Fiona feels betrayed. By her crush Beau, who promised her something he couldn’t keep. By her old friend Jenny, who used her just to make herself feel better. And by her best friend Trixie, who may have been lying to her since the day they met. Then, one night changes Fiona’s entire life and now she’s questioning everything about the people she thought she knew. After Trixie’s disappearance is ruled a suicide, Fiona tries to find her. Piecing together the trail of a girl who doesn’t want to be found may be more trouble than Fiona asked for, but can she let go?

Non-fiction | Feminism | Women’s Rights | Social Justice | Inequality | Activism

With the tag line “Claiming the F-WORD in Turbulent Times”, Monique Polak’s book lives up to its promise and provides an engaging and conversational look at feminism over the ages and helps us learn how we can embrace the stigmatized ‘F-Word.’ Throughout history, women have had to fight tooth and nail for the rights that many of us now take for granted. From voting rights, to property rights, to equal pay, this gutsy text holds no punches back when it comes to discussing the complex and intersectional realities of feminism. It covers the history of feminist movements, from the First Wave Feminist suffragettes who fought for their right to vote, to the #MeToo movements of the 21st century.

Polak has done extensive research for this project, detailing the multiple feminist movements of the past whilst continuously tying the fights of the women who came before us back to contemporary feminist concerns. Multiple spotlights are given to modern feminists, whether they be authors, artists, politicians or just average women fighting against the patriarchy, who are doing their part to make a difference for future generations. Polak also focuses on many feminist issues that are rarely addressed in a political context, like objectification and the sexualization of women in the media. She does not shy away from the heavy topics of date rape or domestic violence and she even discusses how to raise feminist boys to be true allies in the fight against sexism. This book is not only fascinating and passionately written, but it would serve as an excellent tool for teachers who want to introduce feminism to their classes.

Kayla O’Brien is an English major at Queen’s University who is planning to start law school in 2020.

Non-fiction | Feminism | Women’s Rights | Social Justice | Inequality | Activism

Love and breaking up are messy in Mariko Tamaki’s most recent graphic novel, just like they are in real life. Seventeen-year-old Freddy Riley has fallen into a pattern: Laura Dean breaks up with her, they get back together. Laura Dean is cool, popular and the worst girlfriend ever. After LD breaks up with her for the third time, Freddy is once again brought back into her orbit, unable to say goodbye to her ex. Meanwhile, Freddy and LD fall into the same cycle and Freddy’s friendships are put at the wayside, even when her best friend needs her.

A story of high school heartbreak that puts queer teens and LGBTQ+ relationships at the forefront, this honest take on teen life features characters that are the type of people I know in real life but never see in books. They make art out of old toys, play Dungeons & Dragons, fall in love with other girls and get their hearts broken. Well-written, with great characters and creative elements (the stuffed animals that occasionally offer their opinions), the striking art pairs perfectly with the story and the bursts of pink hues work well aesthetically and thematically. Not only does this book represent the type of relationships that are underrepresented in books, it’s a love story that looks at things from a different perspective, exploring the difference between the love we have and the love we deserve.

Emma Hunter is the CCBC’s Marketing and Communications Coordinator.

L.E. Flynn’s work is gripping and hair-raising, as she leads the reader down a twisted trail of revelations. Using alternating chapters between past and present, Flynn creates an emotional thriller as the reader follows a main character unsure of everything, including herself.

This authentically written novel had me on the edge of my seat as I fell deeper into the mystery. It shows what you see and what is true can be two very different things. The book also deals with several other trials that teenagers face, including body dysmorphia, alcoholism, parent and peer pressure and group dysfunction.

Anyone who has ever felt betrayed by someone they cared about or was forced to stand on the sidelines as someone they loved tore their life apart, can put themselves in Fiona’s shoes. Written for senior high school students, this book is great for looking beyond the mask and discovering your limits when being lied to. Or how long you can lie to yourself.

Sara Rigotti
Nazemian presents three fully-realized and equally sympathetic protagonists in this intense, powerful coming-of-age story. The narrative alternates between each of their stories, which are complex and nuanced. He creates a stunning evocation of time and place, and the atmosphere of fear and hysteria. He also captures the strong sense of community and support amongst those most deeply affected by the crisis, as well as people like Judy and her mother who were trying, in their own imperfect ways, to oppose the homophobia and injustice that Uncle Stephen, Art and Reza faced daily. Heartfelt, passionate, heartbreaking and beautiful, this book is equal parts love story, family drama and an eloquent snapshot of a particular time in recent history.

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Near the end of middle school, Charlie and her friends keep a low profile in Mr. K’s music class. She’s preoccupied with her silent crush on Emile, who is dealing with the breakup of his parents, and the empty desk that used to belong to Luka, who hasn’t come to school since he became a target of homophobic slurs. When she must find one song that ‘feels like home’ for a music assignment, Charlie discovers opera singer Maria Callas. As Charlie researches the bold life of the diva, she’s inspired to speak to Emile, reconnect with Luka and perform with her entire voice at the year-end showcase.

Eggenschwiler’s fresh use of the graphic novel form visualizes the transformational power of music and the complexity of social interactions in a simple, accessible way. Illustrated sequences beautifully capture Charlie’s emotions using fitting visual metaphors. Maclear’s characters are fully realized as they contend with a realistic landscape of larger-than-life feelings and stifling tween social rules, and the comparison of high emotional conflict to opera hits the right note. Together, the format and content offer cross-curricular opportunities for both visual and musical literacy.

Operatic is an authentic story about the colossal nature of middle school emotions and how to express one’s true self.

Karen Krossing is a Toronto author and MFA student.

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This is the story of the creation and completion of the Witness Blanket, a collaborative work of art that holds and displays pieces from each residential school in Canada and from other affiliated organizations. It also includes stories and testimonies from survivors and their families who shared the pieces. The Witness Blanket was commissioned as a commemoration by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and toured throughout Canada from January 2015 until May 2018 and will permanently reside in Winnipeg in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

This book, filled with photographs, allows people who have been unable to see the blanket in person, an intimate opportunity to engage with it. It captures the fact that “Reconciliation is a journey, rather than an act of destination.” By explaining the process and story behind each object held within it, it calls on readers to bear witness to the truths and tragedies of residential school. The authors explain that the survivors who donated the pieces are witnesses, as are the pieces within the art installation. Because of this, the readers also too become witnesses.

The title includes a glossary, references, a list for further reading, a map of Witness Blanket artifacts and a list of residential schools. A foreword is included, written by Dr. Marie Wilson, one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners.

Through the narrative and the artwork, this title is a powerful testimony to the strength and resiliency of survivors and their families as well as the lasting impact that these institutions and policies have had within Indigenous communities.

Highly recommended for school and public libraries.

Colette Poitras is a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, holds a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science and is the Manager of Indigenous Public Outreach for Public Library Services Branch, Alberta.
Invaluable as a research/reference tool, Qaqavii will undoubtedly find its pages dog-eared on the bookshelves and in the hearts and minds of students, teachers and librarians.

Jennifer D. Foster is a Toronto-based freelance editor, writer and mentor. She’s administrative director of Rowers Reading Series and Vice President of the Toronto branch of Canadian Authors Association.

This Place: 150 Years Retold
written by Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm,
Sonny Assu, Brandon Mitchell, Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley, David A. Robertson, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, Jen Storm,
Richard Van Camp, Katherena Vermette,
Chelsea Vowel
illustrated by Tara Audibert, Kyle Charles,
GMB Chomichuk, Natasha Donovan,
Scott B. Henderson, Ryan Howe, Andrew Lodwick, Jen Storm
colour by Scott A. Ford, Donovan Yaciuk
Highwater Press, 2019
978-1-55379-758-6 (pb) $36.00
for Grades 7 and up

Graphic Novels | Comic Books | History | Indigenous Literature | Anthologies

This Place: 150 Years Retold allows the reader to explore the last 150 years (roughly seven generations) through the voices of 10 different Indigenous storytellers. After a powerful forward written by Alicia Elliot, each story is shared in chronological order with a timeline highlighting important historical events and a short background preface written by its author. It starts with the story of Annie Bannatyne at the Red River at the time of Canadian Confederation and ends in the year 2350 with the futuristic story of wâpanâchâhos who travels back in time (to the present).

While incredibly engaging and entertaining, this title is also thought-provoking and important, as many members of the public may not have ever heard this history told before (certainly, not from this perspective). It includes a select bibliography at the end for more information about each story. All together, each story demonstrates the vastness and richness in history and traditions of different Indigenous Nations, languages and cultures with an authentic voice.

With powerful text and stunning artwork, this anthology empowers Indigenous peoples to lift our voices, reclaim our stories and share our history, so that all Canadians can hear us.

Highly recommended for home, school and public libraries.

Colette Poitras
22
WE RECOMMEND

The Absence of Sparrows
Kurt Kirchmeier

Alma and the Beast
Esmé Shapiro

The Beauty of the Moment
Tanaz Bhathena

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(The Evermore Chronicles, Book 1)
Emily R. King

A Box of Bones
Marina Cohen

Break in Case of Emergency
Brian Francis

Broken Strings
Eric Walters, Kathy Kacer

The Candle and the Flame
Naiza Azad

City on Strike
Harriet Zaidman

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Cary Fagan

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Residential School Memories and the Making of the Witness Blanket
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Qaqavii
Miriam Körner

Stinky Science:
Why the Smelliest Smells Smell So Smelly
Edward Kay, Mike Shiel

This Place: 150 Years Retold

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Carmen Oliver, Katy Dockrill

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