Hear Our Stories
The exciting growth in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Literature

Making History: David Alexander Robertson

Bookmark! Summer Sports for the Pan Am Games

Reviews of over 30 books by Susan Juby, Shane Peacock, Gordon Korman, Dennis Lee and more
Being a princess can be a royal pain.
from the award-winning author/illustrator

Marie-Louise Gay

ISBN 9781927485699
Recently Released
Early Readers Ages 5–8
Written and illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay
Translated by Jacob Homel

ISBN 9781927485736
Pub Date March 10, 2015

Praise for Princess Pistachio

“The skillful combination of text and illustrations addresses many serious concerns of early childhood—and even of parenthood—without straying from the book’s tone of fun and frivolity.”—Kirkus ★ Starred Review

“…vividly portrays the characters’ emotions in both the text and the many colorful ink-and-wash illustrations. Sometimes charming and sometimes funny, the story is as satisfying as its protagonist’s name: Pistachio Shoelace.”—Booklist

© Marie-Louise Gay
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TD Canadian Children’s Book Week takes place May 2 to 9, 2015. For more information, visit www.bookweek.ca.

MEDIUM: Paper, watercolour, gouache and digital collage.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR: Cree-Métis artist Julie Flett is an award-winning author and illustrator currently living in Vancouver, BC. Julie studied fine arts at Concordia University in Montreal and Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver. She received the Christie Harris Illustrated Children’s Literature Prize and was nominated for the Governor General’s Literary Award for Children’s Literature (Illustration) for her book Owls See Clearly at Night (Lii Yiiboo Nayaapiwak lii Swer): A Michif Alphabet (L’alphabet di Michif). Her book Wild Berries / Pakwa che Menisw was chosen as the First Nation Communities READ title selection for 2014-2015.

Opinion: Kokum (Grandma), I Can Read
Author and literacy advocate David Bouchard, OC, talks about Aboriginal children and “the Reading Feast.”

News Roundup
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Focus: The Exciting Growth in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Literature
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Bookmark! Summer Sports for the Pan Am Games

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Book Bits: The Power of Observation
Four new picture books.

We Recommend
Reviews of the latest in fine Canadian books for children and teens.

Index of Reviews
“A slick subterranean caper flavored with a diverse nonhuman cast...Young readers will slurp up the gumshoes' gooey first exploit with relish.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“WHO LET THE SLIMES OUT?"

From the author-illustrator team behind the Graphic Guide Adventures

“For ages 8-11"

“WHO KILLED TRUMAN’S GIRLFRIEND?”

For ages 14+

Also by Norah McClintock
CCBC Best Books
“A fast-paced tale of rivalry, justice and loyalty.” —VOYA
I’ve been excited about the fine Aboriginal stories being published in this country for a long time. When our now grown-up kids were small, we particularly enjoyed I Can’t Have Bannock But the Beaver Has a Dam written by Bernelda Wheeler and illustrated by Herman Bekkering (Portage & Main Press), A Promise Is a Promise written by Michael Kusugak and Robert Munsch with illustrations by Vladyana Krykorka (Annick Press) and Thomas King’s A Coyote Columbus Story (Groundwood Books). This last book, the tale of how Coyote absentmindedly conjured up Columbus and then Cartier, had illustrations by the noted artist, Kent Monkman, whose style has changed considerably since then, if not his playful irreverence.

In 2003, CCBN did its first feature on First Nations authors and publishing. We had interviews with authors Jan Bourdeau Waboose, Deborah Delaronde, Larry Loyie and Jacqueline Guest and a profile of Pemmican Publications. We also noted the recent arrival on the book scene of the three-year-old GoodMinds.com, the distributor of Aboriginal-themed books.

Twelve years later, there has been an explosion of stories, writers and publishing. Many of the people and companies we profiled are still going strong; Guest, Delaronde and Loyie are celebrating recent and new books. In this issue, we have a powerful opinion piece by David Bouchard, a profile of David Alexander Robertson who explores First Nations history through graphic novels, and a look at some of the people publishing First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) stories.

Of course, First Nations, Métis and Inuit stories are the theme for the 2015 TD Canadian Children’s Book Week. Our cover features the gorgeous poster image by Cree-Métis artist Julie Flett. Be sure to download the Book Week theme guide at www.bookweek.ca for a superb collection of books by and about members of Canada’s FNMI communities.

You’ll also find our regular Bookmark! column — in this issue, we look at summer sports in honour of Toronto’s Pan Am and Parapan Am Games this summer — and reviews of many new and recommended books.

Happy reading.
For the first time in history, Canada’s Aboriginal people are being invited to the Great Reading Feast. We have been invited and we have accepted the invitation.

If Maria Montessori is right, and I think she is, it takes three things to become a reader, and Aboriginal people have not had, until today, two of the three prerequisites. Until today, Aboriginal people as a whole have been denied the gift of reading. And because of that, they have been denied an education. This might be somewhat oversimplified, but it’s not far from the truth.

Maria Montessori taught us that it takes three things to learn to read: time, a hero and books — not just any books but books that include their readers and books that are accessible to them. Until today, books that have included Aboriginal readers have been few and far between (a problem that now exists for many immigrant groups in our multicultural country) as have books that were accessible to them — books that they had the ability to read.

Canadians are seeing more and more success stories among Aboriginal people; from lawyers to business executives, from authors and musicians to politicians and humanitarians. And the number is growing.

That being said, the dropout rate among Aboriginal students was and remains an embarrassment to a country that knows and is capable of much better. Roughly 70 percent of students on reserve do not complete high school and over 50 percent of off-reserve Aboriginal students drop out of school before completing Grade 12. This is wrong and not acceptable.

Governments’ responses to this reality do not change. They continue to do the same thing, only in different ways. There is always some new promise of reform, which somehow consistently promises to turn educational matters over to Aboriginal people. Their promises, however, are always — yes always — accompanied by some statement of standards... standards that are set by them — by government — standards that do not reflect the traditions, values or the lifestyle of Aboriginal people.

Should Aboriginal students in Nain, Labrador, students whose first language is Inuktitut and whose culture and lifestyle is more foreign than those of people living in the UK, France or Turkey, be studying the same curriculum as students in southern Newfoundland or in Toronto or Ottawa? Should Inuit youth be using the same textbooks as students with whom they have little to nothing in common? Should they not be allowed to be taught by their own storytellers, artisans, weavers and hunters, even if they are not certified in the “Canadian” way?

If we can put all these crucial issues aside, we might then address a very important fundamental right — that of reading. To be able to read should be a basic human right. That
so many Canadians cannot read is inconceivable, especially when we consider that reading is as natural as talking and walking. Then there is the matter of denying anyone not only the right to read, but the right to an education. Let us be clear on this. Canadian education is founded on reading. It should not be so but is. Kids who read succeed. Kids who don’t read fail. The better a student reads, the better their level of success. Having spent 30 years in education and having seen my own children move through the system, I have never seen a non-reader walk across the stage singing “We are the Champions.” Schools are for readers. Non-readers (athletes, musicians, artists and artisans) wait for their school life to finish before they are allowed to succeed.

**Until today, Aboriginal students have lacked two of the three ingredients to become readers.**

1. They have time — or at least as much as our schools allow any child. Children all mature at different ages. We are not giving our kids the time they need to become readers. Our early, aggressive testing policies are not in the best interest of our kids.

2. Aboriginal students lack the heroes they need to become readers. The effects of residential schools hang over almost everything in the lives of Aboriginal people. They do and will for generations. Aboriginal people can read and many do read but all too many do not read for pleasure. This reality is changing and will change over time, but up until now, finding the hero it takes to become a reader has been a challenge for many Aboriginal students.

3. Until recently, Aboriginal students have not had books that include them nor have they had books they can read. Twenty years ago, Canadian libraries contained few books that accurately or respectfully reflected Aboriginal life and culture. To take one example, the best-known First Nations person of all time is Hiawatha, an Onondaga man who lived by Lake Ontario. Hiawatha was immortalized by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as being an Ojibway from Lake Superior. Longfellow completely misrepresented this important First Nation man.

The table has been set. It is now for us to make sure the banquet unfolds as it should.

Unfortunately, there is little we can do about allowing students the time they need to become readers other than understanding that kids do need time. Once we understand this, it is for us to share our knowledge. I spend much of my time informing parents that their children all mature at various ages. I explain how some children walk earlier than others and some talk earlier than others. Some will also read earlier. I think it important that educators and parents alike come to understand that children will read when they are ready and not when we tell them to. Parents need not subject their children to early and overly aggressive testing that will taint the love of reading in the children. Teachers and administrators can share that knowledge with parents and any government official ready to listen.

It is for all of us to make sure every child has a hero who can lead him or her to reading. If a student doesn’t have a hero at home, then teachers or administrators or caretakers or bus drivers have to pick up the ball and run with it. Let’s make sure that we all wear our hero hats to work, not knowing exactly who will need a hero and when… not always knowing exactly who sees us as their hero.

Canadians are so very fortunate to finally have an impressive, invaluable bank of Aboriginal authors and illustrators to draw on. For the first time in history, we can provide Aboriginal students with books, from traditional knowledge to contemporary fiction and non-fiction, from board books for babies to teen literature, written by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. Educational publishers have also become involved in this movement. Check out Pearson’s Turtle Island Voices or Scholastic’s Raven Tales and their Trickster Tales. There is an ever-increasing volume of excellent literature at our fingertips. It is for us to go out and find it and to get it into the hands of those who need it. And for parents or educators who don’t have the time or don’t know where to look to find it, they have an invaluable resource reaching out to them. GoodMinds.com, the largest distributor of Aboriginal books in the world, is based on the Six Nations of the Grand River (Brantford) in southwestern Ontario. They can easily be accessed online at [www.goodminds.com](http://www.goodminds.com).

For the first time in history, Aboriginal people have been invited to the Great Reading Feast. It is for all of us to help make the banquet a success. David Bouchard, OC, is an author, storyteller, literacy champion and one of the series editors for Turtle Island Voices. He is a former president of the Metis Nation of Greater Victoria and continues to serve as a community leader.
IBBY Honours to Pratt (twice), Oppel, Saltman and Payette
Pierre Pratt has won the 2014 Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award for Stop, Thief! written by Heather Tekavec (Kids Can Press). The award, established in 1986, in memory of the groundbreaking artist, is given annually by IBBY Canada, the Canadian section of the International Board on Books for Young People. The $1000 prize goes to the illustrator of a Canadian picture book in recognition of outstanding artistic talent. The two shortlisted Cleaver books are Mr. Got to Go, Where Are You?, illustrated by Cynthia Nugent and written by Lois Simmie (Red Deer Press) and The Most Magnificent Thing, written and illustrated by Ashley Spires (Kids Can Press).

Pratt was doubly honoured at the IBBY Canada Annual Meeting of Members on February 28, 2015. Along with Kenneth Oppel, he was named one of the two Canadian nominees for the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award for Children’s Literature. The highest international recognition for children’s books, the Hans Christian Andersen Award is often called “the little Nobel.” Each national section of IBBY can nominate one author and one illustrator whose body of work has made a lasting contribution to children’s literature. The winners, selected by an international panel of experts, will be announced in the spring of 2016.

The Claude Aubry Award, given in recognition of distinguished service in the field of children’s literature, went to University of British Columbia (UBC) professor Judith Saltman and to publisher Jacques Payette. Judith Saltman is a professor at the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies and the chair of the Masters in Children’s Literature program at UBC. She has published extensively on Canadian and international children’s literature. With Gail Edwards, she authored the notable Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children’s Illustrated Books and Publishing (University of Toronto Press). Jacques Payette is a pioneer in the editing and publishing of children’s literature in Quebec — both books and magazines. From 1968 on, he was the owner of Editions Heritage — which now has a list of over 2000 titles — and in 1997, he founded the publishing house Dominique et compagnie.

Also announced at the IBBY Canada Annual Meeting of Members was the recipient of the 2014 Frances E. Russell Grant, given in support of research in children’s literature. This year’s recipient is Dr. Erin Spring, a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute of Child and Youth Studies, University of Lethbridge, who will be looking at Aboriginal young adult responses to contemporary Canadian YA fiction.

For further information, visit www.ibby-canada.org.

Five authors, eight schools, one Teachers’ Book Bank celebration
To celebrate the launch of its Teachers’ Book Bank, a database of history-related books for kids and teens, the Canadian Children’s Book Centre held a draw for educators across Canada last fall. Eight classrooms around the country were picked at random and won a presentation by a Canadian children’s history writer, with all expenses paid by the CCBC. Between December 2014 and March 2015, Hugh Brewster visited St. Peter School in Brantford, Ontario; Jacqueline Guest visited four schools in and around Calgary; Linda Granfield visited L.M. Montgomery Elementary School in Charlottetown; Penny Draper visited Eglinton Junior Public School in Toronto; and Sharon McKay presented at schools in several communities near Regina.

The CCBC’s Teachers’ Book Bank offers a database of Canadian fiction and non-fiction books appropriate for Grades 4 to 8. The books are sorted by curriculum topic, allowing educators to narrow their search by clicking on one or more of the available themes (for example, The Great Depression, Science and Innovation, etc.). The titles in the database can be used by teachers to introduce topics in Canadian history classes or by students carrying out research projects. Many of the books also offer opportunities for cross-curricular connections in language arts, geography, the arts, science and other subjects.

The Centre plans on expanding the available grade levels and creating an equivalent database with French-language books in the next two years. Eventually, they also hope to create databases featuring other topics.

The Teachers’ Book Bank was created in partnership with Historica Canada, who feature lesson plans on similar topics on their website. The project was funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Canada Book Fund.

Kids’ Lit Quiz Canada grows to over 100 schools
On a snowy night in Toronto, the team from British Columbia’s Southridge School won the national Kids’ Lit Quiz competition and the opportunity to compete at the international final in Connecticut this summer. It was a tough competition with seven teams in total vying for the prize.

The Kids’ Lit Quiz program is designed to get kids enthused and excited about reading — and it definitely works! Teams of students, aged 10 to 13, from over 100 schools competed in the fifth annual Kids’ Lit Quiz Canadian program this year. The young contestants are tested on many aspects of children’s literature, including opening lines, famous characters, books to film, mythology, lives of the authors and more. The competition is fierce, as the questions get progressively harder as teams move from regional heats to national finals. At the regional events, teams of children’s authors also participate alongside the kids to add to the fun.

continued on page 8
 Seen at …
 A PHOTOGRAPHIC LOOK AT CANADIAN CHILDREN’S BOOK EVENTS

1. At the Kids’ Lit Quiz (KLQ) regional finals in Vancouver, Stacey Matson, member of "The Quizzards of Oz" authors’ team, chats with KLQ founder and quizmaster Wayne Mills.  

2. At the OLA Superconference: Co-authors Wayne K. Spear, Constance Brissenden and Larry Loyie (Residential Schools, With the Words and Images of Survivors) with publisher Jeff Burnham (Indigenous Education Press).  

3. At the new Halifax Central Library, author JonArno Lawson and illustrator Sydney Smith sign for eager fans at the launch of Sidewalk Flowers.  

4. Sharon McKay talks about war zones and writing at Edenwold School in Edenwold, Saskatchewan.  

The competition with the tag line “The Sport of Reading” was established two decades ago in New Zealand by Wayne Mills, a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland. Mills still writes all the questions and travels around the world as quizmaster for the national finals in each country. The program now includes over 1000 schools in the United Kingdom, South Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, China and Canada. In 2017, Toronto will be the host city for the world final.

For more information on Kids’ Lit Quiz — or to try your hand at sample questions — visit kidslitquizcanada.blogspot.ca.

Margaret Bloy Graham 1920–2015

Canadian-born-and-raised Margaret Bloy Graham, illustrator of *Harry the Dirty Dog* (Harper & Bros.) and many other books, died on January 22, 2015.

Although she spent most of her adult life in the United States, Graham maintained strong ties to the Toronto Public Library’s Osborne Collection, a resource she had discovered as an illustration student. Leslie McGrath, Senior Department Head, recalls, “As an established artist, Margaret donated a piece of original art treasured at Osborne, and one of our signature cards [in which] ‘Harry’ lies comfortably under a banner of ‘Osborne Collection.’ Margaret also gave the Osborne Collection the original drawings for *Harry the Dirty Dog* and copies of her books, many of which are decorated with inscriptions and original sketches.”

Nova Scotia book community fights higher book tax

The province of Nova Scotia is considering a change in the tax on printed books from 5% to 15% (by removing the HST rebate and effectively changing the provincial component of the HST from 0% to 10%). This would make it the only province to fully tax books.

The idea is being vigorously opposed by numerous organizations, including the Nova Scotia Library Association, the Atlantic Independent Booksellers’ Association and the Atlantic Publishers Marketing Association. They are encouraging Nova Scotians to write to their Members of the Legislative Assembly and all Canadians to sign an online petition. At press time, representatives were scheduled to meet with the Nova Scotia Finance Minister Diana Whalen on March 9.

Tell us about your newest book. In *Swimmers*, 17-year-old Hunter Ryan has been shipped off from his home in Victoria, BC, to live with his aunt in Lethbridge, AB, where his parents hope he will work through a few of his problems. *Swimmers* knits together Hunter’s pre-Alberta life with his new reality of living in his aunt’s basement, and the Greyhound bus trip through the Rocky Mountains that forces him to confront what he’s been running from.

Tell us about the process of writing. When I’m working on a rough draft, I’m writing fairly quickly and will have a manuscript completed in a little over a month. I think R.L. Stine once said that he used to rough out one to two *Goosebumps* novels a week. I’m not that fast, but it is remarkably easier to have something on the page to work with than to get stuck in the middle of the story. After that, it becomes all about rewriting. My current work — writing a PhD dissertation — has made me “extremely better” at rewriting.

How did you first get published? Peter Carver at Red Deer Press acquired my first book, *Before We Go* (2012), which I wrote as my Honours Thesis at Mount Allison University. The structure of *Before We Go* changed quite dramatically from first draft to the published version, dropping several extra character perspectives and about one third of the manuscript, and I learned a lot about editing and revising. I was so incredibly lucky to work with my editor Kathy Stinson. I’ve had Kathy’s picture book, *Red is Best*, since I was in elementary school and Peter’s edited collection of best short stories for teens, *Close Ups*, since high school. It seemed very serendipitous to get to work with them both.

What do you like about writing for young people? YA isn’t afraid to be vulnerable, and there is a sincerity and honesty about the storytelling. I think sometimes critics of YA (and I’m thinking of Ruth Graham’s Slate article here) seem to suggest that not only is it embarrassing for adults to read YA, but that it’s also embarrassing to be a teenager. But everyone’s been a teenager, and everyone has that shared experience. In a way, books for young people remind us of who we were and who we want to be, and writing those books allows me to remember adolescence without having to leave it behind completely.

Tell us about writers who inspire you. I constantly read YA. Some of my recent favourites are Matthew Quick’s *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock*, Jandy Nelson’s *Tell Me Again Why We Turned Away* and *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* and Morgan Matson’s *Since You’ve Been Gone*. I just finished Jennifer Niven’s *All the Bright Places*, which is told from the perspectives of Violet and Finch, who are facing tragedy in their senior year of high school. I’m looking forward to new books by Judy Blume, Matthew Quick and Robyn Schneider this spring. I like writers who write so well that they motivate me to get back to my own writing.
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CANADIAN CHILDREN’S BOOK CENTRE

Wednesday, June 17, 2015 | 6:00pm

Room 200, Northern District Library
40 Orchard View Blvd. (Yonge and Eglinton)
Toronto, Ontario  M4R 1B9

Reception to follow at
The Canadian Children’s Book Centre Library
Suite 222, Northern District Library

For more information, visit www.bookcentre.ca

GUEST SPEAKER: KATHY KACER

Members* and public welcome.

* Members are reminded that they may appoint a proxy to attend the Annual General Meeting on their behalf. Any such appointment must be evidenced by a document in writing, signed by the member and received by CCBC prior to the date of the Annual General Meeting.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

To all members: The Canadian Children’s Book Centre’s Annual General Meeting will take place on Wednesday, June 17, 2015 in Toronto at 40 Orchard View Boulevard, Room 200, Toronto, ON. In accordance with Section 3.04(b) of our bylaws please accept this notice as a formal call for the nomination of directors. The members will elect new director(s) to the board to fill any vacancies at the Annual General Meeting.

Two openings on the board will be available and we welcome nominations from the general membership.

If you are a member in good standing with the Canadian Children's Book Centre and have someone in mind who you think would be an asset to the CCBC and its mission and goals, please send the name of the person you are nominating along with their mailing address, e-mail address, current telephone number and a short bio to Charlotte Teeple care of the CCBC (charlotte@bookcentre.ca).

Nominations must be received by May 31, 2015 in order for them to be considered by the nominations committee of the board.

FAQ

Qualities we are looking for in a potential board member:
• strong belief in and commitment to the mission and goals of the CCBC
• would be interested in people with background in finance, public relations, fundraising, IT or website specialization
• must work well in groups
• although not essential, a plus would be some background in children’s literature
• able to commit to giving time and energy to the organization

Once a nomination is received by the nominating committee of the board it will issue to the nominee a form of consent that must be completed by the nominee and returned as soon as reasonably possible and in any event prior to the Annual General Meeting. A nominee shall also meet any other requirements for nomination determined by the board of directors from time to time.

PROXY

THE CANADIAN CHILDREN’S BOOK CENTRE (the “Corporation”)

PROXY FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MEMBERS TO BE HELD ON Wednesday, JUNE 17, 2015

The undersigned Member of the Corporation hereby appoints ___________________________________________________ or, failing him/her, the chair of the meeting, as proxy of the undersigned to represent the undersigned at the Annual General Meeting of Members to be held on June 17, 2015, at 40 Orchard View Boulevard, Suite 200, Toronto, Ontario at 6 p.m. (local time) or at any adjournment or adjournments of said meeting and at such meeting to vote for the undersigned upon any and all matters which may come before the meeting, and to do any and all acts and things which the undersigned might or could do if personally present; provided that, if checked, the following items shall be voted as follows:

1) The director nominee or nominees, or slate, identified in the notice of the meeting on the Canadian Children’s Book Centre website at www.bookcentre.ca is elected as a director of the Corporation:
   □ For  □ Withheld

2) Martyn, Dooley & Partners LLP Chartered Accountants, are appointed as public accountant for the Corporation to hold office until the next Annual General Meeting:
   □ For  □ Withheld

The undersigned hereby undertakes to ratify and confirm all that the said attorney and proxy of the undersigned may do or cause to be done by virtue hereof.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned has executed this Proxy, the ______ day of _____________________________, 2015.

Name of Member  __________________________________________________
   (please print)
Signature of Member  _______________________________________________

Proxies must be received before the calling to order of the meeting.

Please fax to Charlotte Teeple at 416-975-8970
or return by email to charlotte@bookcentre.ca
or by mail to Charlotte Teeple, Executive Director,
Ste. 217, 40 Orchard View Blvd, Toronto, ON M4R 1B9
How Yesterday Has Brought Us to Today
David Alexander Robertson connects kids to history
BY SYLVIA MCNICOLL

Tyrese: Learning history is like watching curling.

Just like Tyrese and Levi, the characters from his graphic novel, The Rebel: Gabriel Dumont, David Alexander Robertson found history boring throughout his school days — mostly because he didn’t really see anything connected to himself in it. For one thing, positive Aboriginal role models never made it to the school texts. But David has a very positive role model in his father Don Robertson, a full status Cree. Don was named to the Order of Manitoba for his dedication to the welfare of his people, especially through education, and his passion helps inform some of David’s career choices. Just like his dad, David wants to make a difference.

From Grade 3 on, David did love writing poetry and short stories and he graduated from the University of Winnipeg with a major in English. One of his professors acted as a writing mentor during off hours, but David lacked the confidence to submit any of his early efforts for publication.

After university, he worked as a personal banker at RBC, then as a coordinator of an Indigenous summer employment program, which led to his present day job in Indigenous workforce development and education.

“Toward a history littered with such harm, anger makes it difficult to focus. To realize there are things we can change, things we cannot.” (Narrator, David Robertson from The Life of Helen Betty Osborne.)

His first foray into making history relevant through sequential visual storytelling was not a fun or “comic” story. The Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation commissioned David to write about the 19-year-old Cree girl (originally from his father’s small northern community of Norway House) who was brutally assaulted and murdered by four men in La Pas. The murderers, who chose her solely because she was Aboriginal, were not brought to trial until 16 years later. Even though her story is serious and dark, David convinced the foundation that a graphic novel about the days leading up to her murder would be the best way to engage both younger and older readers. In The Life of Helen Betty Osborne: A Graphic Novel (In a Bind Publications, 2008), David used that approach to depict her as a person rather than a victim. Madison Blackstone, the illustrator, used black-and-white drawings and full-colour paintings as well as photographs to remind the reader that Helen Betty Osborne’s story happened in real life.

When Portage & Main Press picked up The Life of Helen Betty Osborne for distribution, David developed a relationship with them and submitted his next book proposal for 7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga to them. This series of four graphic novels, published by Highwater Press (an imprint of Portage & Main), juxtaposes a contemporary character, Edwin, against three other characters from the past over a time spanning seven generations.

“The Elders say what was done to us will touch us for 7 generations.” (James, father of main character Edwin)

David explains, “7 Generations came out of an idea of how I could tell a multigenerational story through the history of a Cree family in such a way that I could touch on certain times in history that I felt were important for youth to learn. The contemporary story was a vehicle to drive that story, and to show how healing happens when brokenness occurs within us.”

The touchstone stories include a background piece on Cree patriarch Stone and everyday life for Aboriginals before European settlers arrived; the smallpox survival tale of White Cloud, Stone’s great-grandson, after receiving infected blankets from the Europeans; and the residential school story of James and his brother who dies trying to escape. James, Edwin’s father, abandons Edwin while he is a child when he catches himself ready to perpetuate the abuse he saw at the school. These three narrative threads weave through contemporary Edwin’s suicide attempt and his subsequent struggle to recover from depression.

After 7 Generations, David and his publisher began looking at curriculum outcomes for different grade levels and then created a list of Indigenous historical figures that David would
research and write about. Big Spirit lends its name to both the series and the imaginary reserve on which the contemporary characters live. The modern children meet the historic figures and provide the entry into the past. In The Scout, for example, a student on a field trip to Winnipeg unwittingly encounters the ghost of Tommy Prince by his statue in Kildonan Park. Prince then recounts his war heroics to her while delivering sound bites of history: “World War II included the Holocaust and the only use of nuclear weapons.” Other heroes in the series include Gabriel Dumont, Pauline Johnson, Thanadelthur, John Ramsey and Shawnadithit.

“In all my work, I’ve tried to ask readers, students and otherwise, to think about the connection between history and contemporary society. How has yesterday brought us to today, and where do we go tomorrow with that knowledge. So, in framing Tales from Big Spirit in such a way that youth are learning about history and we can see how it impacts them and how they engage with it, it is connecting with youth but also asking them to consider, as the characters are, what that history means to them, and, to the larger community of this country in which we live.”

By day, David works as the publishing operations manager for the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. He enjoys his wife Jill’s support for his writing, both spiritually and physically. She encourages him and takes care of their five children (ages 11, 9, 6 and 4 years, and 18 days at time of interview) when he needs to create. His children continue to inspire him to help effect positive changes through his work.

Mostly he will write late at night after they are in bed. He likes working in the dark on a computer and thinks of his story visually as though watching a movie reel in his head, pausing when he wants to write out detailed directions for his graphic artist. He will rewrite, and submits only the edited version to illustrators. On a daily basis, as the artist creates the thumbnails, David will consult and make suggestions through Facetime. Scott Henderson, who has illustrated nine of David’s books, says, “David likes to have a lot of control over his scripts, with many ideas on the number of panels per page, general size of panels, and camera angles — which I like, as opposed to more loose or open scripts which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings — but he is open to suggestions and alternatives.”

“We are not our yesterday, we are our today, our tomorrow.” Narrator from The Life of Helen Betty Osborne.

While David plans another historical graphic novel, The Runner: Joseph Keeper, he is also branching out from writing graphic novels. His latest work, The Evolution of Alice, is a story targeted at adults but written simply and with enough emotional immediacy to suit young adult readers, too. Depicting strong family life on a reserve, it relates the tragedy that causes a Cree single mother to try to escape from these very ties. Together with a team of writers, David also completed a six-episode supernatural, Internet television series, The Reckoner (Kistikan Pictures Inc.), about what happens in a couple of remote adjacent communities, one a mining town, the other a First Nations reserve, when a stranger’s visit sets off some mysterious events and deaths.

As part of dedication to making a difference, he is also revisiting the Helen Betty Osborne story, this time around calling it Betty. When the first version was published, some 520 native women had disappeared since 1980; the latest statistic lists 1,200 as missing or murdered. David explains why he is writing the story again, “For one reason, I’ve grown as a writer and think that now I can handle the nuances and importance of Betty’s story far more effectively. Secondly, I believe her story is more relevant than ever, and in redoing the story I’ve been able to place her death into a contemporary context. So, readers will be able to read about her story and consider what it means today. What has changed, what hasn’t and what can change? And how do we change things together?”

Author Sylvia McNicoll’s 32nd novel, Survival (WP Publishing), depicts a plane crash just outside the Dene community of Hay River and a 17-year-old’s struggle to save her pilot mother. Her 33rd, Best Friends Though Eternity (Tundra Books) shows how an adopted Chinese teen struggles for a sense of family and belonging.

Books by David Alexander Robertson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Illustrator</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Ballad of Nancy April: Shawnadithit</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2014</td>
<td>Scott B. Henderson</td>
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<td>(Tales from Big Spirit)</td>
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<td>The Land of Os: John Ramsay</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2014</td>
<td>Scott B. Henderson</td>
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<td>The Poet: Pauline Johnson</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2011</td>
<td>Scott B. Henderson</td>
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<td>(Tales from Big Spirit)</td>
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<td>The Rebel: Gabriel Dumont</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2014</td>
<td>Andrew Lodwick</td>
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<td>(Tales from Big Spirit)</td>
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<td>The Scout: Tommy Prince</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2010-2011</td>
<td>Scott B. Henderson</td>
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<td>(Tales from Big Spirit)</td>
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<td>Sugar Falls: A Residential School Story</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2011</td>
<td>Scott B. Henderson</td>
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<td>Stone</td>
<td>(7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga, Book 1)</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2010-2011</td>
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<td>Scars</td>
<td>(7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga, Book 2)</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2010-2011</td>
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<td>Ends/Begins</td>
<td>(7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga, Book 3)</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2010-2011</td>
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<td>The Pact</td>
<td>(7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga, Book 4)</td>
<td>HighWater Press, 2010-2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Life of Helen Betty Osborne: A Graphic Novel</td>
<td>In a Bind Publications, 2008</td>
<td>Madison Blackstone</td>
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All books are also available in eBooks. Teachers’ guides are available for both series from Portage & Main Press.
In recent years, there has been an explosion of books from talented authors and illustrators of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) heritage. Equally important has been the marked increase in attention to the superb stories coming from those creators, both in the field of adult writing and in the realm of children’s and teen books. Consider the 2014 Governor General’s Literary Awards, where the Fiction prize went to Thomas King for *The Inconvenient Indian* (Doubleday), the Non-Fiction shortlist included Edmund Metatawabin’s memoir *Up Ghost River* (Knopf Canada) and the Children’s Text shortlist included *The Skraelings* by Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley (Inhabit Media).

Without a doubt, the publishers of these books want them to reach a wide audience of both FNMI and non-Aboriginal readers. As Randal McIlroy, editor-in-chief of Pemmican Publications of Winnipeg says, “The image I like to use is one of windows and mirrors. For readers [within the Métis community], these books recognize and validate our cultural heritage. For those from the outside, these books are a great chance to learn more about it.”

For FNMI and non-Aboriginal publishers alike, it is exciting to find the talented authors and illustrators who can tell those stories. For FNMI publishers, there are also the challenges of finding and retaining the staff to help bring those books into being and finding ways to reach and develop their audiences. For mainstream publishers, the task is to ensure that they can find and appropriately support the Aboriginal talents whose voices they want to bring to a wider audience.

**Theytus Books**

We need to find a way to reach those YA readers

Established in 1982, and based in Syilx territory on the Penticton Indian reserve in British Columbia, Theytus Books is one of the oldest First Nations (FN) publishing houses. Children’s books make up about one-third of its list. Titles range from Margaret Manuel’s board book, *I See Me*, and Beth Cuthand and Mary Longman’s picture book, *The Little Duck Sikihpsis*, to Larry Loyie’s memoir of residential school *Goodbye Buffalo Bay*. The company has also published four traditional stories told in bilingual editions (English and Dogrib).

Has the children’s book list changed over the years? Editor-in-chief Paul Seesequasis says it has changed in some ways and not others. “We’ve always had a fairly extensive children’s book focus and, more recently, YA titles or crossover titles. Picture books have been a bit part of that, and we’ve done a few language books that fit in nicely. It’s a pretty broad sweep.

“The changes are in technology and economics. We used to do a lot of hardcover / full-colour books. Given our size, [to do that now] would be fairly daunting. So we are doing softcover, not-so-expensive books. I would love to do hardcover, glossy, full-colour books.”

The other change, he adds, is in technology — the exciting possibilities of how to marry eBooks and apps with traditional books. “Particularly in the language books, there is a lot of potential there,” he says, noting that their Dogrib/English books came with a CD that allowed readers to hear the stories, a technology that might almost be considered obsolete.

The success of big-name authors in the adult field — like Joseph Boyden, Thomas King and Richard Wagamese — has helped grow the audience for FNMI stories. “It’s a positive thing for non-Indigenous awareness. There is a trickle-down effect. I am encouraged by the success of those three, and I am more encouraged by the emerging voices, the really talented writers coming out of small presses.”

What are the other challenges today and in the next few years for FNMI publishers as a whole? A member of the board of the National Reading Campaign (NRC), Seesequasis points first of all to the need to strengthen First Nations libraries, as discussed at the NRC’s recent Aboriginal Roundtable (see sidebar).

The second challenge is reaching YA readers, whom he describes as an increasingly transient population. “It is more critical somehow that now is the time to encourage reading — and to encourage reading Indigenous writers. We need to find a way to reach those readers, and to find a way to ensure that our books can be read online or on a phone. Often they will buy print books, too. We need to have the resources to reach those readers the way we should be reaching them.”
Thirdly, he says, it is important to encourage reading for its own sake. First Nations schools, he says, focus more heavily on training in the skilled trades, and he feels it is essential that books and openness to arts and culture are seen to be as important as a skilled trade.

A particular challenge for a publishing house like Theytus, he adds, is staffing. As an Indigenous publishing house, it is incumbent on the firm to use FN staff as much as possible, but finding and retaining good FN editors, marketing people and designers is difficult. “This difficulty is not reflected in the way funding goes to FN publishers.”

Furthermore, “FN publishers are in remoter areas without the supports that mainstream publishers have. So when they are going through periods of transition, it is harder to come out of that turbulence.”

**Pemmican Publications**

*The challenge is attracting and nurturing authors*

“We want good stories and commercial appeal with a cultural mandate,” says Randal McIlroy.

Over the last three decades, Winnipeg’s Pemmican Publications, an arm’s-length affiliate of the Manitoba Métis Federation, has tried to put that into practice. Among its authors are Joe McLellan, author of 12 books to date in the Nanabosho series; Deborah Delaronde (“It’s magical the way she wove traditional elements into a Métis story.”) and Bonnie Murray, author of four books with English and Michif text.

McIlroy says that one change over the years has been in an increased willingness to take on certain subjects. “We are not afraid to tackle some topics that might have been too daunting before.” He cites Peter Eyvindson’s *Kookum’s Red Shoes*, which deals with residential schools; Angel St. Cyr’s *Chickadee’s Trust*, about a child new to a neighbourhood and dealing with bullies; and Linda Ducharme’s *The Bannock Book*, a traditional kitchen story, but with the addition of the fact that the girl is preparing bannock for her diabetic grandfather (and a diabetic-adjusted recipe is included).

Pemmican has found ways to work with traditional material but with a new slant. In the picture book, *Girls Dance, Boys Fiddle*, the protagonist is a girl who wants her own role as a musician in the Métis fiddling culture. In the YA novels by T.D. Thompson, “the teen protagonist is very real, but there is a subtle incorporation of Métis elements.”

At the 2013 National Reading Campaign Roundtable on Aboriginal Readers, McIlroy talked about the challenge of creating stories for the contemporary reader. “[We] are looking for fiction that reflects modern realities, with emphasis on young, urban Métis people, the issues and challenges they face, and how they may draw on their community and history. This is our way to nurture and retain those readers who may begin with us via our popular books for children. As well, it vindicates the divergent reality of modern Métis life in Canada.”

Given that divergent reality, what makes a Métis story? “This is very much a fluid work in process,” McIlroy observes, citing the conundrum presented by a Mennonite colleague who wondered whether she was a Mennonite artist or an artist who happened to be Mennonite. What he has occasionally seen is tokenism where “people send a story and plant some bannock in it. Those kinds of cultural straitjackets are pretty easy to avoid.”

It is clear, McIlroy says, that there need to be more and better library services in northern and remote Canada. For Pemmican, however, the greatest challenge for an office of two people “is attracting and nurturing authors — and nurturing them more deeply. We also need to connect more deeply with school and college librarians — and that’s anything but a cakewalk.”

**Inhabit Media**

*Looking for an authentic Northern voice*

“We are like the little publisher that could... or at least we keep trying,” says Louise Flaherty of Inhabit Media.

For Inhabit Media, based in Iqaluit and Toronto, some of the challenges are different from more southern presses. The company, founded in 2006, now has approximately 200 books in print — about 80-90 titles in various language editions. Almost every book Inhabit Media publishes is available in English and Inuktitut. Many are also available in Inuinnaqtun and French and there are eBook editions in other Inuit dialects. Books for children and teens make up about 75 percent of its list.
Flaherty, an Inuk who saw books written only in English in her growing-up years, had been an elementary school teacher before she co-founded the company with Neil Christopher, a southerner who came north to teach and stayed, and his brother Danny Christopher. She says, “I knew we were lacking in books with Inuit content, written by Inuit for an Inuit audience. Why I started was to make sure the children in my daughters’ generation had more appealing books than I had.”

Neil Christopher says that when they sit down to decide on the work-list for the year, “we always make sure that the bulk of our list is for an Northern audience. However we always make sure that one or two might appeal to a southern audience.”

He points to Inhabit Media’s picture book on custom adoption (Nala’s Magical Mitsiaq) as a book that is likely to find most of its readers in the North but has now also found a southern audience.

It is a challenge to produce books in so many languages. Flaherty has a limited pool of translators; she tries to pick ones who are educators as well. Christopher observes that all their translators are, in a way, social justice advocates. “We select talented Inuktituk-speaking educators, because of their talent but also because of their commitment to the language. We make sure we don’t get sloppy with the language, sloppy with the orthography or sloppy with the grammar.”

While they publish in Inuktituk and other northern dialects, they see themselves as publishing not just Inuit authors but as publishing Nunavummiut authors (those from the entire northern community). “We are looking for an authentic northern voice,” says Christopher. “Part of that is living here, having a shared experience of the North.”

Unlike Theytus and Pemmican, who try to work almost entirely with First Nations and Métis authors and illustrators, Inhabit has reached out to national and international creators to help them achieve their goals. While they have prolific northern authors like Rachel and Sean Gitsualik-Tinsley, the company has often paired southern writers and mentors with northern writers to develop texts. In addition, they have worked with many non-northern illustrators, who have been very excited by the imaginative possibilities of northern stories. Flaherty and Christopher took this step in order to be able to produce their list at the pace they needed. “We were not content to do one or two books a year. We have wonderful artists in the North, but not a tremendous number of illustrators. We maintain control and approval, but we don’t have the luxury of not trying to involve national and international artists [and southern mentors].”

Inhabit has three people in the Iqaluit office (sometimes more at busy times) and two or three at the Toronto office. Staffing — finding translators and editors — is an ongoing challenge, as is the cost of living and consequent higher salaries (30 percent more) in the North. Christopher observes, “We don’t get to sell our books for 30 percent more. We have to do more with fewer people.”

Annick Press

“There is a richness of storytelling and wisdom that excited us.”

Annick Press has technically been publishing FNMI stories since 1988, when it released Michael Kusugak and Robert Munsch’s A Promise Is a Promise, and went on to publish many more books by Kusugak. In recent years, the non-Aboriginal company has accelerated its publishing of FNMI stories: two books in the non-fiction We Thought of It series; The Night Wanderer, Drew Hayden Taylor’s First Nations vampire story; Fatty Legs (about an Inuk girl in residential school); and most recently the anthology Dreaming in Indian, edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale. Another title by the same editors, Urban Tribes: Native Americans in the City, will appear in the fall of 2015.

“We’ve wanted to be a catalyst for FNMI voices for some time,” says publisher Rick Wilks. “There is a richness of storytelling and wisdom that excited us. At the same time we are very aware that this is a diverse community with a history and experiences that have remained largely marginalized in the broader Canadian consciousness. The best way we might contribute to giving voice to this community was by working with leading Aboriginal artists and providing a platform.”

Wilks says he is excited by new dynamic voices, such as those in Dreaming in Indian, who are challenging the status quo. “If we can play a role in bringing these voices to all Canadians, that makes for very exciting publishing. There is no question that the need for a better informed dialogue is there. Youth have interest and empathy for the issues that the Aboriginal community wants to get out there. We want to fuel the conversation.”

Mindful of the challenges for non-Aboriginal publishers in publishing FNMI stories, Wilks adds, “There is an energy, self-assurance and spirit [in FNMI writing] that is making a strong statement in relation to Aboriginal history and contemporary life. Our challenge as a non-Aboriginal publisher is to not get in the way, to let that confidence shine through and speak for itself.”

An NRC board member and former co-chair, Wilks says, “The issue of ensuring the books are visible in Aboriginal communities demands that we communicate with networks within those communities and support the work of the National Reading Campaign which has identified the need
Bringing Métis Children’s Literature to Life is a guidebook for teachers to support the children’s literature published by the Gabriel Dumont Institute. The guidebook supports teaching about the Métis and utilizes strategies that foster and promote literacy development (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing).

The stories used in this guidebook are written and illustrated by Métis authors and illustrators. Each story brings traditional and contemporary Métis culture to life. They honour the past and present. Métis children often see themselves in these publications. Non-Métis students will see and connect with the universal themes and relate them to their own lives while learning about Métis culture. Most importantly, this resource is about engaging readers in the history and traditions of Métis culture through literature.

Download this free resource at:
http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/13827

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Leveled reader set containing 27 books under 9 different themes, all relating to Métis culture. Each book has a level from A to I (3 for each level), word counts, cultural connections, and a lesson plan.

Various Pricing Available. Complete 27-Book Set $175
9-Book Theme Sets (1 Book per Theme, chosen from one of the three options below): $63.00
(A-C 8-page Stories, D-G 12-page Stories, F-I 16-page Stories)
6-book set of individual titles: $42.00   Individual titles: $7.00

Michif and English bilingual versions also available!
for libraries and trained staff as a national priority.”

An interesting feature of Dreaming in Indian and its forthcoming sequel is that the books have not only the same editors but also the same designer, Inti Amaterasu (Hiro Chavez). “Inti Amaterasu has deep roots with the Indigenous community. He has actively worked with a good number of Aboriginal people and organizations and has a deep understanding of the issues, artistic sensibilities and struggles. He is highly respected within the FN community, so we knew that people would be comfortable and trusting in their working relationships. He is also incredibly talented.”

Who does Annick see as the audience for these books? “Everyone! We hope that the books will play a supportive role in chronicling and enriching the lives of FNMI communities. But we also very much wish to open the eyes of all Canadians... There is a great need to build understanding across this country, challenge perceived notions and create room for a different vision to assert itself through literature.”

And more

Over the past decade, Canadians have seen fine books coming from a variety of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal publishers, including: Native Northwest, HighWater Press, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Fifth House Publishers, Harbour Publishing, Red Deer Press, Groundwood Books, Coteau Books, Kegedonce Press, Orca Book Publishers, Simply Read and more. A relative newcomer is Strong Nations; located on Vancouver Island, it has published over 90 books in its Strong Readers levelled reading series. The company also sells titles from other publishers both online and in its recently established bricks-and-mortar outlet in Nanaimo.

GoodMinds.com, the distributor based on the Six Nations of the Grand River at Brantford, Ontario, has been an active player in the fostering of FNMI literature since 2000, with its considerable expertise and an extensive catalogue of bias-free books and teaching resources, and its support for First Nation Communities READ and other book-related initiatives. Recently, the company embarked on its own publishing venture through its new Indigenous Education Press, releasing the impressive Residential Schools, With the Words and Images of Survivors by noted author Larry Loyie, with Wayne K. Spear and Constance Brissenden.

There are still many challenges in getting FNMI stories to press and to the readers who need to read them. The conversation around these issues is ongoing. But the increasing quality and quantity of what is being published and the determination of publishers to see those stories told present an encouraging picture of the future. ☀

Gillian O'Reilly is the editor of Canadian Children’s Book News.

Bringing readers and Aboriginal Stories Together

First Nation Communities READ: Shared reading encourages literacy

For over a decade, the First Nation Communities READ (FNCR) program has been bringing attention to children’s and YA books, as well as adult books, through an annual reading program. FNCR was launched in 2003, by the First Nations public library community in Ontario with coordination support from the Southern Ontario Library Service. As each community reads the selected title, and other recommended titles, the shared activity encourages family literacy, intergenerational storytelling and information sharing.

The chosen FNCR title receives additional recognition as the recipient of the $5000 Aboriginal Literary Award supported by the Periodical Marketers of Canada. This prize was instituted in 2014 and Julie Flett’s Wild Berries / Pakwa Che Menisu was the first winner.

Copies of the selected title are distributed to First Nation public libraries in Ontario. A poster featuring the selected title and recommended books is widely distributed, and participation from other provinces allows the poster to be disseminated in many parts of the country. In 2015, there are eight provinces and territories participating. In addition, the creator of the selected title tours to First Nation communities over the summer.

Selected and recommended books are those written and/or illustrated by or otherwise involve the participation of an FNMI creator; or contain FNMI content produced with FNMI support or endorsement. The program alternates between children’s books and YA / adult titles. The 2015 selected and recommended titles will be YA or adult books.

This year’s shortlist is being released in April and the winning YA / adult title will be announced in May. For further information, visit the SOLS website at www.sols.org and click on Links.

National Reading Campaign: A goal of strengthening libraries

One of the many tasks for the ongoing National Reading Campaign (NRC) has been to find answers to the question of how to support Aboriginal readers. To that end, two Roundtables were staged in 2013 and 2014, with a third to take place in early 2016. The 2013 conference focused on Aboriginal Readers: Opening New Worlds and the 2014 conference was titled “Aboriginal Readers: Best Practices & Advocacy.”

Speakers at the two gatherings included noted educator Harvey McCue; Dr. Sabrina Redwing Saunders, CEO of Six Nations Public Library, author Joseph Boyden; Dr. Cindy Blackstock; Bob Rae; Kim Delormier of the Kahnawake Library; Harriet Roy of the PahkiSimon Nuye?ah Library System in La Ronge, Saskatchewan; Jeff Burham of GoodMinds.com and many others, including Paul Seesequasis, Randal McLroy and Louise Flaherty.

The consensus arising from the two Roundtables is that there needs to be a library in every Aboriginal community and enhanced library services for Aboriginal people living in urban and rural communities. NRC Executive Director Sandy Crawley says, “Our most concrete goal is the overarching need to strengthen libraries on reserves and to assist First Nations librarians in the goal of forming a National Aboriginal Library Association, which could bring together private sector librarians, academic librarians and public librarians.”

A wealth of background information and videos of many of the thought-provoking presentations from both Roundtables are available at www.nationalreadingcampaign.ca.

And more

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Gillian O’Reilly is the editor of Canadian Children’s Book News.
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Heading Out
First-time Book Week authors talk about touring, failure, inspiration and daydreaming

Twenty-nine wonderful Canadian authors, illustrators and storytellers will be visiting schools, libraries, community centres and bookstores across Canada throughout TD Canadian Children’s Book Week (May 2–9, 2015).

Some of the participants have toured for Book Week previously and are returning to enjoy the sometimes exhausting but always exhilarating and inspiring week. Others are heading out for their first experience with the CCBC’s national tour. What are they looking forward to? We asked six authors.

**Chieri Uegaki visiting Quebec**
Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin, illustrated by Qin Leng
(Kids Can Press, 2014)
Rosie and Buttercup, illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch
(Kids Can Press, 2008)
Suki’s Kimono, illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch
(Kids Can Press, 2003)

The one and only time I’ve visited Quebec was during a summer holiday with my family when I was 15 years old. I remember really enjoying walking around the cobblestoned streets of old Montreal and feeling a bit like I was in a movie. So when I learned that my “working holiday” would be in Quebec, I was thrilled that I would get to revisit a province of which I have fond memories.

As a first-timer on the tour, I can only imagine how exciting, nerve-wracking and unpredictable each day is going to be. I’m psyching myself up to be prepared for anything! I look forward to meeting all the students and sharing a little bit about my heritage and how I came to be a children’s author. I also look forward to hearing their questions (and in some cases, declarations), learning what their interests and aspirations are and being inspired by them. If, along the way, something I say inspires a budding writer, then that would be a wonderful bonus.

I must confess there are a few things I am worried about: being late because of heavy traffic, losing my voice, and jetlag. Also, missing my flight.

**Lee Edward Födi visiting Ontario**
Kendra Kandlestar and the Search for Arazeen
(Simply Read Books, 2015)
Kendra Kandlestar and the Crack in Kazah
(Simply Read Books, 2014)
Kendra Kandlestar and the Shard from Greeve
(Simply Read Books, 2014)

I’m very excited to be participating in the Book Week tour for the first time and to have the chance to celebrate my latest book, *Kendra Kandlestar and the Search for Arazeen*, with young readers in Ontario. They’ll get to follow Kendra, Oki, Uncle Griffinskitch and some of the other favourite characters from the series to such magical places as the City on the Storm, the Unger witch’s lair and the whimsical town of Trader’s Folly. But Book Week isn’t just about my new book; for me, it’s a chance to spend time with young daydreamers, inspiring and empowering them to create their own stories. That’s what I’m looking forward to the most! During my Book Week school visits, I’ll be working with students to nurture their creative impulses by helping them brainstorm character designs or map out a hero’s journey across a dangerous landscape. Most of all, I’ll be encouraging them to embrace the raw creative process, emphasizing the joy of brainstorming — and the power of using a pencil without an eraser.
Jan Coates visiting BC (Lower Mainland)

The King of Keji (Nimbus Publishing, 2015)
Rocket Man (Red Deer Press, 2014)
The Power of Harmony (Red Deer Press, 2013)

What a privilege and pleasure it is for me to prepare for the TD Canadian Children’s Book Week tour! As a first-time participant, there are a thousand thoughts whirling around my head. I am eagerly anticipating every aspect of the event, but I would have to say that meeting with the children and youth involved will be my favourite part. The openness and sincerity of the young have always been a great source of inspiration and joy for me.

I am a proud Newfoundlander, and I see my work as a medium through which I may introduce others to my incredible home. The good things and the bad are equally compelling. It is my sincerest hope that by sharing the words and pictures within the context of my children's books, those that are present will gain a greater understanding of Canada's youngest province.

Jeff Ross visiting Alberta

At Ease (Orca Book Publishers, October 2015)
Set You Free (Orca Book Publishers, October 2015)
Above All Else (Orca Book Publishers, 2014)
Dawn Patrol (Orca Book Publishers, 2012)

Somehow, I’ve never been to Alberta. I’ve dreamed of the mountains there. The fresh powder. I have friends who live and work there and tell me what an incredible place it is. So I’m looking forward to seeing the province first hand.

While in Alberta, I hope to talk with as many young readers as possible. I feel my message of how we all need to fail, and understanding what failure really is, is an important one. I especially love talking with young writers. That spark I see in a young person who has just discovered the magic of writing fiction is so familiar. It never goes away, we just pass it from one person to another. So what I really am looking forward to the most is what I look forward to every day — inspiring and being inspired by all of the talented people around me.

Dawn Baker visiting Ontario

A Newfoundland Adventure (Flanker Press, 2014)
A Newfoundland Year (Flanker Press, 2013)
Saltwater Joys, written by Wayne Chaulk (Flanker Press, 2012)

What a privilege and pleasure it is for me to prepare for the TD Canadian Children’s Book Week tour! As a first-time participant, there are a thousand thoughts whirling around my head. I am eagerly anticipating every aspect of the event, but I would have to say that meeting with the children and youth involved will be my favourite part. The openness and sincerity of the young have always been a great source of inspiration and joy for me.

I am a proud Newfoundlander, and I see my work as a medium through which I may introduce others to my incredible home. The good things and the bad are equally compelling. It is my sincerest hope that by sharing the words and pictures within the context of my children's books, those that are present will gain a greater understanding of Canada's youngest province.

Shelly Sanders visiting Manitoba

Rachel’s Hope (Second Story Press, 2014)
Rachel’s Promise (Second Story Press, 2013)
Rachel’s Secret (Second Story Press, 2012)

I’ve had a tough time letting go of Rachel and Sergei after finishing the final edits for Rachel’s Hope, so I can’t wait to talk about them during Book Week. Whenever I discuss their tumultuous journeys from Russia to America, I’m struck by the genuine affection readers have for Rachel and Sergei.

The most gratifying part of being an author is seeing people enthusiastic about the characters I’ve created. Especially when one of these characters, Rachel, was inspired by my grandmother, a Russian Jew who lived under an oppressive Tsar’s regime, escaped an anti-Semitic massacre and put herself through university. Courage and perseverance are what got my grandmother through difficult times, and it is these same traits within my character, Rachel, that keep her going on the darkest days. My grandmother, however, hid her Judaism once she came to Canada, and I can’t help but wonder what she’d say about my sharing her life so publicly. Then, when I think about how her story has opened people’s eyes to the importance of tolerance and human rights, I look at my audience and begin speaking with pride — which is what I look forward to doing in Manitoba.
“BOOKMARK!” HIGHLIGHTS BOOKS FOR A VARIETY OF GRADE LEVELS AROUND A PARTICULAR THEME.

With the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games coming to Toronto this summer, explore summer sports, ranging from cycling to synchronized swimming and much more, with this diverse selection of books compiled by CCBC Library Coordinator Meghan Howe.

Summer Sports

PICTURE BOOKS AND EARLY READERS FOR KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 3

Along a Long Road
written and illustrated by Frank Viva
(HarperCollins Canada, 2011)

Speed off on an eventful bicycle ride along the bold yellow road that cuts through town, by the sea and through the country. Viva’s striking graphic style is executed in five joyous colours, and his spare, rhythmic language is infectious.

Captain Lilly and the New Girl
(First Novels)
written by Brenda Bellingham
illustrated by Clarke Macdonald
(Formac Publishing, 2009)

A competing coach doesn’t want to let Lilly’s friend Sara play soccer because she is wearing a hijab. But Lilly, Sara and the other soccer players, tired of listening to the adults argue, head off to have a game for fun, showing the grown-ups what really matters.

JUNIOR & INTERMEDIATE NON-FICTION AND FICTION FOR GRADES 3 TO 8

Addy’s Race
(Orca Young Readers)
written by Debby Waldman
(Orca Book Publishers, 2011)

Addy has always worn a hearing aid and, although her mother says it makes her special, she wants to be special for something she’s done. She joins her school’s running club and discovers her talent for the sport, but problems on the team and at school make Addy’s life complicated.

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

Behind the game of baseball lies a wealth of science, folklore, mathematics, psychology — and a very colourful past. Whether they are die-hard fans or casual spectators, readers will be captivated by this collection of fascinating, little-known facts. Fans will also enjoy Sylvester’s Game Day: Meet the People Who Make it Happen.

Cyclist BikeList: The Book for Every Rider
written by Laura Robinson
illustrated by Ramón K. Pérez
(Tundra Books, 2010)

An essential guide for cyclists, whether they’re first-timers or dedicated riders, this book includes historical information and lots of practical information, from how to choose a bike to how to maintain it, to proper nutrition and useful gear. Also included is a section dedicated to famous cyclists throughout history, including Canadian Olympian Clara Hughes.

Crazy About Basketball!
written by Loris Lesynski
illustrated by Gerry Rasmussen
(Annick Press, 2013)

With over 40 bouncy poems and energetic, humorous illustrations, this book captures the joys, thrills and challenges of basketball. The poems run the gamut from silly, just-for-fun ones to others that provide useful tips on training, tactics and teamwork. Young readers will also like Lesynski and Rasmussen’s Crazy About Soccer!

Curve Ball
(Sports Stories)
written by John Danakas
(Lorimer, 2014)

On his old team Tom was a star catcher, but on his new team all the players are older and bigger. His feelings of failure get worse once a new catcher joins the team and Tom is benched. Can Tom regain his rightful place behind the plate? Check out these other baseball titles in the Sports Stories series: Double Play by Sara Cassidy and Power Hitter by Christine A. Forsyth.
**Flying Feet**  
(Orca Sports)  
written by James McCann  
(Orca Book Publishers, 2010)

Jinho is frustrated with his traditional tae kwon do training. When he meets a trainer from an underground mixed martial arts club, the prospect of fighting without boundaries is exciting. He soon realizes fighting without rules or referees is dangerous. What will happen when he faces an opponent named The Ripper?

**The Gymnastics Book: The Young Performer’s Guide to Gymnastics**  
(Second Edition)  
written by Elf Schlegel and Claire Ross Dunn  
(Firefly Books, 2012)

Any child interested in gymnastics will be drawn to this comprehensive introduction to the sport. Expert advice is combined with instructive how-to photographs to create an indispensible resource. Topics covered include finding a club, warm-up and cool-down exercises, routines, nutrition and much more.

**Hoop Genius: How a Desperate Teacher and a Rowdy Gym Class Invented Basketball**  
written by John Coy  
illustrated by Joe Morse  
(Carolrhoda Books, 2013)

James Naismith was asked to take over a rowdy gym class right before winter vacation in December of 1891. The boys were all bored with the exercises and gymnastics they’d been doing, so Naismith decided to try something new. Using a soccer ball and two old peach baskets, Naismith introduced his class to his new game of basketball.

**Hustle**  
(Sports Stories)  
written by Johnny Boateng  
(Lorimer, 2014)

Fourteen-year-old Johnny, nicknamed “Hustle,” wants to be the school’s basketball star, but his friend Rex outshines him, on and off the court. Then Rex gets hurt, and Johnny has to put his jealousy aside to help his friend and his team. Basketball fans will want to read these other titles in the Sports Stories series: *Game Face* by Sylvia Gunnery, *Hoop Magic* by Eric Howling and *Pick and Roll* by Kelsey Blair.

**Jackie Robinson: Breaking the Color Line in Baseball**  
( Crabtree Groundbreaker Biographies)  
written by Matt J. Simmons  
(Crabtree Publishing, 2014)

Jackie Robinson broke the colour barrier to become the first African-American player in Major League Baseball. With dignity and composure, Robinson endured racist jeers and even death threats from fans and players. His historic feat of crossing baseball’s “colour line” became a symbol in the American civil rights movement.

**Kayak Combat**  
(Sports Stories)  
written by Eric Howling  
(Lorimer, 2010)

Cody is the star of his Calgary kayaking club as they host a Canada-wide competition. But there is a new guy from Ontario who can out-paddle them all. One stormy day, Cody notices his rival’s kayak is missing from the clubhouse — does Cody attempt a solo rescue or does he eliminate the competition?

**Playing Favourites**  
(Sports Stories)  
written by Trevor Kew  
(Lorimer, 2012)

Gavin is starting high school this year, which means moving from a school with a championship-winning soccer team to a school with no team at all. He makes a deal with the football coach who agrees to let Gavin be responsible for running the soccer team. Gavin soon learns that being a good coach isn’t the same as being a good player. Soccer fans will also want to read Kew’s *Breakaway*.

**Score! The Story of Soccer**  
(Soccer Source)  
written by Jennie Haw  
(Crabtree Publishing, 2013)

Providing a historical look at the sport’s development, from ancient times through its explosion in Europe to its huge popularity in North America today, this book will interest young soccer fans wanting to know more about the sport they love. They will also like Amanda Bishop’s *Soccer’s Superstars: The Best of the Best* in the Soccer Source series.

**Shot in the Dark**  
(Sports Stories)  
written by Janet M. Whyte  
(Lorimer, 2015)

Eighth-grader Micah is psyched to have made the BC junior goalball team — even though he gets the news while dealing with a flare-up of his degenerative eye condition. What he’s not happy about is his parents’ decision to get him a guide dog, and the possibility of losing his independence.
Soccer Sabotage  
(A Graphic Guide Adventure)  
written by Liam O’Donnell  
illustrated by Mike Deas  
(Orca Book Publishers, 2009)

Playing on her local soccer team, Nadia faces challenges from her opponents and teammates. After her coach is hurt in a suspicious accident, and threats against the team escalate, Nadia and her brother must pull the team together and take a shot at the championship. This read offers a clever blend of action, mystery and soccer tips.

Spiked  
(Sports Stories)  
written by Steven Barwin  
(Lorimer, 2013)

Emma is the tallest eighth-grader in her class. While she used to love sports, other things have become more important — like clothes and makeup and fitting in. When Emma gets roped into volunteering for the girls’ volleyball team, she feels the urge to play again. But what will her new friends say?

Topspin  
(Orca Sports)  
written by Sonya Spreen Bates  
(Orca Book Publishers, 2013)

Kat is thrilled to be competing in a junior doubles tennis championship. But her partner Miri is sneaking around at night, showing up late to practice and jeopardizing their matches. When strange things interfere with Miri’s boyfriend’s performance, Kat tries to figure out what’s going on before it’s too late.

Weird Zone: Sports  
(Weird Zone)  
written by Maria Birmingham  
illustrated by Jamie Bennett  
(Owlkids Books, 2013)

There’s more to sports than just soccer, baseball, basketball and hockey! This book uncovers the “other” sports of the world, from the local and hidden to the strange, bizarre and downright crazy. Discover people who ride bikes underwater, sail boats on sand and golf on ice. Filled with fascinating facts and fabulous photographs, Weird Zone: Sports is sure to please.

Wicket Season  
(Sports Stories)  
written by Gabrielle Prendergast  
(Lorimer, 2012)

Harry is determined to make the cricket team at his new school in Toronto, but he’ll have to step up his game. To impress his coach, he volunteers to coach Kanga cricket for beginners. He soon realizes being part of a bigger community is more rewarding than standing out on your own. Readers will also like Not Out by Dirk McLean.

SENIOR FICTION FOR GRADES 7 AND UP

BMX Tunnel Run  
(Take It to the Xtreme)  
written by Pam Withers  
(Whitecap Books, 2011)

Join Jake and Peter as they BMX their way through another adventure. The duo discover a maze of mining tunnels and ride through their latest escape — underground. Equipped with night-vision goggles, the teens have to defy a group of hostile riders as they struggle to find their way back to daylight. Along the way, Peter must deal with some personal misfortunes.

Haze  
(Orca Sports)  
written by Erin Thomas  
(Orca Book Publishers, 2012)

Bram’s friend Jeremy tells him he has information about a hazing-related student death, and then he’s injured in a hit-and-run accident. With Jeremy in a coma, Bram and Abby are trying to figure out what really happened. Is the swimming coach to blame? Bram doesn’t want to accuse an innocent man.

Straight Punch  
written by Monique Polak  
(Orca Book Publishers, 2014)

Tessa’s tagging habit lands her at New Directions, an alternative school in Montreal’s toughest neighbourhood. Half of every school day is devoted to boxing. The other students think boxing is cool; Tessa can’t handle violence of any kind. But when a neighbour starts a petition to have New Directions closed down, Tessa discovers something worth fighting for, both in and out of the ring.

Vegas Tryout  
(Podium Sports Academy)  
written by Lorna Schultz Nicholson  
(Lorimer, 2012)

Synchro swimmer Carrie Munroe is Podium Sports Academy’s best prospect at the upcoming Vegas tryouts — but the pressure to succeed, combined with family issues, leads Carrie to make risky decisions about her health and eating habits. Can her family and friends help her before things spiral out of control? Readers will enjoy other titles in the Podium Sports Academy series, including Forward Pass (soccer), Hoop Dreams (basketball) and One Cycle (lacrosse).
Named Best Bedtime Book of 2014 by the Huffington Post

"Shimmering with musical text . . . and stunning illustrations, *Sweetest Kulu* shows the hopes and dreams that accompany the arrival of a new child." —*Huffington Post*

**Sweetest Kulu**

by Celina Kalluk • Illustrated by Alexandria Neonakis

Recent titles from Inhabit Media:

- The Spirit of the Sea
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- The Walrus Who Escaped

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The Classroom Bookshelf

Animals Big and Small

BY SANDRA O'BRIEN

Featured in this edition's Classroom Bookshelf are books by Rob Laidlaw, Sue Carstairs and Natalie Hyde. If you have a child or student who's interested in animals, animal protection or bioluminescence, then one of these books should definitely fit the bill. Kids can read about elephants and what they need to thrive, they can learn about turtles and how they can be protected and they can discover strange land and ocean creatures that glow in the dark.

**5 Elephants**

*(5 Animals)*

written by Rob Laidlaw

Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2014

978-1-55455-316-7 (hc) $19.95

for Grades 3 to 7

Non-fiction | Elephants | Wildlife Protection | Social Action

In order for readers to come to know elephants as individuals, Rob Laidlaw has written a book that tells the stories of five famous elephants. Each touching story will help students to better understand that elephants, both in the wild and in captivity, are in trouble and need our help now. Elephants are incredibly social animals and should not live alone. They also need great expanses to wander through in order to thrive. In the wild, elephants experience a diversity of natural sights, sounds, smells and textures every day. Poaching for ivory, the destruction of elephant habitats and human-elephant conflicts are major threats to elephant populations. Laidlaw explains the differences between zoos and sanctuaries and about the many people around the world who work tirelessly to help elephants. Laidlaw refers to these people as Elephant Guardians and talks about the ways kids can get involved in elephant protection.

This is an excellent resource that will introduce kids to or get them talking about animal protection, the challenges of captivity and the endangerment of elephants in the wild. Laidlaw has written a comprehensive book that will help children understand more about these magnificent creatures and their way of life. The layout and design of the book have been well thought out and beautifully presented. The abundance of photographs will appeal to younger children and the content will keep older students engaged and fascinated. Written for students in the late primary and junior grades, this is a resource that should adorn the shelves of classrooms and libraries everywhere.

**Saving Turtles: A Kid's Guide to Helping Endangered Creatures**

written by Sue Carstairs

Firefly Books, 2014

978-1-77085-434-5 (hc) $19.95

978-1-77085-290-7 (pb) $9.95

for Grades 3 to 6

Non-fiction | Turtles | Endangered Species | Conservation

Sue Carstairs, DVM, is the veterinarian and chief medical officer at the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre in Peterborough, Ontario, and in this book she writes about the important work she carries out on a daily basis. The book begins with an introduction to turtles — their habitat, their diet, their anatomy and how they reproduce. She then goes on to talk about the crisis turtles are currently facing (they are among the most endangered animals on the planet) and what is being done to rescue and rehabilitate these beloved creatures. Carstairs talks about programs that harvest, incubate and hatch turtle eggs and raise and release baby turtles back into the wild. Conservation efforts are happening worldwide to save some species from extinction, and Carstairs encourages students to take steps to help turtles survive.

With just the right balance of information and visuals, this is another excellent resource to have in classrooms and libraries. The photographs are informative and stunning, and the text is clearly written. Teachers could use it to start conversations about habitat loss, pollution, the dangers turtles face due to the pet trade or ways to prevent road and fishing fatalities. It will appeal to students in the late primary and junior grades and could be used in conjunction with or to support the science curriculum.
Glow-in-the-Dark Creatures
written by Natalie Hyde
Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2014
978-1-55455-330-3 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 4 to 7
Non-fiction | Bioluminescence | Animal Diversity

This book introduces students to bioluminescent creatures on land and in the ocean. Students will learn which creatures use chemicals in their bodies to create “living light” and that these lights come in an astonishing variety of colours and patterns. They will learn about the importance of bioluminescence in nature, examine the chemical process that occurs to make creatures glow, learn why different creatures create different colours and discover how scientists are harnessing the power of bioluminescence for human uses. A glossary of terms is included as well as a list of books, websites, videos and exhibits that might also appeal to students interested in this topic.

While this book contains an abundance of fascinating information about bioluminescent creatures, I was disappointed with the layout and design of the book. I did not find it very child friendly and feel that a better balance of text and visuals could have been achieved. While I would still recommend the book as an excellent resource on this topic, I would warn teachers and parents that the book might be too complex for reluctant readers. The activities have been well selected, though, sound like fun and are explained in a straightforward and clear manner. This is a book best used with very proficient readers in the junior grades or as a resource for teachers.

Sandra O’Brien is the CCBC Interim Program Coordinator and a former teacher with an M.Ed. in Children’s Literature.
The Power of Observation

BY SENTA ROSS

From the moment we are born, we begin to observe. Here are four superb picture books in which the skill of observation is highlighted, whether it occurs in a backyard, neighbourhood or the world at large.

Life in the country is filled with endless chores for young Tom and his parents in *Work and More Work*. Yearning to experience more than tending the vegetable garden, the boy asks his parents, “What’s it like in the town?” “It’s the same everywhere,” comes the response. “There’s nothing there but work and more work.” Resolved to see for himself, Tom departs on a solitary quest to discover what lies beyond his rural environs. It turns out that the entire world beckons. He journeys from his farm in northern England to the neighbouring town and city, and then sails across the sea to faraway countries, thus witnessing a plethora of labourers and striking landscapes. When Tom relays details about his adventure to his parents upon his return, the response is, “I told you so. Wherever you go — just work and more work.”

But such an array of work! Setting the story in the 1840s, before electricity and engines are widespread, author Linda Little has composed a highly informative and entertaining tale about a society on the cusp of change. We follow the intrepid Tom as he traverses the globe while encountering a variety of workers, including those producing tea in China, indigo dyes in India and cinnamon in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Included is an afterword containing fascinating information about the trades depicted in the story.

The text piques our senses and fills us with wonder as Tom “... gazes at the endless blue of the world too vast for his imagination.”

There is much to examine in Óscar T. Pérez’s marvellous pencil-on-paper illustrations. Through the Spanish artist’s elaborate and meticulous panoramas, readers are transported to the bucolic English countryside, the bustling towns, the vast oceans and the exotic lands of 140 years ago. This is time travel at its finest!

The saying “A picture is worth one thousand words” clearly rings true for *Sidewalk Flowers*, a wordless picture book that speaks volumes. Here we follow a young girl and her father en route home from a grocery store. Congested with the busyness of traffic and preoccupied people, the urban streets they traverse are swathed in grey and devoid of any colour, with the exception of the child’s own bright red coat and hood. While the father converses on his cell phone, the girl pays close attention to her surroundings. Looking up, down and all around, she notices the small marvels of a teeming city, which others apparently fail to see. Discovering wild flowers growing in the cracks of sidewalks, the child gathers enough of them to create a bouquet. She then dedicates her humble but lovely bounty by placing a few blooms on top of a dead sparrow, beside a sleeping man on a park bench, and in a dog’s collar. As she calmly perceives and shares with others the wonders of the simple joys of life, colour gradually seeps into the city.

JonArno Lawson’s poignant story marks the small pleasures of everyday living. As the young child goes about her uncomplicated,
yet profound, rituals with her quiet grace and wisdom, one can’t help but be reminded of the gifts that surround us — if only we would take the time to notice!

Sydney Smith’s nuanced pen, ink and watercolour illustrations bring the intricacies of city life to the fore. He masterfully adds a fragment of brilliance wherever the girl’s eyes are focused — be it on a flower, a woman’s dress or a piece of glass — thus gradually transforming the washed-out grey of an urban landscape into an understated kaleidoscope of colour.

“Rosario lives next door. He’s a magician. He doesn’t pull rabbits out of hats or find pennies behind your ears. He’s a garden magician.”

So believes the little girl in *Rosario’s Fig Tree* who helps her elderly neighbour with the planting of seeds in his vegetable garden every spring. Amazed by his timing for the planting, in that it never snows or gets cold in the days that follow, she concludes, “It must be a magician’s secret.” The garden becomes even more intriguing with the addition of a fig tree, in time laden with fruit. With the arrival of fall and cooler temperatures, the girl becomes confused as she observes Rosario bending the leafless tree over, only to bury it under the ground. “I said we should have a funeral. Rosario just smiled. He didn’t seem very sad, but I know that he loved that tree.” However, with the arrival of spring, Rosario revives the fig tree, and the young gardener receives a valuable lesson about growth and renewal.

In this, her first picture book, Charis Wahl has written a delightful story about an enriching relationship that takes place in a backyard garden. Hearing the story from the viewpoint of an observant child, one encounters not only the rhythm of nature through the seasons but also the wise and patient immigrant who willingly shares his gardening knowledge with his protégé. “You just learn, and then you know.” More than seeds are being planted in this special place.

One is immediately engaged by Luc Melanson’s stylized, yet simple, digital illustrations, using limited palettes and colour gradations, particularly green and brown. The wide-eyed protagonists have an endearing quality that makes them, and their story, memorable long after the book has been read.

In *The Secret Life of Squirrels*, we meet Mr. Peanuts, a most unusual and uniquely talented squirrel. Rather than spend his days climbing trees and scurrying through the woods, he much prefers to cook on a grill, play the piano, read books and write letters, all within the comfort of his home. When Mr. Peanuts feels lonely, he extends an invitation to Cousin Squirrel to pay a visit. The two enjoy a wonderful time playing chess, riding a wagon, indulging in a picnic and experiencing camping. “Having a friend makes everything twice as fun.”

When squirrels became regular visitors to her backyard birdfeeder, Nancy Rose began photographing them with her digital camera. To add interest to her photos, she created a variety of handcrafted backgrounds and miniature props featuring household furniture and placed them on her deck and picnic table. Hiding peanuts in and around these props encouraged the curious squirrels to interact with them in almost human-like poses. Thus, a picture-book narrative featuring Mr. Peanuts emerged. A great deal of patience is needed to photograph wildlife, and Rose often took over 100 photographs in order to get one perfect image of Mr. Peanuts, living his life in a domestic setting quite similar to our own. This publication also includes “Ten Tips for Photographing Wildlife” and “Q&A with Nancy Rose” in response to those “How did she do that?” questions. Young readers will be entranced by Mr. Peanuts, whose secret has now been revealed.

Though these four picture books may differ in emotion, characters, place and style, the thread that unmistakably brings them together is that of the ability to observe and to integrate what is perceived into one’s everyday response to life. By watching and pondering, one learns. Horizons are broadened, thoughts take shape and lives are enriched.

Senta Ross is a former elementary teacher and teacher-librarian in Kitchener, Ontario.
Beck’s unique take on the conventional counting book is filled with beautifully descriptive imagery that brings to life each creature using simple words and short poems. Dragonflies dart, hover, dip, whiz, pause, zoom and zip, while snakes slither through the ferns, making “curly kinks and long twisty turns.” The cadence of each animal perfectly suits its actions, and evokes the rhythm of each creature for young readers.

The colourful collage illustrations by Patkau will provide hours of absorbed study, with realistic details such as dewdrops on the leaves and spider webs amongst the rushes to keep readers busy. The best counting books are those that encourage the child to participate in the process, and One Hungry Heron succeeds in spades with a search-and-find technique. While some of the creatures, such as the 10 tiny turtles, are more easily spotted, others may require the assistance of an older sibling or parent, especially on the final page when all the creatures are mixed together.

This book is deceptively simple, giving counting instruction from one to 10 and back down to zero, but it also provides a beautiful picture of wetland life. There’s an abundance of teachable moments here, from ecology to number sense, and it will be a welcome addition to every library, classroom and bedroom bookshelf.


Poetry / Wordplay

After discovering one another in a library in the title poem, Melvis and Elvis are soon leading us down “a secret path / Called POETRY.” We clap, jump and skip in rhythmic accompaniment to Lee’s wonderful poetic nonsense, rhymes and chants — from Sloppy Joe slurping up a bug along with his gumbo, to Mister Kim chasing mice after teaching his cat to run the store and to all the delightful otamuses in “The Notapotamus.”

His poem “Is Your Nose Too Small,” based on a certain tune about low-hanging ears, is energetically hilarious, while “Hopeless,” about a puppy that “chew[s] on the sofa, / And pee[s] on the floor,” is poignantly playful.

All his poems demand to be read aloud, including his quieter and more reflective ones such as “Sleeping With Bears,” in which a teddy occasionally requires the comforting arms of a child, and “The New Friend,” in which a child wonders “If you could like me / Like me now.”

Using ink to draw thick lines and digital media to colour, Tankard’s illustrations are bold and rich, complementing the whimsy and energy of Lee’s poems. Whether we are searching for the lost Triceratops in “Calling All Dinosaurs” or chanting Zoonberry pie as a prelude to flying in “The Wizard” or experiencing exploding body parts “In Cabbagetown,” all we want to do with each poem is to “read it, and read it, / And read it again.”

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.


Picture Book / Amusement Parks / Birthdays / Wordplay

Frank Viva brings Coney Island to your bookshelves with this playful and cleverly designed book. The story itself is sparse: a little boy and his mother spend his birthday at Coney Island, an ice cream cone is dropped, rides are ridden, there is birthday cake and night rain. Conceptually, the book is “a whole story with holes.”

On each right-hand page there are cut-outs through which the reader can see words, which turn into corresponding pictures when you turn the page.

Thematically the boy’s day takes turns for the better and worse, not unlike the rollercoaster he rides. Ultimately, the book is very design heavy — it uses five colours only and hand-drawn fonts. The text plays with onomatopaeia (e.g., I scream / ice cream) and is not as straightforward or story-like as some might want, but for those with an arty side it’s definitely engaging.

The book works well as a read-aloud, as the holes make for an adult-kid interactive experience. Because the interactions are tactile, however, it might be a more difficult read for a classroom, or at least require some advance planning. For example, a question

one asks the reader to ask the child, “Do you like this? Would you like to read it again?”
and answer about what the holes become or expose might work better than younger children taking turns turning pages.

At one sentence per page, and a fully rhyming text, it's an easy read for children with a short attention span. And who doesn’t like a carnival setting? Hot dog stands, space rides and whack-a-mole games are plenty here.

Tara-Michelle Ziniuk is a freelance writer and editor in Toronto.

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**Fishermen Through & Through**

**written by Colleen Sydor**

**illustrated by Brooke Kerrigan**

Red Deer Press, 2014

978-0-88995-517-2 (hc) $18.95

for Preschool to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Dreams | Choices | Fishing*

Peter, Santiago and Ahab are fishermen who are “as salty as the bottom of a pretzel bag” and “as weathered as a twisted stick of driftwood.” Nevertheless, they dream of exotic adventures. Peter dreams of travelling the desert on the back of a camel, Santiago wishes to float above the world in a hot air balloon, and Ahab imagines himself in an endless sea of colourful tulips. One day, they discover an albino lobster “as white as the clouds in Santiago’s daydreams” in their nets and they put the lobster on display in a local restaurant. When the fishermen are offered a chance to sell the lobster for enough money to fulfill their dreams, they must make a decision that could change their lives — and that of the lobster — forever.

With roots in a real-life story, *Fishermen Through & Through* is a captivating narrative. The rhythm of each page lends itself to a read-aloud, with subtly repetitive phrases to encourage participation. Each fisherman has his own distinctive dream to match his distinctive look, and adult readers will appreciate the nod to famous fishermen in literature through their names. The moral dilemma of the fishermen provides excellent starting points for discussion about sustainability and human interaction with the environment for both younger readers and their older counterparts.

Kerrigan’s beautifully rendered pencil drawings and soft watercolour illustrations complement the text perfectly, with whimsical details such as the emotions on the lobster’s face to keep readers entertained. Each page is a work of art, with beautiful colour washes to evoke the sea, balanced with tiny details of texture on fabric.

Sydor and Kerrigan have created a wonderful read-aloud story that stimulates the imagination, enticing readers to envision each step of the journey. Parents and teachers will discover something new in each reading, and the discussions it will inspire are sure to last long after the story is finished.

Jenn Hubbs

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**Sam’s Pet Temper**

written by Sangeeta Bhadra

illustrated by Marion Arbona

Kids Can Press, 2014

978-1-77138-025-6 (hc) $18.95

for Kindergarten to Grade 3

*Picture Book | Emotions*

Frustrated by having to constantly wait his turn at the playground, Sam has the biggest tantrum of his young life. Suddenly, a dark scribbly storm cloud appears over his head and, taking on a life of its own, frightens the other children away. “Sam had never seen anything like it before, but he knew what it was. It was a Temper.”

At first Sam enjoys the Temper’s companionship. But when he invites it home, the Temper, now completely out of control, wreaks havoc throughout. Doors are slammed, walls are kicked and dinner is thrown. When confronted by his family, Sam can only yell, “It wasn’t me! It was my Temper!” Much to the boy’s chagrin, the Temper continues its chaotic actions at school. Realizing that his constant emotional outbursts are damaging his relationships with others, Sam gathers a newly discovered inner strength and finds a creative way to control his Temper once and for all.

In her first picture book, Bhadra has cleverly transformed an esoteric concept into a visible entity, thus making it easier for children to examine their emotions. The interactions between Sam and his internal nemesis range from humorous to dramatic, and a sprinkling of different fonts adds greatly to the text’s expressiveness. Although Sam realizes that the Temper is never far away, he now understands what to do if it finds him again.

Rendered in pencil, gouache and Photoshop, Arbona’s detailed and fanciful illustrations are as energetic and vivid as the Temper she has so imaginatively brought to life. One could almost believe this whirling force of fury to be quite lovable, if only it wasn’t so destructive. Bright colours and geometric shapes dominate against a white background, drawing readers in to a world turned upside down and then back again.

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

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**The Pirate’s Bed**

written by Nicola Winstanley

illustrated by Matt James

Tundra Books, 2015

978-1-77049-616-3 (hc) $19.99

for Kindergarten to Grade 3

*Picture Book | Pirates | Loneliness | New Beginnings*

Although pirates have lived in countless children’s imaginations through the centuries, it is the bed of a pirate that takes the starring role in this fantastical tale. During a fierce storm, the pirate’s ship crashes onto an island shore. While the pirate and his shipmates make it to safety, the bed is swept out to sea, where it floats aimlessly at the mercy of the deep undercurrents. At first, the bed is jubilant to be free of the smells, snores and immense weight of its owner. How glorious it feels to welcome birds to rest upon its frame in the sunshine, and to play with a school of dolphins! However, with time the bed realizes that something is definitely missing.

Senta Ross is a former elementary teacher and teacher-librarian in Kitchener, Ontario.
It receives a new lease on life after it is rescued on a beach and comes to belong to a young boy who, fortuitously, dreams of becoming a pirate.

It is indeed inspiring to read Winstanley’s brilliant narrative, which magically transports readers into a nautical world of adventure. Her expressive storytelling, with its vibrant imagery and rich language, transforms an inanimate object into a poignant being with profound thoughts and deep feelings.

James’s surging maritime panoramas, rendered in acrylic and India ink on board, seethe with energy, action and humour. There is much for readers to examine, both above and below the sea’s surface. Giving eyes and a mouth to the pirate’s four-poster bed adds to its human-like personality, and the image of the unkempt sleeping pirate is unforgettable.

Senta Ross

Unnatural Selections
written and illustrated by Wallace Edwards
Orca Book Publishers, 2014
978-1-55498-055-2 (hc) $19.95
978-1-55498-055-9 (pdf) $19.95
978-1-55498-057-6 (eBook) $19.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Picture Book | Imagination | Fantastical Creatures | Creativity | Wordplay

Wallace Edwards has created another delightful book that is more about the illustrations than a story. Unnatural Selections is a collection of mixed and matched animals created by Professor I. B. Doodling.

What a wonderful conceit for a book! The presentation is appealing with each animal given a two-page spread. The left-hand page includes the name of the creature and the animals that are combined to make it, a simple drawing and a two-line rhyme. The right-hand page is a full-colour illustration embellished with a naturalistic background and other animals. Most of the selections are two animals combined while some are three or more.

There are 12 featured creatures but don’t stop there, look for smaller mixed animals as well (the bumblebear is particularly appealing). In addition, there are real animals hidden in each picture. The hawkodile, for example, is shown at rest on the left-hand page and with open wings on the right-hand page, but hidden in the picture, among the rich variety of mixed animals, real animals and insects, are a hawk and a crocodile. Wallace also lists all the mixed animals at the back of the book (but not the real ones). Each picture can be approached in several different ways, making this a book that you can ‘read’ in any way you want.

A new book by Wallace Edwards is cause for celebration. He uses his own distinctive style to create a unique book full of pleasure and amusement. You will want to enjoy this book many times, sharing the pleasure and surprise with your young one; it is a wonderful addition to any library.

Willow Moonbeam is a librarian and math professor.

Frankenstink! Garbage Gone Bad
written and illustrated by Ron Lightburn
Tundra Books, 2015
978-1-77049-694-1 (hc) $19.99
for Grades 1 to 3

Picture Book | Monsters | Environment | Humour

Award-winning author and illustrator Ron Lightburn offers a twist on teaching kids to clean up their rooms. He saves the message of Frankenstink until the end of the book, after making sure he really has his readers’ attention. Using onomatopoeia and rhyme, Lightburn tells kids what happens to all of the junk and trash that collects when they shove things under their beds or in their closets. He creates a garbage monster, reminiscent of our generation’s Garbage Pail Kids, which is ravenous and a bit scary for younger readers.

The perfect target audience for this book would be boys in Grades 2 and 3. It has enough goo and gross descriptions to get them excited. The pictures are vivid, but dark, as the blob creeps around and over broken toys, dust bunnies and forgotten food. Frankenstink begins to stir, thanks to the boy’s extremely messy bedroom.
Fresh new books for spring!

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A guide to solving nature mysteries of seas, sands, and surf.

Music is for Everyone
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Art by Sydney Smith
Discover all the joys of making music!

Here Babies, There Babies
Words by Nancy Cohen
Art by Carmen Mok
Follow baby on a typical day: at the store, at the park, at the library.

The King of Keji
Words by Jan L. Coates
Art by Patsy MacKinnon

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The Canadian Children’s Book Centre
The best part of this book is the use of words that depict sound, such as KERPLUNK, RUMBLE, ROAR, KASPLOOEY. The vocabulary would make it a fun read-aloud at home or in a classroom. While some of the images could be scary for children under seven, they are fluid; the movement makes them almost jump off the page. If you’re trying to entice a reluctant reader, especially a boy between the ages of 7 and 9, this book would work.

Jody Holford is a teacher and author in Chilliwack, BC.

**Not For Sale**  
*(Orca Echoes)*  
written by Sara Cassidy  
illustrated by Helen Flook  
Orca Book Publishers, 2015  
978-1-4598-0721-1 (eBook) $6.95  
for Grades 2 to 4  
reviewed from advance copy

**Fiction | Moving | Families**

Cyrus and his younger brother, Rudy, find out they are moving from their beloved house. Rudy has lived there since birth, Cyrus since his parents adopted him as a baby. When the “For Sale” sign goes up in front of the house, Cyrus takes things into his own hands to make sure the house is not sold, so he and his family can stay.

Cassidy succeeds in producing fully fleshed-out characters and family dynamics within a short volume, and does so without taking away from the central plot. While this is ultimately a book about moving, and two brothers resisting change, Not For Sale manages to include many other elements. They include Rudy’s anxiety disorder, Cyrus’s feelings about being adopted, and their father’s work as a logger and his long absences from home. The story also touches on family income, as the reason for the move is that they can’t afford to stay where they are.

Cassidy develops the quirks and rituals of her characters, really bringing them to life and making them relatable. She balances the heavy aspects of the story with quirkiness and humour. Flook’s interspersed drawings also bring a lightness and whimsy to the book.

What stands out is that Cassidy doesn’t shy away from creating boy characters that are emotional and sensitive. This book is recommended as a platform to talk about moving homes, but apart from its central theme, it is also a great and entertaining read.

Tara-Michelle Ziniuk

**Connecting Dots**  
*(A Gutsy Girl Book)*  
written by Sharon Jennings  
Second Story Press, 2015  
978-1-927583-62-3 (pb) $9.95  
for Grades 4 to 8

**Fiction | Orphans | Friendship | Courage | Secrets**

“No one wants me… I am an accident! I’m an embarrassment. I’m not supposed to be alive!” Set in the 1960s, this is the moving story of Cassandra Jovanovich and the burden of illegitimacy she carries. When her beloved grandmother dies, Cass is passed around various relatives, none of whom really want her. Her great-aunts simmer with resentment at having to take care of such a shameful reminder of their family’s disgrace. It isn’t until Cass is 12 that she begins to find some stability, discovers some truths about her mother — and meets Lee Mets.

Jennings’ first Gutsy Girl novel, Home Free, is Lee’s story of the summer she met Cass. Now Lee wants Cass to write her story, too. Cass is unsure… can she tell the truth of who she is after so many years of lying? And her story is strong; is it too strong to be written? But once she gets started, Cass finds she can’t stop. Writing her story is like completing a really large connect-the-dots puzzle. And she really wants to see the picture that will emerge.

Jennings has drawn a tenderly genuine character in Cass who is both naive and insightful. She does not survive the upheavals of her life unscathed — she is secretive, distrustful, becomes adept at stealing and even flirts with arson — lashing out with a deep-seated anger she learns she must never show. But Cass is more than the sum of her life’s hardships. She is tough and resilient and she revels in moments of joy where she finds them.

This is an engaging, heart-felt story. Cass’s direct narrative voice will appeal to young readers, drawing them into the story and convincingly bringing to life the feel of the 1960s. A worthy addition to any bookshelf.

Tracey Schindler is a book reviewer and former teacher in Ajax, Ontario.

**Rain Shadow**  
written by Valerie Sherrard  
Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2014  
978-1-55455-341-9 (pb) $12.95  
for Grades 4 to 7

**Fiction | Disability | Grief | Polio | Community**

Award-winning author Valerie Sherrard continues to explore the connection between human beings, community and nature in Rain Shadow, a companion novel to The Glory Wind.

Twelve-year-old Bethany is slower than the other kids her age and has a physical disability, but she believes her father when he tells her that she’s special. Bethany’s mother is less forgiving, often hiding her from company and chastising her when she does something wrong. When it comes to Bethany’s older sister, Mira, however, Mother dotes on her. As Bethany says, “She is a jewel and I am a stone or she is a rose and I am a cabbage.” When Mira contracts polio and dies, Bethany’s grieving mother blames her for her sister’s death and turns against the family, leaving Bethany and her father to start over.

Jennings has drawn a tenderly genuine character in Cass who is both naive and insightful. She does not survive the upheavals of her life unscathed — she is secretive, distrustful, becomes adept at stealing and even flirts with arson — lashing out with a deep-seated anger she learns she must never show. But Cass is more than the sum of her life’s hardships. She is tough and resilient and she revels in moments of joy where she finds them.

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Tracey Schindler is a book reviewer and former teacher in Ajax, Ontario.
The setting is The Junction, a couple of years after the events of The Glory Wind. Readers will be reintroducted to some familiar faces, such as Luke, and discover a few surprises that link the books together. However, Rain Shadow stands on its own as a story told from the point of a view of a person with special needs, keeping the action very close to Bethany’s experience. She might be “slow,” but she is perceptive, picking up on small details, such as how the community didn’t stay at the house during her sister’s wake because they worried about contracting polio. These novels work well together. Each explores themes of tolerance and compassion in the context of post-WWII Canada, using unique points of view that on one hand create the illusion of distance, but on the other put the reader right where s/he needs to be.

Melanie J. Fishbane is a freelance writer and the Co-ordinator for Canadian Children’s Book Reviews for the National Reading Campaign.
The boys of the Seven Series are thrust into a new set of adventures — The Seven Sequels — when they discover a hidden cache of passports and foreign currency at their grandfather's cottage. They also find an envelope with the words “You are a traitor, you deserve to die” embedded in it and a notebook indicating that their mysterious grandfather may indeed have been a spy. To Adam, the most exciting find is a Walther PPK pistol — James Bond's weapon of choice — and he is quick to claim it. The boys set off for different destinations chasing their grandfather's secrets. Following the address on the envelope as his lead, Adam (with the Walther) leaves for Bermuda.

A huge Bond fan, Adam is eager for adventure, but uneasy about uncovering his grandfather's dark secrets. Once in Bermuda, he is plunged into his own Bond-style exploits: he comes face to face with someone who appears to be his grandfather, is nearly crushed to death by a shed with moving walls, is rescued by a girl named Angel, and is relentlessly pursued by bad guys.

He is also trying hard to overcome his darker side (which he dubs Bad Adam). Bad Adam is enthralled with the Walther, violence and beautiful girls. Adam must hold this darker side of himself in check throughout the novel. Ultimately, Adam is a reminder that we are all both dark and light, and that we are defined not by our thoughts and otherworldly boy named Win, and discovers the shocking truth — for thousands of years Earth has been the subject of alien time-manipulation experiments, and the “wrong” feeling is her ability to sense shifts in chronology. Win needs Skylar's help to stop time-traveling experiences also offer her, and the reader, a perspective on the cycle of violence in history, and what, if any, obligation humanity has to fix the messes they create.

For as long as she can remember, 17-year-old Skylar has been haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she’s haunted by the feeling that something is horrible


Stewart and Ashley have next to nothing in common. Stewart has always been exceedingly bright and motivated, but is awkward and uncomfortable in most social situations. Ashley is solely interested in maintaining her standing as the most popular girl in school. But the two are both struggling to deal with recent traumas in their home lives, including the fact that Stewart's dad and Ashley's mom have decided to move in together. This means that the four of them have to learn how to become a new family and to adapt to each other's unique styles and idiosyncrasies. While Stewart is still coming to terms with his mother's recent passing, he's glad to see his father happy and is willing to try to make this new arrangement work for his father's sake. Ashley, meanwhile, is angry and bitter: about her father's recent revelation that he is gay, about her new blended family and about geeky Stewart now being a part of her life. But when the chips are down, both Ashley and Stewart discover who their friends really are and what it truly means to be a family.

Nielsen once again offers up a story that explores the complex nature of families and family ties with warmth and wit. She sensitively tackles a number of weighty issues, ranging from the death of a parent to bullying and homophobia, yet manages to keep the tone light. Stewart is an endearing character whose honesty and openness, especially when speaking of how much he misses his mother, is refreshing and lovely. Unfortunately, Ashley's character falls somewhat flat by comparison, coming across as more of a stereotype than the fully formed protagonist she might have been. Readers will nevertheless be relieved by the satisfying, if not entirely surprising, resolution and will appreciate Nielsen's authentic depiction of contemporary school (and home) life.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager of Woozles in Halifax.

Earth & Sky (Earth & Sky Trilogy, Book 1) written by Megan Crewe Razorbill Canada, 2014 978-0-670-06-812-8 (hc) $18.99 978-0-14-319316-6 (eBook) $11.99 for Grades 7 and up Fiction | Science Fiction | Time Travel

For as long as she can remember, 17-year-old Skylar has been haunted by the feeling that something is horribly wrong. Despite her frequent panic attacks, nothing ever happens, and she's beginning to think that she's crazy. Then she meets a mysterious and otherworldly boy named Win, and discovers the shocking truth — for thousands of years Earth has been the subject of alien time-manipulation experiments, and the “wrong” feeling is her ability to sense shifts in chronology. Win needs Skylar's help to stop them. But with each shift in the past, the very fabric of reality is unraveling, and soon there may be no Earth left to save.

The first book in Crewe's new trilogy is a fascinating sci-fi time travel that will give readers plenty to ponder. Time travel is always a challenging device to execute, and Crewe mostly does it well, offering readers a unique take. Time travel in this story is far from glamorous. It's physically uncomfortable and nauseating, and it doesn't get much easier with practice. The time machine is a combination of invisibility cloak, flying carpet and iPad, and there are some humorous moments as Win and Skylar are challenged to find a place to charge it before the battery runs out. Skylar’s time-travelling experiences also offer her, and the reader, a perspective on the cycle of violence in history, and what, if any, obligation humanity has to fix the messes they create.

Readers will also appreciate how Skylar uses time travel to solve the mystery of what really happened to her older brother who was presumed to have run away when she was five, at the peril of creating a time paradox by changing the past.
leper of the dragons, must prepare for war. Seraphina soon assumes a pivotal role when she is sent on a mission to find and bring back all of her fellow ityasaari (half-human, half-dragon) kin. Together, they have an extraordinary ability that could change the course of the war. With only her unique internal connection to these individuals to guide her, she sets out on this journey filled with hope. But before long, she realizes that convincing the ityasaari to unite may prove more challenging than she had anticipated. Then her worst fears are realized: Jannoula, a diabolical ityasaari with the power to enter and control the minds of her brethren, has taken up this same cause, but Seraphina knows that she cannot be trusted. As she watches those that she loves fall victim to treachery and cunning, and the fate of the world hangs in the balance, Seraphina must find within herself the strength, and the secret, to overcoming Jannoula.

Filled with shrewd political machinations, beguiling and multi-faceted characters and sophisticated world building, Shadow Scale is a worthy follow-up to the highly lauded Seraphina. Hartman’s artistry is very much in evidence here as the plot carefully and dramatically unfolds. Seraphina remains an empathetic and relatable protagonist whose hopes, dreams and insecurities are realistic and integral to the story. The author skillfully weaves the many and various aspects of the story into a rich and exquisite tapestry that still leaves readers wanting more. Readers will be left especially anxious to know more about the complex relationships between Glissenda, Lucian and Seraphina than what the resolution of this tale provides. That notwithstanding, it is an intricate, highly ambitious and brilliantly imagined sequel that succeeds, despite packing an incredible amount into its 600+ pages.

Lisa Doucet

Andreo’s Race
written by Pam Withers
Tundra Books, 2015
978-1-77049-766-5 (pb) $14.99
978-1-77049-767-2 (eBook) $6.99
for Grades 7 to 10
Fiction | Friendship | Family | Adoption | Adventure Racing | Baby-Trafficking

Sixteen-year-old adrenaline junkies Andreo and Raul are best friends. The thrill of adventure racing — including mountain biking, caving, trekking and canoeing — has made them fast friends, but they are also bound by a deeper tie. Both boys were adopted as babies from Bolivia and both feel like outsiders in their own families. Andreo feels second-rate compared to his natural-born brother, while Raul’s parents have slipped into alcoholism and neglect.

When Andreo’s father suggests that they all participate in an international adventure race in Bolivia, it is the chance of a lifetime. They will get to participate in a high-profile race and visit their country of birth. Then Raul happens upon a news article about the ringleader of a Bolivian black-market baby racket being captured. Gradually Andreo’s desire to race is subsumed by his need to learn about his adoption; he becomes consumed with a longing to find his birth mother — a mother that in his imagination will love him completely.
Tensions rise as the race begins at the same time as clues about their adoptions begin to emerge. Andreo’s nerves become frayed and his loyalties divided. The boys’ efforts to keep their sleuthing secret lead them to escalating conflicts with Andreo’s family and finally a dangerous confrontation with baby-trafficking thugs.

Acclaimed author Pam Withers provides lots of action and drama as well as a satisfying ending in this fast-paced story. Andreo and Raul are credible as energetic and bright, if naive, teenagers trying to define themselves, to find a feeling of identity and a place of belonging. The action of adventure racing will draw readers in, but the emotional ride of Andreo’s race to find his mother will keep them reading.

Tracey Schindler

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**Guardian**
written by Natasha Deen
Great Plains Teen Fiction, 2014
978-1-92785-509-6 (pb) $14.95
for Grades 7 to 10

*Fiction | Supernatural | Bullying | Mystery*

Seventeen-year-old Maggie Johnson sees ghosts and has for years. She’s used to the constant stream of confused spirits who need her help to move on. Transitioning the dead is hardly difficult. What’s more of a struggle is surviving the spirits who need her help to move on. Transitioning the dead is and has for years. She’s used to the constant stream of confused spirits who need her help to move on. Transitioning the dead is hardly difficult. What’s more of a struggle is surviving the spirits who need her help to move on. Transitioning the dead is and has for years. She’s used to the constant stream of confused spirits who need her help to move on. Transitioning the dead is and has for years. She’s used to the constant stream of confused spirits who need her help to move on. Transitioning the dead is hardly difficult. What’s more of a struggle is surviving the spirits who need her help to move on. Transitioning the dead is and has for years. 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She’s used to the constant stream of confused spirits who need her help to move on.

In her new young adult novel, Alberta author Natasha Deen has created a unique supernatural mystery with themes of bullying and redemption. Maggie’s father knows about her gift, but no one else does. Navigating high school is difficult enough without everyone else knowing she sees dead people — especially Craig, the hot new guy on whom Maggie is crushing.

Serge seems at first blush like a stereotypical jock/bully, but as he and Maggie reluctantly work together to solve his murder, readers witness his gradual transformation into an empathetic and redemptive character. While their partnership is as unwanted as it is unlikely, it works, and a lot of the novel’s humour comes from their relationship.

The mystery is complex and well crafted, and the author does an excellent job of allowing the clues to be revealed through characters that are unpredictable and also complex. The spooky atmosphere, supernatural elements and rapid-pacing and smart dialogue make this an excellent choice for reluctant teen readers craving excitement and depth.

Rachel Seigel

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**The Gospel Truth**
written by Caroline Pignat
Red Deer Press, 2014
978-0-88995-493-9 (pb) $12.95
978-1-55244-349-1 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 7 to 12

*Fiction | Black History | American History | Novels in Verse*

The year is 1868. With her mother sold away, Phoebe is an enslaved 16-year-old who works inside the Master’s household on a Virginia tobacco plantation. Phoebe’s world consists of Bea who is like a mother, Master Duncan, his cruel wife and their daughter Tessa. Will is a recaptured fugitive slave who was severely punished, yet his brother Shad seeks Master’s approval and Phoebe’s hand in marriage. When Dr. Bergman arrives on the plantation to study birds, Phoebe’s silence and observations are welcome. Yet, it appears Dr. Bergman is in search of something else that only Phoebe can provide, which infuriates Tessa. Could getting even mean the difference between Phoebe’s freedom and a life of captivity?

With films like 12 Years a Slave and Django Unchained and the CBC/BET television miniseries, The Book of Negroes, public interest has turned to slave narratives. The Gospel Truth finds itself in a timely niche. This book could work in an English poetry unit or History class at the secondary school level; it would also appeal to the socially conscious intermediate grade student.

Pignat uses titled poetic recountings to tell this story from the perspectives of six characters, cleverly distinguishing each one’s voice in the first person. Although Phoebe is mute with an old soul, her vocabulary and inner landscape are rich, her descriptions colourful — sweet memories and longing for her absent mother, the slow curve of her southern drawl, and the words she treasures that form her truth. Young readers are drawn into the brutal and callous world that surrounds Phoebe but does not crush her gentle spirit.

Nadia L. Hohn teaches at an alternative elementary school in Toronto and is the author of two books in the Sankofa series being published in 2015.

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**The Truth Commission**
written by Susan Juby
Razorbill Canada, 2015
978-0-670-06759-6 (hc) $21.00
978-0-14-319445-3 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 8 to 12

*Fiction | Truth and Lies | Friendship*

“It is our destiny to bring some much-needed truth to this world of lies.” When Normandy’s best friend, Dusk, makes this bold declaration, their other best friend, Neil, readily agrees. And thus the three of them become the self-appointed “Truth Commission,” committed to asking people to reveal the truth about specific aspects of their lives.

Norm goes along with this new project, but has her own misgivings about it: shouldn’t people have the right to privacy? Does their quest for truth sometimes cross the line into poking into things that are none of their business? What her friends don’t know is that she is already being confronted with more supposed truths than she feels equipped to handle in her own life. But when Norm begins
to realize the full extent of the lies that her sister has been crafting into her own twisted version of reality, she is shocked to discover that her friends are there to help her uncover the real truth and to deal with its messy consequences.

In characteristic Susan Juby fashion, this book delivers a thoughtful reflection on the nature of truth in a package that is smart and funny and utterly original. Written as Norm’s narrative non-fiction assignment, it is a unique variation on the journal format (with witty footnotes adding an extra element of slightly irreverent humour). The art school setting is an ideal backdrop for the story and is cleverly depicted. The primary and secondary characters are all fresh and convincing, and Norm’s journey is both wacky and offbeat and yet strangely sympathetic. Part mystery, part family drama and wholly hilarious, this is Juby at her finest.

Lisa Doucet

Fragile Bones: Harrison & Anna
(One-2-One, Book 1)
written by Lorna Schultz Nicholson
Clockwork Press, 2015
978-0-993939-510-7 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 8 and up
Fiction | Friendship | Disabilities

Seasoned author Lorna Schultz Nicholson’s Fragile Bones: Harrison & Anna is the first book in Clockwork Press’s One-2-One series. Inspired by the Best Buddies program, each book in the series focuses on a different pair of teens participating in the program at a fictional high school. In this book, told from the alternating viewpoints of Harrison and Anna, Nicholson creates two convincing characters with a multi-dimensional story, making what could have been a potentially didactic novel a very enjoyable read.

Harrison has Asperger’s. Each day is a struggle as he tries to cope with his anxieties around hygiene, his desire for order, and with what people expect from him, especially his mother and older brother, Joel. Harrison would rather watch his favourite show, Grey’s Anatomy, than attend Best Buddies, but he goes because he knows it will help his mother and brother.

Anna is an honours graduating student who joins the Best Buddies program because she thinks it will look good on her resume — and Justin, the intriguing and handsome guy running the program, is a nice bonus. Eager to please her overachieving mother, Anna is dismayed when her mother thinks that maybe the program is taking Anna away from her schoolwork. But Anna’s time with Harrison teaches her that there is more than what looks good on a resume.

Indeed, what makes this book so good is that both Harrison and Anna must step outside their external and self-imposed limitations, demonstrating that, if given the chance, people can — and do — experience great things.

Melanie J. Fishbane

Twisted
written by Jeyn Roberts
Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2014
978-0-385-75411-8 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Suspense | Revenge | Forgiveness

Faye was 11 years old when she and her best friend, Christian, had the drug Heam forced upon them. Eight years later, Faye is finally ready to take revenge on the men who destroyed her life and killed Christian. When a mysterious young man named Chael appears, Faye’s plan suddenly gets a lot more complicated. Chael seems to know everything about her and her past. But too many secrets start tearing her world apart; even her guardian Gazer fears she’s become too obsessed with vengeance. Will Faye overcome her desires, or will her quest for revenge consume her?

In this futuristic thriller, Roberts has crafted a complicated and realistic character in Faye. Brought back from an overdose by
Gazer, a retired cop, she is alive, but doesn’t really live. She is convinced that the scars (literal and figurative) of her addiction mean she has no future, and is obsessed with exacting her revenge before her eventual death. At the same time, readers see glimpses of her desire for a different kind of life — one where she can graduate and have friends and a career. Readers also see her compassionate side as she tries to help a girl named Beth in the way she was unable to help Christian.

The appearance of Chael, and his connection to Faye is mysterious and curious, and his role seems to be to protect Faye (as much from herself as from others) and to help her see that there is an alternative path open to her. Faye does eventually figure out who he is, but Roberts never satisfactorily explains how he got there.

Action-packed and compelling, this futuristic thriller is at its core about redemption and forgiveness, and will give readers perspective on the obstacles they, and those around them, are facing.

Rachel Seigel

Switch
written by Douglas Davey
Red Deer Press, 2014
978-0-88995-524-0 (pb) $12.95
978-1-55244-340-8 (eBook) $12.99
for Grades 9 and up

Fiction | Sexual Identity | Bullying | Self-Worth

It’s the 1980s. Sheldon Bates is 17 years old and he thinks about sex a lot. He and his girlfriend Jenny make out all the time and he’s pretty sure they are both ready to go “all the way.” But then his world turns upside down. A chance encounter with a new boy on his swim team sends Sheldon spinning into a disturbing new reality: he likes boys, too.

Just as Sheldon begins to explore what it means to be bisexual (starting with looking it up in the dictionary!), everyone at school finds out and the ostracism begins. His girlfriend won’t talk to him, his best friend is distant and confused, he is subjected to verbal abuse from his classmates and violence from a gang of homophobic boys. Sheldon feels he can’t tell his parents or his teachers and grows ever more isolated as he tries to deal with it all by himself.

Switch is a searing, funny, heartbreaking book about a young man trying to come to terms with his sexual identity in a hostile world. The premise is that Sheldon, a hapless, lustful hero, wrote it when he was 17, and years later his grown-up self is editing it, with explanatory footnotes. The footnotes are a clever device that Davey uses very effectively to provide perspective, humour and insight about the far-off culture of the 1980s. The book takes a frank and non-judgmental look at issues important to most teenagers: sexual identity, peer pressure, bullying and self-worth. Completely engaging, Sheldon’s story will both entertain and inspire young readers who are trying to figure out who they are.

Charis Cotter is an author, editor and book reviewer living in Western Bay, Newfoundland.

When Everything Feels Like the Movies
written by Raziel Reid
Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014
978-1-55152-574-7 (pb) $15.95
for Grades 11 to 12

Fiction | LGBTQ | Bullying | Being Yourself | Movies | Unique Perspectives

Despite facing daily prejudice for wearing makeup and cross-dressing, Jude views his life through the context of filming a movie where his own experiences are the subject matter. Everyone in Jude’s life has a part to play, from the crew to the paparazzi to his few fans. In love with Luke, one of the movie stars of the production, Jude is irrepressible in expressing interest, even when punished for it. As his movie approaches its ending, Jude’s intentions to leave small-town life and start over triumphantly in Hollywood are conquered by a surprising and tragic rewrite.

The power of Jude’s story is in its unique perspective. Stuck in a small town, bullied at school with a best friend who can’t always be trusted and a dicey, abusive family situation, the cards seem to be stacked against him. But pretending everything is just a part of a movie helps ease Jude’s experience as an outsider by seeing it through a new lens. First-time author Raziel Reid skillfully promotes this view with specific chapter titles relating to the film industry and detailed explanations of each person’s role in the production of the movie that is Jude’s life.

Jude is an effervescent character trying to find a way in the world despite others’ judgment of his self-expression. Containing scenes of extreme violence, sexual encounters, bullying and abortion, Reid’s book is an intense but multi-faceted, challenging read for older teens. Although Reid does not mention it in the book itself, Jude’s story is based on true events.

Amy Mathers is a member of the CCBC and recently completed a year-long Marathon of Books.

New editions
Mystery in the Frozen Lands by Martyn Godfrey was first published in 1988. James Lorimer & Company has re-issued the popular author’s novel about a teenager named Peter Griffin, who sails with his uncle in 1858 on a dangerous quest to solve the mystery of the Franklin expedition. An introduction by Ken McGoogan provides readers with background on the 2014 discovery of the wreck of one of Franklin’s ships, HMS Erebus, and connects these events to the 19th century story.

One of the first picture books written by Cary Fagan, The Market Wedding (with illustrations by Regolo Ricci), has been re-issued by Groundwood Books. Adapted from a 19th century short story by Abraham Cahan, The Market Wedding is a lighthearted tale of a misguided wedding plan, set in Toronto’s Kensington Market.
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The Bodies We Wear
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Double You (Seven Sequels)
Shane Peacock

Earth & Sky (Earth & Sky Trilogy, Book 1)
Megan Crewe

Fishermen Through & Through
Colleen Sydor, Brooke Kerrigan

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Carolyn Beck, Karen Patkau

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