Taking Humour More Seriously!

The Genre-Hopping Imagination of Gordon Korman

Bookmark! Humorous Books for Kids

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Pout-Pout a peur du noir

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Opinion: Taking Humour Seriously
Author Adrienne Kress discusses why she’d like to see humour for younger readers taken more seriously.

News Roundup
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Keep Your Eye On... Andrew Kolb

Profile: Gordon Korman
With more than 80 books to his name, New York Times best-selling author, Gordon Korman, chats with Marylynn Miller Oke about his 30-year career and talks about why he loves the kids’ books business.

Focus: The Serious Business of Making Funny Children’s Books
Children’s author Naseem Hrab and illustrator Josh Holinaty discuss the creation of funny books for kids and reveal how they got started in the children’s book business.

Spring Cleaning!
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Bookmark! Humour
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Red Leaf Literature
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We Recommend
Reviews of the latest Canadian books for children and teens

Index of Reviews
Explore Diversity
with the Orca Origins

Award-winning authors dig deep into the cultures that shaped them as they connect with and explain traditions that have nourished and supported people for centuries. Filled with rich personal stories, carefully researched history, gorgeous photos (and some delicious recipes), the Orca Origins provide vital connections to the magnificent diversity of our modern world.

“A must-have title.”
—Jewish Book Council

“An exceptionally valuable resource.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“Capture[s] the essence of what makes these celebrations special and piques the interest of the reader.”
—School Library Connection

“Uniquely personal stories make this book stand out...Kids who think they know about this holiday will be surprised at the new things they learn.”
—Booklist

“Wide in scope and personal in presentation, this book is a good choice for learning about Muslims’ traditions as expressed in various cultures.”
—Kirkus Reviews

Christmas: From Solstice to Santa

Fall 2018

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Many of us love to read comics, enjoy a good joke and giggle at the antics of our favourite sitcom characters. Why then do humorous books not receive the same type of recognition that their more serious counterparts do? Is it because humour is not seen as important enough in our lives to garner that recognition, or is it that people deem writing humour is easier than writing the other many forms of literature that we read? In this issue, Adrienne Kress argues that humour should have a more predominant place in our children’s lives and classrooms and on award lists. She also recommends some great Canadian books that will make young readers laugh and perhaps give them entry into a world of books that they may otherwise find daunting.

And, if we’re talking about humour, who better to profile than Gordon Korman? He began his writing career as a teenager with the unforgettable Macdonald Hall series and now has more than 80 books to his name. While Korman has written many books with goofy characters, he has also undertaken adventure and mystery and finds that those funny moments arise when you’re least expecting them. He does, however, admit that comedy is his first love.

In this issue, we also include a discussion between Naseem Hrab and Josh Holinaty, in which they talk about the co-creation of Ira Crumb Makes a Pretty Good Friend and the forthcoming Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings. They talk about the importance of funny books for kids and why they enjoy working in the kids’ lit field.

And please be sure to read Roxanne Deans’ interview with John Ibbitson, author of The Landing, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary and being sold to raise funds for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre. Ibbitson is waiving his royalties, printing is courtesy of Friesens, and both Kids Can Press and Manda Group are donating all proceeds from the sales. The Landing is available now at bookstores across Canada and via the CCBC’s website at bookcentre.ca/shop.

Finally, don’t forget to check out our “Bookmark!” column, which recommends some fabulous books of humour compiled by CCBC Library Coordinator Meghan Howe; meet author-illustrator Andrew Kolb in our “Keep Your Eye On…” column; and discover reviews of some of the latest Canadian books to hit the shelves in our “Red Leaf Literature” and “We Recommend” sections.

Venture into a new book today!

Sandra O’Brien
Two fish are in a tank. One fish turns to the other and says, “Hey, do you know how to drive this thing?”

I love poetry. I love Shakespeare. I am a classically trained actress who adores a beautifully wrought piece of writing, for Pete’s sake (or in this case, maybe Will’s sake?). A good metaphor makes my knees weak. Heck, even a good simile can produce a slightly unstable ankle. But no one, not anyone, could ever convince me there is anything about a perfectly constructed piece of dramatic imagery that is inherently superior to a punchline.

True, no one yet has directly attempted to convince me of that, but it’s hard to deny that there is a general feeling, across all artistic disciplines, I believe, that gravity is inherently worth more than wit. It’s a strange concept when you think about it. After all, they both evoke strong feelings in their audience. They both have an element of surprise, a delightful “Ooh, I wasn’t expecting that!” Better yet, they both have the potential to deliver something particularly special—a human truth. Brilliant writing is brilliant writing, whether it communicates through pathos: “I live with bread like you, feel want, taste grief, need friends” (Richard II) or absurdity: “Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here! This is the War Room.” (Dr. Strangelove)

And yet, ‘serious’ writing is often held in greater esteem than humour. It might not seem such a big deal, but I think there is something insidious about the fact that in small systemic ways we tell audiences that one affecting kind of writing is inherently of greater value than another. In literature in particular we see this preference in the sorts of books that end up on awards short lists. We see it in the kinds of books chosen to be taught in schools. Unless the subject/award category is specifically ‘funny books,’ funny books get excluded from course and prize lists time and time again.

Yes, it is, alas, a rather well known fact that humour doesn’t often get nominated for nor win awards, aside from humour awards. (But even then . . . the fact that the science fiction drama, The Martian, won in the Comedy/Musical category at the 2015 Golden Globes confused everyone, including its director.) This reluctance to honour works that make us laugh is commonplace across the spectrum of the arts, from the Academy Awards to the Governor General’s Literary Awards. And that range obviously also includes children’s literature.

It’s an uncomfortable fact, but art that is straight-up funny—not dark/edgy satires, or dramatic with some humour for texture and variety, but truly comedic work—doesn’t get recognized.

The question is ‘Why?’ What is there about humour that is seen as less worthy, less impressive, less meaningful and less able to speak to human truths than something dramatic? What makes some consider an evoked happy feeling less powerful than an evoked sad feeling? And what makes a catharsis reached through laughter any less of a release than one achieved through tears?

Please don’t mistake my meaning here. I am a huge fan of the dramatic in all its manifestations. There is nothing I like better than a good cry, and I sometimes pick up a particular book or put on a particular movie or song with that express...
goal in mind. But other times, what I want is a hearty belly laugh. I want my spirits to soar. I want tears, yes, but because I can’t stop laughing. Heck, the core workout alone is worth it. My point is not to diminish any other genre or style in favour of comedy. It’s to raise the level of respect that humour is due.

We could certainly spend a lot of time on the truth-telling capacity of humour and the unfairness of its exclusion from what society considers ‘good literature.’ But I’d like to turn in a different direction. I’d like to contemplate this uneven value system’s impact on kids — especially on kids as readers.

Adults who read have a long history with books; we can read and enjoy books on many levels and for many reasons. Even books that disappoint our expectations in one area may turn out to provide some nourishment in another. We’re critical, but we’re also forgiving. We trust books. By and large, new readers don’t. New readers need to be taught to trust. And most new readers happen to be children.

There are many, many, many ways for people of all ages to spend their leisure time. Electronic devices send out temptations everywhere we look. Games, gossip, social interaction — the world is before us 24/7, and we don’t have to exert ourselves to get the built-in charge of an immediate payoff. A book, on the other hand, represents an unknown, perhaps very far-off reward — if it turns out that there is a reward for our efforts at all. And for some, those efforts will be extremely tiring. Why should new readers read at all, then, since they can be fairly sure that reading will be a more difficult pursuit than almost anything else they could do? We need to find a way to convince new readers to give books a chance. It’s a chance, as we know, that is well worth taking.

But how, exactly, do we do that? Well, we pull out our tool box and get to work. But in an industry attempting in every possible way to teach the value of reading to the next generation, a very useful tool in achieving this goal is being kept in the shed. In order to try to get kids to read, we will pull out the hammer of short chapters. We twist with the screwdriver of relatable themes. We measure twice with the ruler of pacing. But the whoopee cushion of humour? It’s left behind to wheeze a little wistful toot, knowing full well that if it were given a chance it would show the world its power to change the way the wind blows for a reluctant reader. (How’s that for an extended metaphor?)

Our social attitudes toward ‘funny’ are in our way at every turn. We’re missing an excellent bet. By rarely awarding humour, by refusing to consider the power of laughter in reducing the fear of reading for many young people and by even denying the value of what many kids like to read, we are frustrating our own goals. We’re accidentally helping to make reading hard, dour and forbidding.

Humour has practical applications, especially in literature for children. When I was young, humour was my way into reading. It was how I found something I could connect with in books. I connected with the stubborn ridiculousness of Ramona Quimby, the wry observations of the many characters created by Judy Blume, the brilliant absurdity of the entire universe in The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy. It was rare for me to find characters personally relatable to my life as I was growing up. But something funny? That I understood. That I appreciated. That made me feel safe. I felt there were other people out there who, like me, understood the funny in the world. I may not have always related to the characters personally, but I could get into the head of the person telling the story. And it was also just darn fun to read.

It’s because of humour that I came to trust books. To people who readily pick up a book with the firm knowledge that what they’re about to read is going to create a positive experience, it might come as a shock that there are those out there who don’t trust books. But the romantic anticipation of sitting wrapped in a blanket surrounded by books and experiencing adventure and wonder thanks to the written word is the same thing that keeps a lot of potential readers away. It’s a lot to demand of someone when you think of it — ‘Sit here and have a magical time!’ It’s a lot of pressure. Especially when you start in on a book and... it’s boring or you get distracted easily or you just really want to watch television.

Another example to consider is arguably the most successful book series of all time: Harry Potter. It is wildly popular for so many reasons. And yet I would argue that what captured so much love and attention, and the reason why it was read by so many different kinds of readers, is rarely mentioned. We talk about the beloved characters and the wonderfully constructed world (my favourite part is Hogwarts); we talk about magic, and we talk about the larger themes, about good and evil and where the grey areas are as well. But I feel people forget that before we get to any of these things, a reader has to start on page one. And then the reader has to have a reason for turning to page two. And for this reader, by which I mean me, the reason was J.K. Rowling’s sense of humour. It’s delightful and absurd.

Chapter One of Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone is filled with whimsy that evokes both Roald Dahl — “Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.” — and Douglas Adams — “Scars can come in handy. I have one myself above my left knee that is a perfect map of the London Underground.” The whimsy continues as we witness Harry’s ridiculously horrendous childhood inflated to fabulously grotesque proportions. (We all know he sleeps in a cupboard under the stairs, and we accept that as part of the canon, but the first time you read that? It’s a wonderful bit of over-the-top absurdity that is delightful in its horribleness.) The journey on which Mr. Dursley takes the entire family to avoid the letters from Hogwarts is downright surreal and ends with the Dursleys out on a rock in the middle of the sea. All of this happens before,
”Harry — Yer a wizard.” And I’d argue that all of this is what got many readers reading in the first place. And kept them reading.

But we don’t value whimsy. It’s not that we don’t notice and chuckle and have a good time. It’s that funny doesn’t win ‘importance points’ from us. We value Rowling’s imagination, world-building, complex themes and so on. And value them we should. But in all of it, subtly lighting the entire scene, is an Instagram filter of ‘humour.’ And that is important. That matters.

Humour is also significant in a way few people ever think about. Suppose that a young reader gets a real charge out of a funny book. Suppose that, happy and satisfied, she says to Mom and Dad, “Please, I want some more.” Then suppose that Mom and Dad, doing their due diligence, find a list of winners of the awards for books in their child’s age group, and suppose they buy some books from that list. If there’s no work of humour among the winners, what will happen? Will the new reader persist in finding one or will she give up? If she tries and she gives up on the serious books, will she feel ‘stupid’ for not valuing what the rest of society values? And will she herself feel less valued as a result? Thus the system often acts as a filter, removing humorous books before kids get a chance to read them, and in this way may unwittingly help to create reluctant readers.

We need to start giving humour credit. We need to start giving it some love. We need to start enjoying it out loud. Things can be complex without being serious all the time. Important conversations can be had while laughing. Being serious does not make a work any more erudite (though I’d argue using the word ‘erudite’ does). In fact, humour in some cases does an excellent job at challenging the reader’s intelligence, at pushing at expectations and knowledge. It often takes a lot of different elements to appreciate a joke:

**Two fish are in a tank.**

I need to understand that a tank is a large glass box that fish are kept in.

**One fish turns to the other and says . . .**

I need to be able to suspend my disbelief to accept the premise of animals talking.

“Hey, do you know how to drive this thing?”

I need to understand that there is more than one kind of tank out there. Further, I need to know that one of the kinds of tanks is something one can drive. And I need to be able to understand that the joke is playing with my expectations of which tank I originally thought the fish were in versus the tank they are actually in.

And as the creator of the joke (which I am not; alas, I don’t know who its originator is, even after extensive googling), I need to trust my reader/listener. I need to rely on a series of expectations to write it. I need to know that people will make the connection between a fish tank and fish. And that when I say ‘drive,’ suddenly people will make the connection between a fish tank and an army tank. All for a two-line joke. Impressive, eh?

A joke asks the reader to participate. It offers an entrance into a room through a hidden passageway instead of the front door. And maybe pushes an ottoman in the way because, let’s be honest here, a well-timed pratfall is seldom unwelcome.

So humour is not only a security blanket that allows the reader to trust a writer. It also simultaneously challenges the reader to think in different ways. That’s pretty cool when you think about it. And not something one can say about many things — that something that is challenging also feels safe. And fun.

Let’s let people with all kinds of tastes into the world of reading. Let’s show new readers that their enjoyment of a book is their enjoyment of a book. A book doesn’t have to be serious to have value. The reader doesn’t have to be serious to have value. The reader isn’t a lesser person for enjoying humour. The book isn’t a lesser book for taking a humorous approach to life. Let’s acknowledge that the best writers (may I mention Will Shakespeare again?) use humour both for its own sake and to help fully develop more serious themes and characters who represent real people with real issues. But let’s also value fun. Let’s get some lighter books on our lists. Let’s welcome new readers — a grand diverse audience of readers — equally.

Let’s sit on a whoopee cushion and laugh out loud. In public. Seriously. ☺

Adrienne Kress is a Toronto-based internationally published and award-winning author of middle grade and young adult fiction, as well as an actor, playwright, screenwriter, director, and a fan of lists. Her latest middle grade adventure, The Explorers: The Reckless Rescue, came out this spring.

**Some funny books by other funny Canadians!**

**Dirk Daring, Secret Agent**
by Helaine Becker, illustrated by Jenn Playford
(Orca Book Publishers)

**My Life is a Zoo series**
by Jess Keating
(Sourcebooks Jabberwocky)

**Lola Carlyle’s 12-Step Romance**
by Danielle Younge-Ullman
(Entangled Publishing)

**Viminy Crowe’s Comic Book**
by Marthe Jocelyn and Richard Scrimger, illustrated by Claudia Dávila
(Tundra Books)

**The Wiggins Weird series**
by Lesley Livingston and Jonathan Llyr, storyboard illustration by Steven Burley
(Puffin Canada)
Welcome, Emma Hunter
The CCBC is pleased to welcome Emma Hunter as our new Marketing and Website Coordinator. Emma comes to the CCBC from Harlequin Books where she has worked since September 2016, in marketing and digital marketing. At Harlequin, Emma implemented their strategy of promotional video content and developed the editorial and visual direction for various platforms. Emma has a love for children's literature and digital marketing and is looking forward to expanding those skills in her new role at the CCBC.

Emma's favourite book is *Pride & Prejudice* and she loves writing, exploring Toronto, plants, travel, photography, her cat Penny Lane and, of course, books. She is especially excited to work for the CCBC and be able to work in Canadian children's publishing, something she has always loved (her childhood dog was named after the Jillian Jiggs character in the book by Phoebe Gilman). She is the person behind all of the CCBC's social media accounts, so say hi to her on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or Pinterest.

Nimbus Publishing celebrates 40th Anniversary
Writing about your company's 40-year history is daunting enough — add to it the fact that I've been with Nimbus for just over one year and live in another province. A Bluenoser by birth, and a CFA (Come from Away) by circumstance, I was drawn back to Nova Scotia and Nimbus when they put out the call for a national publicist. Now, I work from home in Toronto, promoting the best titles from the Atlantic provinces, with 2018 marking the 40th anniversary of the company.

Listed in *Publishers Weekly* in 2017 as one of Canada's fastest-growing publishers, Nimbus is the largest independent publisher and distributor east of Toronto, now with over 50 titles per year, including a wide variety of adult fiction and non-fiction, along with a tremendous stable of children's authors and illustrators. (In November 2017, I had the honour of attending the TD Canadian Children's Literature Awards with Jennifer McGrath and Josée Bisaillon when they won the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award for *The Snow Knows*.)

started in 1978, by John Marshall, the company was taken over in 2012, by now general manager Terrilee Bulger and art director/production manager Heather Bryan, who in late February 2018, moved Nimbus to a new location on the whimsically named Strawberry Hill Street. Located in an industrial strip in the north end of Halifax, and coincidentally painted a blue very close to our company colour, the newly redesigned space sports a sleek industrial look, with room for 17 staff and a new 12,000 square-foot warehouse. Enhancing the setup will be Open Book Coffee, a coffee shop and showroom of Nimbus and distributed titles attached to the building, to be run by Terrilee's partner Joe Tinney. Flexible event space next to the coffee shop will add to the arrangement.

The big celebration for our 40th anniversary took place during the second annual East Bound literary conference, run by the Atlantic Publishers Marketing Association, in Halifax (May 9-11). Nimbus joined children's bookstore Woozles, also celebrating its 40th anniversary, for a celebration in the store on May 8, followed by a warehouse party at the new Nimbus location for all delegates on the afternoon of May 9. Along with local beers and regional treats, east coast musician David Myles performed (his new children's book, *Santa Never Brings Me a Banjo*, will be released by Nimbus in October 2018). A newly stylized logo, the launch of a line of audiobooks, and author events across the country will round out the celebrations. It's an exciting time to be with Nimbus!

Karen McMullin

Second Story Press Winners
In March of this year, Second Story Press announced two winning authors and one winning artist for its 2018 Indigenous Writing and Illustration Contest. The jury has named the co-winners for writing as Jodie Callaghan, a Mi’gmaq woman from Listuguj, Quebec, for her story *The Train*; and Michael Hutchinson, a member of the Misipawistik Cree Nation who lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, for his story *The Case of Windy Lake*. The winner of the illustration contest is Niki Watts, a Cree artist who lives in Bella Coola, British Columbia.

The winning submissions were chosen by a jury comprised of Second Story Press publisher Margie Wolfe; writer Jan Bourdeau Waboose, who is First Nation Anishinaabe and the author of *The Spirit Trackers*; and writer, speaker and consultant Monique Gray Smith, who is of Cree, Lakota and Scottish ancestry.

Heather Bryan and Terrilee Bulger (both from Nimbus Publishing) at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair in March 2018
and is the author of *Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation*.


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**10th Anniversary of Atlantic Book Awards**

Celebrating their 10th anniversary, the Atlantic Book Awards Society announced the shortlist for the 12 different book prizes comprising the 2018 Atlantic Book Awards in March of this year. The nominated titles represented a wide range of books from Atlantic Canada — everything from history to kids’ books.

The Awards were given out in Paul O'Regan Hall, Halifax Central Library, on Thursday, May 10 at 7:00 p.m. To see the shortlist and winners, visit [www.atlanticbookawards.ca](http://www.atlanticbookawards.ca).

**East Bound: Talking Atlantic Books held May 9 to 11 in Halifax**

*East Bound: Talking Atlantic Books* is an exciting initiative of the Atlantic Publishers Marketing Association and the Atlantic Book Awards Society that was launched in 2017. The 2018 edition, which took place May 9 to 11 in Halifax, brought together delegates from across Canada and the Atlantic provinces. The theme was public libraries, and so, collections staff, programmers and media were invited with the goal of improving discoverability of, as well as appreciation for, Atlantic Canada-published books.

**IBBY Canada Children in Crisis Refugee Centre Reading Program**

IBBY Canada is launching a therapeutic reading program for young refugee claimants from 6-12 years old living in shelters in Toronto, based on the model of IBBY Children in Crisis programs worldwide. Increasing numbers of refugee claimants are arriving in the Greater Toronto Area and are facing longer and longer waits for refugee hearings. Children and families need support during this transitional stage. IBBY Canada will train volunteers to read with the children. A six-week pilot reading program at the Christie Street Welcome Centre began in mid-May 2018.

IBBY Canada hopes to expand to shelters across the GTA and eventually across the country, as fuelled by need and volunteer interest. For more information go to [www.ibby-canada.org](http://www.ibby-canada.org).

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**Keep Your Eye On... Andrew Kolb**

INTERVIEW BY SANDRA O’BRIEN

Tell us about your latest book or a project you are currently working on. Well, my last project was a card game that I just released! It’s called *Peace: A Card Game* and it’s a reversal of the classic game of *War* (in that acts of kindness and love win the day)! As for my latest book, that goes to *Les & Ronnie Step Out*, and it’s about a left and right foot who have trouble getting along until they spend some time in the other’s shoe!

Tell us about your process of writing and/or illustrating. Oh, I wish I had a consistent process. My books and projects all come from different points of inspiration and take very different journeys along the way. One thing that is consistent is the bits between each project. I often have to work through a LOT of bad ideas before I get to something good. I’m sure my literary agent is tired of it by now, but I easily send her eight to 10 bad ideas before we get to something good. So I suppose my process involves writing/conceptualizing a lot of junk before I get to something that’s less bad.

How did you first get published? I started as an illustrator first, so a lot of my personal projects were crafted with the intent of selling myself as an artist for picture books. That, combined with reaching out to a number of different literary agencies, got me in touch with Laurie Abkemeier of Defiore and Company. She and I put together a few different ideas (after slogging through a bunch of the bad ones that I mentioned earlier), and eventually one stuck!

What do you like about writing and/or illustrating for young people? My favourite part of creating a picture book is telling the story underneath the story. Because I’m an illustrator first, I enjoy putting little Easter eggs or secondary plots into my images. I’ve always appreciated being rewarded for really paying attention to an image, so I try to do that as much as possible with my artwork.

Tell us about writers and/or illustrators who inspire you. Well, I have to mention fellow Canadian Jon Klassen, as I love his approach to imagery and storytelling. For the classics, I’m heavily inspired by the illustrative work of Bernice Meyers, Aliki Brandenberg and Alain Grée. Really, I could just list amazing artists all day, but the stylings of mid-century illustration are still some of my heaviest influences.
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This Can Be Happening to Gordon Korman

BY MARYLYNN MILLER OKE

Gordon Korman takes his characters on very different journeys: Luther the Doberman searches for his beloved owner; a beleaguered boy sets sail on the ill-fated Titanic; and a car thief, gang member and murderer run from consequences.

He also asks the big questions. Just how did the underwear cross the road anyway?

Luckily, the nimble, genre-hopping imagination of Gordon Korman has the answers. As middle-grade and teenage fans around the world navigate the precarious school hallway and the unpredictable path of growing up, they are glad he does.

Remember that kid who wrote his first book at 12? This is the guy. Thanks to an assignment unceremoniously doled out by his seventh-grade track coach conscripted to teach English, Gordon sent out the resulting manuscript to Scholastic Canada. After all, as the classroom book-order monitor, he concluded he was “practically an employee” of the publisher.

Along with the unfettered logic of youth, he struck gold. “When I first started, I assumed that I was writing for kids because I was a kid,” states Gordon. “Then I wrote about teenagers. It seemed natural that I would eventually write for adults. I’m not that interested in it. I love the kids’ book business.”

After two agonizing years of waiting, This Can’t Be Happening at Macdonald Hall, featuring the escapades of Bruno and Boots, was published — and a decades-long career was born. However, there is so much more to the story of Gordon Korman than that.

Things seem to be working out

Now, with more than 80 books to his name, the New York Times (NYT) best-selling author proves time and time again that the pivotal process of coming into your own still resonates.

Ever since his adolescent novel debut in 1978, Gordon has sold more than 28 million books in multiple languages around the world.

Although he fondly recalls ‘G Man’ as the best nickname he ever had, he simply describes himself as a regular guy. A regular guy who transports his readers into the goofy, the adventurous, the mysterious and back again, through his trilogies, series and stand-alone works.

What was this guy like as a kid?

Gordon feels the genre cut its teeth on classic middle-grade novels such as Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing and the Mad Scientists’ Club. It seems his early years in Montreal as an only child, living in a two-family house with his cousins, heavily influenced the writer he was to become.

“I had an older cousin who was like my big brother. He was cool and fearless. Like they say about Odysseus, ‘skilled in all ways of contending.’ He was my Bruno and I was Boots. So, a lot of the characters that I have written about, particularly early in my career, follow that pattern — the main guy and the sidekick. On the other hand, Cervantes, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza never knew my cousin and me.”

He recalls the freedom he had as a teenager in Toronto, exploring the city with friends.

“It was nothing for us to ride the subway and spend the day hanging around Yonge Street, which was the thing to do in the ’70s when you were a Toronto teenager.”
Taking control
We all remember the books, movies and music that rocked our world when we were young. Not to mention the first crushes and the horror of being embarrassed by our parents. We also learned to think for ourselves.

“What I love specifically about this age group is that this is the first time in your life that you become in charge of your own opinion,” reflects Gordon, referring to his book No More Dead Dogs, as young Wallace faces detention for criticizing Old Shep, My Pal. Like Gordon, he doesn’t like sad, boring books where the dog always dies at the end.

In stark contrast to his typical fans, Gordon says his own teenage daughter likes his books but loves anything that wins critical literary awards.

“We all have our own kind of thing. They choose what they like just like we did.”

Stakes well done
“For me, it’s always a good story. I’m trying to entertain first before I do anything else.”

Gordon is the creator of several adventure series, including the Hypnotists and NYT bestselling Masterminds. He also introduced kid-friendly characters such as Max Carmody from Maxx Comedy: The Funniest Kid in America. His love for transcending genres is evident. However, it all comes down to telling a compelling tale.

“In a series like Island or Everest, or even something more speculative like Masterminds, the high stakes of life and death are obviously assets within the book. But if a book is well written, the stakes can be much lower, like a kid finding his place in his world, at school, in his family or in his own mind. It isn’t necessarily worse or even smaller, it’s just different.”

Is comedy really the lower art form?
Unlike Aristotle, Gordon doesn’t think so. Although he also loves adventure, Gordon will admit that comedy is his first love. Nose-picking aliens are proof positive of that.

“As a kid, when the grown-ups were around the dinner table, I admired the guy who could tell a really good joke and make everyone else laugh. When I started writing, which was certainly not intended to launch a career, it was very natural for me that a good story would be funny.”

However, Gordon discovered that the consistent delivery of humour came with its own pressure. When he first started doing the more suspenseful adventure trilogies like 39 Clues, he felt unexpected relief.

“Ironically, he states, “Some of the best humour has come when I was writing something that wasn’t supposed to be funny.”

Early in his career, Gordon wrote his characters based upon his own life experiences. As he explored other genres, producing works such as Titanic, he developed an appreciation for quality adventure and historical-fiction writing — and the extensive research they require.

He wrote that?!
Throughout his career, Gordon has discovered that when he shakes things up, people notice.

“When the Island series first came out, a lot of people wouldn’t believe the captain was really dead at the end of the first book because that is not something they would expect from me. Death wouldn’t be a plot point that I would fool with one way or the other. If you read a Farley Mowat book about kids lost in the North and suddenly somebody died, you wouldn’t say, ‘Well, he can’t really be dead.”’

Gordon recalls an encounter with a bewildered woman at a Toronto bookstore. His Macdonald Hall books were re-released while his adventure titles were hot and new on the market. She asked why he stopped writing Island and Everest to start writing Macdonald Hall?

“From her perception, I started as this adventure guy and suddenly I’m writing these funny boarding school books. Whatever is famous lately is the thing that you’re kind of all about.”

He learned that writing material for different age groups also stirs the pot.

“When writing books like Son of the Mob, Jake Reinvented and Pop for teenagers, you’re going to deal with more honest and racy material than you would in a middle-grade novel.”

He doesn’t hit his readers over the head
To his surprise, many reviewers felt Schooled, his book about a home-schooled boy thrust into middle school, was a great anti-bullying book.

“Now when I look at the book, I think absolutely. I don’t know if it’s anti-bullying, I mean who’s pro-bullying? If I’d had to write an anti-bullying book, it would have been preachy and horrible. So, for me, it’s great if there is a message or a theme in there.”

Many of Gordon’s stories often include themes of empowerment, redemption and, ultimately, friendship. He believes the concept of being an outsider is a really powerful trope for kids, and that we all bring our own life experiences to what we read.

“If you look at a lot of my books, it’s the idea of being the person who doesn’t fit in, trying to find a way to make it work. Even in the Swindle books, the one thing that unites the kids is that they are misfits in their school and in their town.”

Unlike the ones in bars, Gordon’s opening lines actually work
His characters aren’t unintentionally creepy either.

“It’s always nice if you can come up with a great opening line for a book that’s going to grab someone’s attention,” said Gordon who recalled a favourite from his teen book, Born to Rock. “The thing about a cavity search is this, it has nothing to do with the dentist, if only it did.”

As for favourite characters, he has many to draw upon, citing Capricorn Anderson from Schooled, Chase Ambrose of Restart and Noah Youkilis from Supergifted.

However, he says, “Sometimes you write about a character who is just not very important and you can have so much more fun because you don’t have to hang a whole book on them.”

As with many authors, it seems he also has an ongoing conflicted relationship with his writing.

“I feel like your favourite book is always the one you’re working on now and, of course, that’s the one you hate the most, too.”
The collaborative 39 Clues adventure
Gordon reveals that working on the 39 Clues series was one of the coolest experiences of his career. He wrote five instalments of the NYT best-selling series, including One False Note, weaving his unique writing style into the story. Alongside Rick Riordan, Peter Lerangis and Jude Watson, Gordon served as one of the original authors of the immensely popular adventure series.

“The camaraderie between us was interesting because we couldn’t go completely off the rails with where the story was going and who the characters were. We weren’t held back from using our own personalities in our writing.”

The project also pushed him out of his comfort zone.

“It was an amazing exercise to start in a place where you never could have come to following your own usual creative process.”

Audiences young and old?
Although there is something to be said for the enduring shelf life of a story, sometimes Gordon is surprised to find devoted 45-year-olds on his fan forum talking about Bugs Potter. From his young fans’ point of view, these guys are ancient.

His most prominent fan from an earlier time is none other than Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who enjoyed the Macdonald Hall books.

“I was 17 when I met him during a visit to Rockcliffe Park Public School in Ottawa. He was kind of famous because his dad was Prime Minister. I don’t know how often he thinks about Macdonald Hall these days as he as a lot on his mind.”

“Egos, quiet on the set please.”
Several of Gordon’s books have been transformed into shows and movies for outlets including YTV and Nickelodeon. Gordon continues to be amazed at their tremendous reach.

“Monday Night Football Club was on TV for four seasons. When I would do a school visit, most of the kids would know about The Jersey. It’s so widespread.”

Gordon felt the production of the Bruno & Boots TV movies, based on the Macdonald Hall book series, was a confluence of old fans all coming together. Coming full circle, the producer of the series introduced himself to Gordon with a fan letter he wrote to Gordon as a kid.

“The idea that, as a producer, he wanted to come back to the books that were important to him when he was that middle-grade age is really, really special.”

Incidentally, the producers, Aircraft Pictures, received nominations for both a Golden Globe Award and an Oscar this year for their animated feature, The Breadwinner.

Talking about star power, many famous faces brought Gordon’s characters to life, including Ariana Grande, and Jennette McCurdy and Noah Munck from the iCarly show.

Gordon recalled, “It seemed like all of these people who my kids watched on TV, got together to act out my book Swindle.”

As a former film major in college, Gordon is familiar with adaptations. However, he advises that when your work is transitioning to the screen, you have to be flexible.

“It’s a bit surreal, I suppose. It’s cool. If you’re going to be too married to what you wrote, it’s going to be painful.”

Readers outrank the perks
“It probably sounds better than it is,” stated Gordon, who works daily out of his home office in Long Island, New York.

“If I went up to my Wall St. friends and told them I was interviewed by Whoopi Goldberg or we got the Kellogg’s cereal cross-promotion or 39 Clues opened the NASDAQ Stock Exchange, they would think I had really arrived.”

However, as with most enduring writers, his fans mean the most.

“The things that are really important are the relationship between you and your readers, or the reluctant readers who never finished a book before they read one of yours. That’s the foundation of what you do when you put together a career in kids’ books – and why you do it.”

Although they’re devoted, Gordon feels his biggest fans aren’t necessarily the kids showing up in wizard suits for the big midnight book-release party.

“They’re great readers, they’re great fans and there are a lot of them. I’m absolutely thrilled about them.”

Even Gordon Korman felt the sting
“I always knew that I was really lucky with the way I started writing. Obviously, I would meet a lot of other writers who would have a much different experience. I know a guy who actually wallpapered his office with rejection letters.”

Although well-known in Canada, Gordon reveals that it was difficult to develop a strong connection to an American audience.

“It is hard to get noticed. It certainly hasn’t been one rollercoaster ride of amazing success. Believe me, I’m not going into a woe is me kind of thing.”

And, as with most adults, he knows a lot more now than he did then.

“I think, as a really young writer, I was incredibly impatient.”

Family life
When not travelling to meet his fans, Gordon works around the schedules of his wife and three teenage kids. Being able to attend his kids’ school events meant a lot to him – even the ones that weren’t fun.

He loves sports, movies and just spending time with the family.

“It’s not boring to live it, but it certainly sounds way better to say I’m a competitive surfer.”

What happens next?
Gordon’s newest books are Supergifted and Restart. Whatshisface will be released in the summer of 2018, and he is currently writing a sequel to Slacker, which he describes as “a work in progress.”

That once impatient kid with the life-changing manuscript seems to have transformed into the man with a pre-destined plan, an uninhibited adventure that unveils itself book by book.

Marylynn Miller Oke is a freelance writer. With experience in broadcast and public relations, she writes frequently for the academic and non-profit sectors.
The Governor General’s Literary Award-winning novel, *The Landing*, by John Ibbitson has been re-issued for its 10th anniversary as a fundraiser for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre — with Ibbitson waiving his royalties, printing courtesy of Friesens, and both Kids Can Press and Manda Group donating all proceeds from the sales.

In Ibbitson’s beautifully crafted novel, we meet Ben, a talented young violinist who yearns to escape the hapless life on his family’s Muskoka farm for a life filled with music. When Ben is hired to fix up a grand old cottage on a nearby island, the new owner — a cultured, wealthy woman from New York — discovers and encourages his budding talent. Suddenly, a whole new world is open to Ben, with a promising future — then a devastating storm changes everything.

John Ibbitson is probably best known for his political writing with *The Globe and Mail* as well as his many non-fiction books, including *The Polite Revolution: Perfecting the Canadian Dream*, *Stephen Harper* and *The Big Shift: The Seismic Change in Canadian Politics, Business, and Culture and What It Means for Our Future*. So it was a bit of a surprise to learn about his start as a playwright and his achievements in YA fiction.

“I had one successful play, one not so successful play and a third play that never saw the light of day.” Ibbitson then wrote a series of YA novellas for Series 2000 Canada, which he said was terrific training for journalism. “There is no better training for journalism than to write for readers who don’t want to read you.” When the publisher decided to branch out and publish full-length young adult novels, they asked him if he would like to participate.

“Once I had arrived at Queen’s Park, I made the move from YA fiction to non-fiction and wrote a book about Mike Harris and I wrote a book about Ontario’s political history, and it looked as though from that point on I was going to write nothing but political non-fiction books.”

“I went to New York to look at the consequences of the attack on the World Trade Center because this is what I had been writing about non-stop and I ended up in a bar where, after several drinks, the idea for *The Landing* came to me. In fact, I had the entire plot worked out by the time I returned to my hotel. But I couldn’t write it. I was afraid to write it. Because if I wrote it badly then I would have blown the biggest chance I ever had to write the one good book that I thought I had in me. And it took years until John Pearce, who is as much a therapist as he is an agent, convinced me to write out a detailed outline of the plot which he then gave to Sheila Barry, who I always believed was the greatest of all editors. Sheila took over the role of editor and therapist and guided me through the writing of the book and there it was.”
Often, when I have ‘required reading,’ I try to avoid dust-jacket synopses and jump into the book without a preconceived idea of what the story might be about. The writing in *The Landing* is effortless. Ibbitson’s love for this area of Ontario is deep and heartfelt and he has truly made Muskoka a character of its own. He makes it easy to imagine the smell of the fall air, the movement of the pine trees in the wind and even the realities of the harsh winters — as if you have visited the region even if you never have. Ben’s 13th summer doesn’t suffer from sappy sentimentality or clichéd storylines but offers a true slice-of-life story with all of its endings and beginnings, and we get to spend time with characters we have all met or know in our own lives — even those we don’t always like. When it was published in 2008, a review in *The Globe and Mail* made comparisons to Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence, calling the book one of Canada’s finest coming-of-age stories. It’s a wonderful book and is a great offering for summer reading for any age.

“It’s a small book, it’s very few words, so every sentence had to be perfect or as perfect as you can get it and was just a case of writing very carefully,” Ibbitson shares.

“We write lots of books, but every now and then you write a book where you feel as if you are reporting, as though the characters are just there alive and you are taking down notes about what they’re saying and doing, and that was very much the feeling with *The Landing*. Ben and Ruth and his mom and Henry, they just took over the book. At one point, I joked to Sheila that I was doing more dictation or transcription than I was doing actual writing.”

Of course, when asked how he felt about seeing his book back on the shelves again, Ibbitson said that he was thrilled, “It’s great to see it have a second life.”

“My partner Grant pointed out something to me when it was all over — somebody had received an award and *The New York Times* was writing about the award he had received and he said, ‘You know there’s the book you want to write and then there’s the book you write. And if you’re lucky, once in your life, you might pick up the book that you’ve finished and read it and go, that’s the book I wanted to write. When the ideal book you wanted to write is realized. And if it happens, thank God it happens because it will never happen again.’ And that was *The Landing*. When it arrived, I sat down and read it and I went that is exactly what I wanted to write. It was a wonderful feeling. I am sure I will never feel it again.”

When asked about writing any more fiction, Ibbitson said, “If the idea came, I would love to do it, but I was just proofing galleys for one non-fiction book and I am already in negotiation for the next book and it’s non-fiction as well. So I don’t know whether another novel will arrive. If it does, I would love to write it, but I can’t go chasing it.”

While we wait for John Ibbitson to greet that next great fiction idea, I suggest spending some time reading *The Landing* — a special opportunity to see Muskoka and life’s possibilities through a bold young person’s eyes.

*The Landing* is available now at bookstores across Canada and via the CCBC’s website at [bookcentre.ca/shop](http://bookcentre.ca/shop). All proceeds from the sales benefit the Canadian Children’s Book Centre. Roxanne Deans is the Director of Inventory, Outreach & Communications at the Children’s Book Bank in Toronto.
The Serious Business of Making Funny Children’s Books

BY NASEEM HRAB AND JOSH HOLINATY

Children’s author Naseem Hrab and illustrator Josh Holinaty discuss the creation of funny books for kids, reveal how they got started in the children’s book business and tell us what it was like collaborating on *Ira Crumb Makes a Pretty Good Friend* and the forthcoming *Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings*.

**Naseem Hrab (NH):** How did you get started in children’s book illustration?

**Josh Holinaty (JH):** Well, I’ve been drawing ever since I was a kid, and my parents were always very supportive of it. In my teens, I remember sitting at my little drawing desk at home when my dad popped by and said, “You obviously like drawing and it looks like you’re pretty good. It’s a viable job that could be very fun and satisfying — take it from me as a welder.” So, I started taking illustration more seriously. After high school, I spent two years at the Grand Prairie Regional College’s art program and then transferred to the Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD) to get the full degree: a Bachelor of Fine Arts. I always thought I would be a fine artist, with paintings hanging up in galleries all over the place.

Fast forward, I met my then-girlfriend, now-wife, and super illustrator, Genevieve. When we started dating, she said that my work was very illustrative and suggested I try to promote myself as an editorial illustrator. So, I started sending postcards out into the wild and, over the years, I managed to get a few jobs with *OWL Magazine*. One day, they approached me about illustrating kids’ books. And that’s how I got started. It was never planned, it just, well, sort of happened! How about yourself?

**NH:** Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to write. Depending on the day, I wanted to be a poet, or a playwright or a screenwriter. Unlike your dad, my mom didn’t think writing was a viable career. She said, “Why don’t you become a lawyer and write on the side? If it’s something you’re actually passionate about, you’ll make time for it.” And she wasn’t wrong to say that — I hadn’t done any writing outside of creative writing assignments in elementary school. So, I ended up studying library science and then becoming a marketing director in children’s publishing.

But there was always this part of me that really wanted to write children’s books and it kept poking at me, but I had no idea how to structure a story. I finally learned how to construct a
JH: I like how the young versions of ourselves wanted to become poets and fine artists and now we’ve wobbled down the ladder to fart jokes (Spoiler alert: Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings features a really big one!). How do you view children's books in the world of art and cultural importance?

NH: Fart jokes or not, children's books are one of the most important things! They’re some of the first examples of story and art that many of us see. I’m a huge fan of funny children's books because they can really capture a kid’s attention and kids are likely to pick them up on their own. Too bad they’re often dismissed as being less complex than more dramatic stuff.

JH: Right. Just because something might be silly on the surface doesn’t make it less meaningful. A silly book might do a better job of keeping a kid locked into reading long term.

NH: What books did you read as a kid?

JH: Confession alert, I feel like I read much more now compared to when I was a kid. When I did read, I enjoyed comic books like Tintin and really detailed stuff like Where's Waldo? I’m not sure if I’d classify Where’s Waldo? as ‘reading,’ but still, I loved those books. I think my favourite medium as a kid was video games. In a weird way, I think there’s overlap between a video game and a kids’ book. Books can be very interactive — kids love to stop and soak up all the pictures and scenes, and each time they turn a page there’s a reveal. That interactive quality is increased a hundredfold in video games. It’s that interactive feeling of being part of the world that I’m in love with, and I think that it has really influenced my work. Another notable book from my youth was the Goosebumps series. I was all over R.L. Stine’s work in my preteens. How about you?

NH: When I was a kid, I read Garfield comics, the Babysitters Club series and books about witches. But most of all, I loved TV. And that’s where my love of comedy came from — animated shows like The Simpsons and Eek! The Cat. Also, I have two older brothers and I think I felt like I had to surprise or shock them to get their attention. That’s probably why I love absurd things so much.

JH: Did you write any books as a kid?

NH: Years ago, I was in a writing club with a group of publishing friends including Sheila Barry and Karen Li. Around the same time, my mom told me a Persian folktale about a little beetle who was trying to meet a husband. The beetle interviews all these animals and none of them is a match — except for this very sweet mouse. Sheila really liked the folktale and suggested I do something with it. But I didn’t think that a book about marriage had a ton of kid appeal, so it turned into a story about making friends. And when I was younger, I definitely tried way too hard to make friends, so that part of Ira is very personal. Ira Crumb started out as a piece of cake in my mind because I came up with his name first, but Sheila said, “He’s not a piece of cake, he’s a little boy!” She was right. And then Karen Li ended up acquiring the book for Owlkids! How did you first picture Ira?

JH: My first approach was to make Ira an animal, and he initially made an appearance in my drawings as a rhinoceros. I got the same feedback when I sent off the thumbnails, too — he should be a little boy. And that’s why Ira’s best friend, Malcolm, isn’t a boy. I thought that if Malcolm was a boy, then every other character would have to be human as well. But the world you outlined is so strange and weird... like, there’s a robo-dog! So, in my eyes, Malcolm had to be an animal, or non-human, to be consistent with the world. I wanted the book to have a very minimal background because it’s so character-based. So, Ira naturally evolved into this kid who dresses a bit weird — he wears boots in the summer and a hoodie all the time.

NH: You gave him such great personal style!

JH: When you’re writing a book and you hit a dead end, do you ever assume that the blanks will get filled in by the illustrator?

NH: I don’t ever want to be a lazy writer, but I also don’t want to fill in all the blanks for an illustrator because then I’m boxing them in too much. I don’t think I’ve ever consciously thought, “Oh, I’m sure the illustrator will figure that out,” but as we create more Ira books I have thought, “Josh will have fun figuring that out.” I think my job is to give you a structurally sound narrative to play with.

JH: I feel like Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings was a lot easier to illustrate than the first book, probably because we both had a better idea of how the characters interacted and how we worked together as writer and illustrator.

NH: Agreed! When I started writing Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings, I had just seen your rough illustrations for Ira Crumb Makes a Pretty Good Friend for the first time. I noticed how many scenes you had to create to make my dialogue work and I thought, “I’ve really got to pull back! There are too many words!” It’s like we got a do-over with the second book! What’s your favourite part about the second book?

JH: Oh, that’s tough! I had a lot of fun with this book. From a strictly illustrative point of view, I love the way the overall style has evolved. I think it’s kind of unavoidable when you’re drawing the same characters over and over, so...
Exactly. In improv class, I learned that jokey jokes always fall flat. It’s better to create a strong character with a unique perspective on the world. How would they react to a given situation? What would they say? More times than not, it’ll be funnier than any joke I can come up with — especially when it comes to writing for kids.

In the world of kids’ books, what’s funny to kids is always going to be really hard for anybody who’s not a kid (e.g., us) to figure out. And those kids, they’re still discovering what they think is funny, and in a way even deciding what is funny. They are the tastemakers. Here’s hoping that kids will still find Ira funny in a couple years despite the Internet and our shortened attention spans!

I know! Humour evolves faster and faster and it feels hard to stay fresh — especially when you’re not writing for your own generation. I guess it’s just about trying to figure out what is funny and surprising to me and hope that kids find it funny, too. And I always come back to what I mentioned I learned in improv classes.

I guess picture books are often being read by adults to kids anyways, so we can rely a bit on adults to explain the humour. Adults might find the rip of fart puns in Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings funnier than kids will.

In a way, yes. The best part of writing the Ira books is when Ira answers the call. Like when the line, “You’ve got a booger in your nose cave, pal!” popped into my head for the first book. It’s not something I would say. I just asked the question, “How would Ira react to seeing a booger in his friend’s nose?” And he told me. Those types of moments happened a lot more for the second book.

Charles Schulz wrote an amazing essay about this topic, saying that after a few years of drawing the Peanuts characters something clicked and it all became so effortless. He didn’t even know what the panel would be, and then he’d start drawing and the characters just wrote themselves in. When I read that back in the day, I was like, “That’s sounds like such a weird hippie thing.” But fast-forward a few years to today and I’m like, “Charles, that’s so true!”

second book is perhaps a bit cleaner and more graphic. Also, I’m pretty proud of how I handled the fart at the end of the book! You and I had conversation about what colour a fart could be and I ended up making him the same green as Ira’s hoodie. It just works so perfectly. The fart’s graphic shape, his silhouette — it’s all kind of refined. After all, he has a monocle and top hat.

He’s such a fancy fart.

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A rip? Is that the collective noun for a group of fart puns? Kidding! The funny thing about the fart puns is that I mostly try to avoid bathroom humour in my kids’ writing. It’s the lowest-hanging fruit. But in Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings, we needed something to pull Ira out of his sadness really quickly and for kids to think, “Yeah, that’d probably make Ira stop crying.” And what could do that better than a fart joke? So, I asked myself, “How can I elevate a fart joke?” And the idea of a pompous talking fart who is tired of people making fun of him popped into my head.

It’s a meta-fart joke. The bounce from sadness to happiness in the story works really well. That fart joke is going to be a home run. 🎾
Spring Cleaning
An Archivist’s Advice to Writers
BY JESSICA SCOTT KERRIN

In my basement, you’ll find the usual stuff: abandoned exercise equipment, gardening tools, camping gear, paint cans, spare tires. But wait. What’s in the corner, taking up a great deal of real estate next to the hot-water heater? Fourteen plastic bins stacked high, each filled to the brim with ephemera related to one of my published novels. Why? I’m not sure, exactly. I have some vague notion that I should be saving records. Yet, I’m often filled with a powerful desire to toss out the entire lot. So, I sat down with several archivists for tips on what to keep and what to let go. Here is some of that advice.

Career documentation and your literary archive
If you value your work, then you must pay attention to documenting your career. Arranging your published works on a bookshelf feels great, but career documentation takes into account all aspects of your career as a writer. You’ll need to develop an overarching organizational structure for your records that considers grant applications, meeting notes, reviews, manuscript drafts, annotated page proofs, style guides, contracts, editorial correspondence, photos/videos, marketing materials, school presentations, rejection letters, research notes, journals, book tours and interviews.

A literary archive is what you are compiling while you are in the process of career documentation. It consists of two parts: your physical and digital records related to your career along with the accompanying inventory (record-keeping list) of those records so that you (and others) can easily track and access their location.

Why would an archive want to acquire your literary records? You are a writer and your work represents a time and place in Canada. Archives are collections of records that have been selected for permanent preservation because of their value as evidence and/or serve as a source for historical or other research. Literary records have both popular and scholarly appeal because they help inform biographies and the creative process. Unlike books, archival records are not fully understood on their own as individual items. The full meaning comes from their relationships with other records in that collection. This is primarily why an archive would want to acquire your entire collection in whole or in part over time.

You can’t keep everything. What’s most important? You should be saving anything that documents your personal writing process. Early drafts of something published are especially prized by literary scholars. Your working notebooks and annotated research materials are also valuable because they provide a rich historical context for your life and work. Contracts are valuable, particularly because they clearly note conditions surrounding copyright of textual work as well as illustrations and photography. Additionally, your professional correspondence will shed a great deal of light on your writing process and your relationship with others.

Many types of records are now created digitally, including emails, word processing documents, spreadsheets, photo-
graphs, videos, blogs and websites. A digital draft with track changes can be as valuable as a printed manuscript with written annotations.

Organizing your records
For many, organizing records can be an emotional yet tedious task (filing your income tax might come to mind). Emerging authors might feel that managing records will take away from time to write. Authors in the midst of their careers might think this will take away from time to plan for the future based on what they’ve accomplished (or not accomplished) to date. And well-established authors might feel challenged to ponder their legacy. How sobering!

The bottom line is that it is never too early to start. Like anything that feels overwhelming, try breaking the job down into smaller, manageable stages as follows:

Sorting
Start with paper. If you have a lot to sort, consider partnering with another writer who is facing the same daunting task. You can set up time to go through each other’s materials together until the job is done.

To prepare, get a folding table to work on. Secure extra acid-free file folders. While sorting, start to create piles, along with a running list of the contents in each pile. At this point, you’ll likely sort your records into general classifications that make sense to you — writing, administration, publicity and events. Then begin to subdivide, as your career dictates, into folders.

Toss out newspaper clippings. While you’re at it, remove financial records (receipts, bank statements, tax returns). You might want to include fan mail, knowing that the archive might curate a sample. You might want to include some personal correspondence, especially if you make reference to your writing, or if you are writing to other authors who happen to be your friends. You should also flag any records that contain highly personal information about living people or information that is confidential. Mark accordingly.

Sorting will give you a good overview of what you’ve got, the condition of your records and where there may be gaps.

Boxing
Remove paper clips, staples and rubber bands as you transfer your folders into cardboard boxes. Do not use plastic bins because of the off-gassing those bins produce and also because they can create a microclimate in which there is no air circulation, moisture is trapped, mould can form and/or materials can deteriorate at a rapid rate.

If you cannot afford archival-quality boxes, use clean, lidded cardboard boxes for temporary storage. These still provide some protection from physical damage, dust or light, especially if you cover them in sheets of plastic. Don’t use boxes that once contained food, as this could attract pests. Depending on volume, metal filing cabinets might be a good alternative to boxes.

Don’t overstuff your boxes. Separate types of paper that may start to stick together under pressure and over time, such as photographs. And label each box by date span (a set of years) and by category (such as ‘marketing materials’).

Understand that how you sort may differ from how the archive will arrange and describe your records to assist future researchers. Archives follow two main principles that guide arrangement: respect des fonds, which states that records must be arranged in original order; and the second, provenance, which requires that archives keep records together and not intermingle them with the records of others.

Record-keeping system
Now create a record-keeping list (a finding aid) that reflects how you’ve organized the folders in your boxes. It should be simple and make sense to you, based on your career timeline and milestones to date.

Digital records
Once you’ve established a record-keeping list for your paper records, you’ll now want to tackle your digital records. To do so, gather your digital files from thumb drives, memory cards, CDs, DVDs, social media, websites and email. Then, much like paper records, create file folders that make sense to you, and sort digital records into those folders. You’ll want to consider tagging digital records, for example, the name(s) of those who appear in your videos and photographs. Assign descriptive and consistent file-folder names, then keep a brief description of the directory that houses them (similar to the record-keeping list you’ve done for your boxes).

Storage
Secure a place where you’ll store your boxes (not next to a hot-water radiator that could leak). Do not choose an attic, garage or shed because of the dampness, dramatic changes in temperature and pests. Also, do not store records directly on a concrete floor or next to an exterior wall because both are sources for moisture. Try to find some place dry, clean and secure. A bedroom closet might be ideal (purging clothes to create space — that’s another topic altogether!).

Digital preservation might seem daunting because of the risks associated with out-of-date software. Additionally, hard drives and memory sticks can fail at random. You’ll need to periodically check to see that your files are still where you’ve backed them up and continue to be readable. Share your record-keeping list with whoever needs to know. You’ll also need to share your password(s) for protected materials with someone you trust to make it easy to access these files after you’re gone. And, of course, regularly back up your digital records and record-keeping system.

When should you approach an archive?
Now that you’ve got everything in order, you do not need to wait until you are well advanced in your career to approach an archive. You can contribute your records in instalments (accruals) over your lifetime and benefit from archival advice along the way.

The archive closest to where you write will likely be the one that is most interested in acquiring your records, given their mandate to care for and provide access to the records in their community. If you are a well-known graduate of a university that houses an archive, or if you’ve spent your career close to that university, they might also want your collection.
If you are approaching your provincial or territorial archive, your work should have achieved provincial scope and significance to align with their mandate. A good place to start is to reach out to your province’s or territory’s archival umbrella group for advice. Ideally, all of your records should be housed in one archive because this will increase the value of that collection.

**What will an agreement (deed of gift) look like?**

After an archive agrees to acquire your work, you’ll be offered a deed of gift or donation agreement. Some clauses can be negotiated.

For example, you should seek a commitment to arranging and describing your work within a specific time frame so that you’ll know when the collection will be made fully available to the public. Variables include the size of your donation, external events that might be linked to your donation and the existing backlog at the archive.

After depositing your records, the archive may need to ‘weed,’ thus removing unwanted or irrelevant material or duplicates. You may think you should weed first, but archives generally prefer to do this themselves. They have the professional and ethical expertise to ensure that nothing valuable is removed. They also want to make it easy for researchers to find what they are looking for by only including records of importance. Still, your agreement should dictate what happens when/if weeding occurs. Anything the archive doesn’t want should be returned to you, destroyed with your permission or moved to another archive with a better-suited mandate.

Seek assurances that your work will be stored as well as the archive’s main collections that they already own — in acid-free archival boxes or folders, on shelves in areas that are clean, dry, secure and protected from light, and that the environmental conditions are stable.

You might want to negotiate the conditions of access and use. This could range from ‘free access to all parts of the collection’ to “mostly free access with the exception of personal papers closed until a certain date,” to “access only by permission of the author during the author’s lifetime.” Archives, which bear the costs associated with maintenance, will prefer the lightest to no restrictions — free access to all parts of the collection. However, they also recognize there are sometimes good reasons for restrictions.

As part of your agreement, you should specify whether you’ll retain copyright or transfer it to the archive. Copyright should not affect access, but it will control a researcher’s ability to quote or make copies. Access and use are two very different things. Keep in mind that some parts of your collection may contain the copyright of others (think about your correspondence). This is described as ‘third party’ copyright.

If you don’t want to give up copyright, you might consider a license-to-publish clause, which would give the archive permission to, say, post your work online in perpetuity, but it is still copyright protected. If you are not giving up copyright, then you’ll need to designate someone who will consider granting permissions after your death.

Know that archives are digitizing their collections more and more. Digitization is the creation of digital copies of records that originated in traditional physical formats such as paper and photographs. There are several reasons to do so: to protect the originals from regular handling, to provide wider access to the collections by posting the records online, or, in response to technical change. Do not confuse digitization for preservation purposes with publishing online and the consideration of copyright.

Your archive may want the right to use your materials for new exhibits, displays and publications. Your agreement should specify that you’ll be fully credited in all these situations. If your collection contains highly personal materials, you may wish to have the right to veto these materials for display or publication until a designated date.

Lastly, if you believe there may be a monetary value, in addition to archival value for researchers, to your collection, that value might be offset with a tax credit. If you approach an archive (one that’s recognized by the Canada Revenue Agency) with this in mind, the archive will generally offer a tax credit for fair market value, and some will arrange and pay for an independent professional valuation. If your work is of national value, your archive may be prepared to approach the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board to certify your donation as Canadian cultural property. The resulting tax receipt can be applied to a higher percentage of the appraised value against your income tax.

**Final considerations**

Once you donate your records, they are no longer your property. Sure, you’ll be able to access them, but only like everyone else. There are no take backs, including any rights that you’ve transferred.

All records generally start out being useful, and then for some indeterminant amount of time, become hateful clutter until, at some point, they become useful, even valuable, once again. Yet, what survives and what is lost is too often left to chance.

Authors who donate their literary records are more likely to be studied in the future, merely because they have taken steps to guarantee that their records will survive. By managing your records now, no matter where you are in your career, you’ll give your literary archive that opportunity to grow and prosper. Once donated to an archive, your work will be protected and shared long after your books are out of print. The future welcomes you! 🌟

Jessica Scott Kerrin recently completed archival research about a Canadian/Icelandic poet for her newest novel, *The Things Owen Wrote*, published by Groundwood Books. For this article, she consulted with Lois Yorke, who recently retired as Nova Scotia’s Provincial Archivist after a 29-year career at the Nova Scotia Archives; Patti Bannister, Acting Provincial Archivist for the Nova Scotia Archives; and, Creighton Barrett, Digital Archivist for Dalhousie University Archives.
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“BOOKMARK!” Highlights Books for a variety of grade levels around a particular theme. CCBC’s Library Coordinator, Meghan Howe, has compiled a list of humorous books to read with kids this summer that will bring forth genuine smiles and some good old-fashioned belly laughs.

Humorous Books for Kids

**PICTURE BOOKS FOR PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 5**

**101 Reasons Why I’m Not Taking a Bath**
written by Stacy McAnulty
illustrated by Joy Ang
(Random House Children’s Books, 2016)

In this entertaining book, a young boy cites 101 reasons why he does NOT need a bath. 
#1 He is not dirty. #12 Baths are too WET! 
#20 He can clean himself like the cat. 
#89-101 He doesn’t want to!

**Braids!**
written by Robert Munsch
illustrated by Dave Whamond
(North Winds Press/Scholastic Canada, 2017)

Ashley hates getting her hair braided. It looks nice when it’s done, but it takes ALL day and Ashley never has time to do anything fun. When Grandma arrives, they turn the tables and braid Mom’s hair! And then the teacher’s — but maybe some people don’t look so good in braids. This title is also available in French as Quelle tête!

**Frank and Laverne**
written by Dave Whamond and Jennifer Stokes
illustrated by Dave Whamond
(Owlkids Books, 2016)

One dog and one cat, two hilarious sides to the story! Frank is busy with squirrel patrol and neighbourhood surveillance, while Laverne enjoys napping and getting Frank in trouble. Both pets report their perspectives separately, from opposite ends of the book, until the story comes to a head in the middle.

**InvisiBill**
written by Maureen Fergus
illustrated by Dušan Petricic
(Tundra Books, 2015)

Bill just wanted someone to pass him the potatoes. Unfortunately, no one even noticed — not his mother, not his father, not his older brother, not even his little sister. If someone had noticed, the wonderful, terrible thing that happened might never have happened. But it did.

**The Princess and the Pony**
written and illustrated by Kate Beaton

Princess Pinecone knows exactly what she wants for her birthday: a big, strong horse fit for a warrior princess! But when the day arrives, she doesn’t quite get the horse of her dreams. This title is also available in French as La princesse et le poney.

**Triangle**
written by Mac Barnett
illustrated by Jon Klassen
(Candlewick Press, 2017)

This book is about Triangle. It is also about Triangle’s friend Square. Also, it is about a sneaky trick Triangle plays on his friend Square, which has some unintended consequences for both friends! Youngsters will also want to read the sequel, Square.

**JUNIOR & INTERMEDIATE FICTION AND NON-FICTION FOR GRADES 1-8**

**28 Tricks for a Fearless Grade 6**
written by Catherine Austen
(James Lorimer, 2014)

Dave believes it’s his mission to cure his friends of their fears. And there are lots of fears to be slayed! Dave’s hare-brained, fear-slaying solutions come with unintended and hilarious consequences.

**Fluffy Strikes Back**
(A P.U.R.S.T. Adventure, Book 1)
written and illustrated by Ashley Spires
(Kids Can Press, 2016)

Fluffy Vandermere, top cat at P.U.R.S.T. (Pets of the Universe Ready for Space Travel), works tirelessly to protect the world from alien (a.k.a. bug) domination. Then Fluffy discovers P.U.R.S.T. headquarters itself is under alien attack! Gordon: Bark to the Future is another must have.

**Laser Moose and Rabbit Boy**
(Laser Moose and Rabbit Boy, Book 1)
written and illustrated by Doug Savage
(AMP Kids, 2016)

The forest is full of danger. Fortunately, there are Laser Moose and Rabbit Boy, improbable pals who use their powers to fight the forces of evil. Together, they battle aliens, a mutant fish-bear, a cyborg porcupine and a mechanical squirrel.
Memoirs of a Neurotic Zombie  
written by Jeff Norton  
(Faber and Faber, 2014)

Meet Adam Meltzer: preteen, worrywart and now a zombie. Adam’s back at school, trying to fit in and find the ‘zombee’ that stung him, but when he sees his neighbour Ernesto transform into a chupacabra, and the beautiful Corina turns out to be a (vegan) vampire, he finds that being undead is never going to be the same again.

Morgan the Brave  
(Be Brave, Morgan!)  
written by Ted Staunton and Will Staunton  
illustrated by Bill Slavin  
(Formac Publishing, 2017)

Morgan’s friend Curtis is throwing a birthday party and everyone in grade three will be there. But when Curtis announces that he’s going to show Brain Eater, the scariest movie EVER, Morgan is nervous — he doesn’t like scary movies.

Slacker  
written by Gordon Korman  
(Scholastic Press, 2016)

All Cameron wants from life is to avoid homework and play video games in the basement... until he almost lets his house burn down. He and his buddies create a bogus school club to make it look like they are doing good deeds. Then other kids start joining, and soon Cameron is club President.

Worms for Breakfast: How to Feed a Zoo  
written by Helaine Becker  
illustrated by Kathy Boake  
(Owlkids Books, 2016)

Covering everything from animal nutrition, to feeding zoo babies, to mimicking how animals hunt and eat in the wild, this informative, humorous, cookbook-style primer is packed with zoo-food facts from experts at zoos and aquariums!

Dan Versus Nature  
written by Dan Calame  
(Candlewick Press, 2016)

Dan Weekes, 16, is being forced to participate in a “survivalist” camping trip in order to “bond” with his mother’s fiancé Hank. Dan and his best friend, Charlie, cook up a series of gross and embarrassing pranks meant to drive Hank away. But their campaign backfires.

Delilah Dirk and the King’s Shilling  
written and illustrated by Tony Cliff  
(First Second, 2016)

After being falsely accused of spying by the nefarious Major Merrick, globe-trotting Delilah Dirk and Mister Selim sail to England to clear her name. But once on her home turf, Delilah encounters an adversary mightier than the entire British army: her mother.

Say You Will  
written by Eric Walters  
(Doubleday Canada, 2015)

Sam is not exactly a regular guy: his IQ is stratospheric, his social skills are low, and he has no dating history. But Sam is determined to finally fit in and find a prom date! Sam thinks he has what he needs to ask a special girl to the prom — in an unforgettable way.

Short for Chameleon  
written by Vicki Grant  
(HarperTrophy Canada, 2017)

Cam Redden works for his dad’s company: The Almost Family Surrogate Agency, which rents out fake family members. Cam’s job is to be whoever clients want him to be. Then he meets Albertina, an old lady on a mission, and Raylene, a beautiful girl with a painful secret.
Red Leaf Literature

Red Leaf Literature features titles chosen by Canadian Children’s Book News’ reviewers. These books are thought to be of the highest quality and signify titles of exceptional calibre. Whether you’re a parent, teacher or librarian, our reviewers feel that these books would make an excellent addition to your home, school or library collection.

PICTURE BOOKS FOR PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 6

The Pink Umbrella
written by Amélie Callot
illustrated by Geneviève Godbout
translated by Lara Hinchberger
978-1-101-91923-1 (hc) $22.99
978-1-101-91924-8 (eBook) $10.99
Tundra Books, 2018
for Grades 1 to 3

French writer Amélie Callot makes her English debut with the charming tale of Adele, a spirited small-town girl who owns the Polka-Dot Apron café. Adele is the heart of her little community, and with the help of her loyal friend, Lucas, she embellishes her shop with bouquets of roses, daisies and tulips to share her joy with the entire village. However, there is one thing Adele cannot stand — rain! When the miserable weather claims her seaside village, she grumpily tucks herself away beneath her quilts and will not venture outdoors.

But one day, when closing up shop, Adele comes across a pair of little pink boots that fit her like Cinderella’s slipper. As the days go by, a pink raincoat and a polka-dotted umbrella are left to complete the ensemble. Despite a distinct carving of a sun in the soles of the boots, no one in the village can help Adele discover who has left her these peculiar presents. As her investigation continues, she begins to realize it was not a coincidence she was gifted with these garments and solves the mystery. Finally deciding to embrace the rainy weather, Adele puts her new outfit to the test and with every step she takes along the muddy path, she leaves a little sun to brighten the day.

Illustrator Geneviève Godbout uses stunning cartoon-like illustrations to bring Adele and her seaside-village companions to life. With the soft palette of pinks and corals, the reader is transported into Adele’s fairy-tale world. No matter where one reads this endearing tale of friendship and community, one will always feel welcome at the Polka-Dot Apron café.

Kayla O’Brien is studying English and Gender Studies at Queen’s University in Kingston.

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.

The Funeral
written and illustrated by Matt James
Groundwood Books, 2018
978-1-55498-908-9 (hc) $18.95
978-1-55498-909-6 (eBook) $16.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Norma practises her sad face in a mirror on the day of her attendance at her great-uncle Frank’s funeral but cannot deny how happy she feels having a day off from school and seeing her favourite cousin, Ray. At the service, she likes to put her face into her mother’s purse, “the smell a mix of toothpaste and makeup and sweet warm leather,” while Ray likes to study a man’s hairy ear. Following the service, Norma and Ray run around outside, reading names on gravestones and looking for fish and frogs in a pond. When they go back inside, Norma stops to admire a flower bouquet with a photo of Uncle Frank, who seems to be “smiling right at her.”

Most of the gorgeous artwork here is done in acrylic and ink on masonite. James successfully balances the solemnity of the occasion with the natural playfulness and interests of children, from Norma losing her “window privileges” while driving behind a hearse, to her facing the coffin in church but mesmerized as “invisible dust appeared and was trapped, dancing in beams of light.” There is also a certain perceptiveness evidenced in both children, such as in Norma’s observation that there is “not very much talk about Uncle Frank” during the service and Ray’s question as to whether Uncle Frank is still a person. And nothing is more touching or profound than Norma’s quiet summation of the day, that “Uncle Frank would have liked his funeral.”

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.

Kayla O’Brien is studying English and Gender Studies at Queen’s University in Kingston.
Red Sky at Night
written and illustrated by Elly MacKay
Tundra Books, 2018
978-1-101-91785-5 (eBook) $10.99
for Preschool to Grade 2
Picture Book | Weather Aphorisms | Weather Prediction | Natural World | Multigenerational Family

In days gone by, people created rhymes to encapsulate in succinct and meaningful ways their observations of how the natural environment and animal behaviour predict weather. MacKay weaves together a variety of these sayings to create a fun, touching story about a grandfather who takes his grandchildren on an overnight fishing trip. As they set out in the morning, mist creeping up the hill and wind coming from the west are very encouraging signs for those wanting to fish. But when they are camped on an island, a number of observations all point to an approaching rainstorm. The grandfather and children now sail through rough seas and winds from the east, arriving home just in time.

MacKay makes wonderful use of these aphorisms, arranging them in an order that makes sense to the characters and the reader. A spread at the end of the book offers simple explanations of the sayings, and also indicates the degree to which they are true or the circumstances under which they may be. MacKay uses cut-outs as well as hand-crafted props and settings to create a diorama that is then photographed. Her art is gorgeous, the images rich in detail and graced by the play of light, drawing us in to be enraptured by all we see. But as the family members focus more on just spending time together, despite whatever the weather may be, we come to realise that “Fair weather’s not always best.”

Ken Kilback

Song on the Wind
written by Caroline Everson
illustrated by Anne Marie Bourgeois
Fifth House Publishers, 2018
978-1-927083-30-7 (hc) $18.95
for Preschool to Grade 1
Picture Book | Bedtime | Lullaby | Story Time | Family | Poetry

Caroline Everson has written a lilting lullaby that will carry young children up and off to explore distant yet familiar landscapes. It begins, “In a long-ago place in a faraway time/A story was sung to the wind.” Swept up by the currents of air, the song finds its way through time and space — from the glow of a family’s fire, to a fishing boat on the wide open sea, to the far north. And then again, from an igloo, the song is sent off on the wind to a place of rivers and forests, until it comes to rest (only briefly) by the crib of a child “in a very close place, in an oh-so-near time.”

Anne Marie Bourgeois’s illustrations add an air of magic and mystery to the experience. She has softened all the edges of the world and illuminated each page with marvellous light — from a fire, the moon, the sun, a lamp, the aurora borealis. The artwork is sumptuous and alive with the beauty of nature.

Everson’s subtle use of rhyme lends a gentleness to the song that works well with Bourgeois’s artwork. She uses a soothing rhythm in her poetry that will make this a lovely choice for bedtime. It is a poem that will send children’s thoughts out to sail the wind and to see what they might find — a song for the curious and the dreamy.

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

Song on the Wind
written by Caroline Everson
illustrated by Anne Marie Bourgeois
Fifth House Publishers, 2018
978-1-927083-30-7 (hc) $18.95
for Preschool to Grade 1
Picture Book | Bedtime | Lullaby | Story Time | Family | Poetry

The Triumphant Tale of the House Sparrow
written and illustrated by Jan Thornhill
Groundwood Books, 2018
978-1-77306-006-4 (hc) $18.95
978-1-77306-007-1 (eBook) $16.95
for Grades 3 to 6
Non-Fiction Picture Book | Introduced Birds | Adaptation | Conservation

Thornhill, whose The Tragic Tale of the Great Auk was awarded the 2017 TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award, has returned with another engaging and informative bird-focused book. But why is this new work a ‘triumphant tale,’ whereas the former was ‘tragic’? The answer resides in the two bird species’ relationship with humans. While the flightless great auk could not adapt as its natural environment was invaded by increasing numbers of Europeans, the house sparrow chose to align itself with humans some 10,000 years ago. Nomadic peoples’ turning to agriculture meant that these originally migratory sparrows had ready, stable access to their favourite food, grass seeds/grain, while buildings offered accessible nesting sites. Though limited in its flying range, the prolific Old World house sparrow, nevertheless, spread widely by ‘hitchhiking’ on ships or via deliberate introduction into new lands, including North America. And with increased urbanization, the house sparrow has triumphantly continued to adapt.

Calling the house sparrow “the most despised bird in human history” because of the damage feeding flocks can inflict on crops, Thornhill details some of man’s unsuccessful attempts to eradicate it and its cousin, the Eurasian tree sparrow. As with her great auk work, Thornhill stresses needed conservation, pointing to the house sparrow’s positive contributions in keeping insects and weeds in check. Thornhill’s digitally created illustrations, all double-page spreads, are richly detailed (including ‘whitewash’ droppings). Valuable end materials include the bird’s life cycle and a list of other wild animals that have adapted to live in human environments.

For some three decades, Dave Jenkinson taught children’s and YA literature at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba.
While unpacking after moving, a nameless girl is waved at by children in a tree house she can see from her bedroom window. Too shy to respond to them, she notices birds flying out from behind torn wallpaper. As she peels it back, she discovers she can step into a new world. A monster appears, though, chasing her into deeper layers of wallpaper. When the girl finally realizes the monster just wants to be friends, she greets it and the two of them explore more wallpaper worlds. After taking a break in her home to eat, she finds that the wall in her room is now merely a collage. What can she possibly do now?

This is predominantly a wordless book, the story told primarily through a series of two or more panels per page. Lam’s paper-collage illustrations are exquisite, vibrant and richly detailed, easily drawing us into the varied wallpaper worlds, and the faces and bodies of the characters are very expressive. One page that is very powerful has a nine-panel sequence contrasting the monster’s ever-deepening sorrow and loneliness with the girl’s increasing empathy and understanding of what the monster needs and wants. It is this moment that gives the girl the strength to not only befriend the monster, but to make an important decision later on when she believes she’ll never again see this friend. And so, the girl is at her bravest when she approaches the children in the tree house and says, “Hello!”

Ken Kilback

**JUNIOR & INTERMEDIATE FICTION AND NON-FICTION FOR GRADES 2 TO 8**

**Bat Citizens: Defending the Ninjas of the Night**
written by Rob Laidlaw
Pajama Press, 2018
978-1-77278-039-0 (hc) $22.95
for Grades 4 to 7

Non-fiction | Bats | Biodiversity | Biology | Citizen Science | Conservation

Creatures of the night, bats are definitely cool. The second largest group of mammals in the world, and the only mammals capable of true flight, bats are shadowy and fascinating, a perennial favourite amongst kids. But, like so many other animals, many species of bats are threatened or endangered. In this highly engaging and informative title, celebrated animal activist and biologist Rob Laidlaw sheds light on these ‘ninjas of the night’ and the efforts being made to save them.

This comprehensive book is chock full of bat facts, appealing colour photographs with captions, intriguing and myth-busting sidebars, as well as an eye-catching centre-gatefold of a hoary bat. The chapters include information on the many different types of bats around the globe, bat habitats, bat biology, how bats are an integral part of a healthy world, as well as some of the challenges bats face, and how readers can help in bat-conservation efforts.

Throughout the book, Laidlaw has included the profiles of 10 ‘Bat Citizens’—young people participating in citizen science to help protect bat populations. While most of the young people highlighted are American, this doesn’t detract from the important grassroots work they are doing. Perhaps reading about these ‘Bat Citizens’ will encourage more Canadian youth to get involved in bat-conservation projects.

Far from portraying bats as sinister denizens of the night, this engrossing book celebrates them as amazing creatures that are critically important to natural ecosystems and beneficial to humans. With a page devoted to 14 ways kids can help bats, many young readers will be inspired to become citizen scientists and to participate in bat-preservation activities. Visually attractive and full of clearly written scientific information, this is a must-have title for all young science and animal enthusiasts!

Tracey Schindler

**Wallpaper**
storyline and illustrations by Thao Lam
Owlkids Books, 2018
978-1-77447-283-8 (hc) $19.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

**Picture Book | Wordless | Loneliness | Shyness | Bravery | Friendship | Moving**

While unpacking after moving, a nameless girl is waved at by children in a tree house she can see from her bedroom window. Too shy to respond to them, she notices birds flying out from behind torn wallpaper. As she peels it back, she discovers she can step into a new world. A monster appears, though, chasing her into deeper layers of wallpaper. When the girl finally realizes the monster just wants to be friends, she greets it and the two of them explore more wallpaper worlds. After taking a break in her home to eat, she finds that the wall in her room is now merely a wall. What can she possibly do now?

This is predominantly a wordless book, the story told primarily through a series of two or more panels per page. Lam’s paper-collage illustrations are exquisite, vibrant and richly detailed, easily drawing us into the varied wallpaper worlds, and the faces and bodies of the characters are very expressive. One page that is very powerful has a nine-panel sequence contrasting the monster’s ever-deepening sorrow and loneliness with the girl’s increasing empathy and understanding of what the monster needs and wants. It is this moment that gives the girl the strength to not only befriend the monster, but to make an important decision later on when she believes she’ll never again see this friend. And so, the girl is at her bravest when she approaches the children in the tree house and says, “Hello!”

Ken Kilback

**Eat This! How Fast-Food Marketing Gets You to Buy Junk (and How to Fight Back)**
written by Andrea Curtis
illustrated by Peggy Collins
Red Deer Press, 2018
978-0-88995-532-5 (pb) $16.95
for Grades 4 to 7

Non-fiction | Marketing | Media Literacy | Junk Food | Fast-Food Culture

Marketing can be an insidious force of manipulation, and nowhere is this more evident than in the marketing of junk food to children and youth. This slim volume, packed with information, is more than just a guide to helping kids understand the techniques and strategies marketers use to influence their purchasing choices—it explores some important implications of our fast-food culture such as environmental costs, food waste, questionable nutritional claims, and serious health consequences such as diabetes and obesity.

Author Andrea Curtis begins by explaining marketing as the ‘art and science of persuasion,’ and each subsequent chapter examines various methods used to market junk food and beverages to kids, including product placement in TV or online shows and video games, use of social media campaigns and viral marketing, adver-gaming where kids earn prizes and special offers by playing ‘free’ product-sponsored games, school fundraising and school sponsorship, digital manipulation to enhance products and the use of celebrity endorsements and spokes-characters like Tony the Tiger.

Curtiss’s tone is never preachy or patronizing and she clearly believes that young people have the ability to push back against the marketing machine and become savvy consumers. In Do This! sections, which appear throughout the book, she highlights parent- and kid-driven campaigns against junk-food marketers and encourages readers to become advocates and activists themselves. The final chapter offers concrete ways kids can educate themselves—from reading nutritional labels and critically examining a favourite show or video game for product placements,
Whether you’re staycationing or heading off to camp, we have the perfect summer reading list for ages 8-12

The Tiny Hero of Ferny Creek Library
by Linda Bailey 9780735263208

The Bonaventure Adventures
by Rachelle Delaney 9780143198772

Chase
by Linwood Barclay 9780143198772

Knock About with the Fitzgerald-Trouts
by Esta Spalding 9780735263192

Sophie Quire and the Last Storyguard
by Jonathan Auxier 9780143198512

The Explorers: The Door in the Alley
by Adrienne Kress 9780143198512

The TINY HERO OF
FERNY CREEK LIBRARY
by Linda Bailey
9780735263208

THE BONAVENTURE
ADVENTURES
by Rachelle Delaney
9780143198772

CHASE
by Linwood Barclay
9780143198772

KNOCK ABOUT WITH
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Winner:
The 2017 Vine Award for Canadian Jewish Literature

Winner:
The Western Canada Jewish Book Prize 2018

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The Western Canada Jewish Book Prize 2018

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The Western Canada Jewish Book Prize 2018
to doing a price and taste comparison between a fast-food meal and a nutritious meal cooked at home.

Offering a diverse and global perspective, *Eat This!* encourages media literacy and critical thinking while empowering young readers to find positive ways to challenge the fast-food culture in their own communities and schools. An important addition to bookshelves everywhere!

Tracey Schindler

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**Ebb & Flow**

written by Heather Smith

Kids Can Press, 2018

978-1-77138-838-2 (hc) $17.99

978-1-5253-0064-6 (eBook) $5.99

for Grades 5 to 8

*Fiction | Novels in Verse | Healing | Forgiveness | Intergenerational Relationships*

When Jett and his mom move to the mainland, it is supposed to be a fresh start. But for Jett it marks the beginning of a tumultuous year, a year of lashing out and making bad decisions and, ultimately, of doing something for which he is deeply ashamed. Now, he is spending the summer with his Grandma Jo for a ‘change of scenery,’ a time to heal and to maybe ultimately forgive himself. He and Grandma Jo go to the movies and dye their hair, play games and search for sea glass, have picnics on the beach and tell each other stories. And through these stories, the details of Jett’s ‘rotten bad year’ emerge. Through it all, Grandma Jo is there, listening and offering up her own words of wisdom, and seeing the beauty in this boy with the bruised and battered heart. When the time comes for Jett to board the plane to return to the mainland, he has rediscovered hope and taken sure steps toward healing.

Exquisite and heartbreaking, this free-verse novel creates a compelling portrait of a boy who is deeply hurting, who made a mistake and who eventually found himself in a terrible position with no easy way out. Jett’s gradual journey toward accepting responsibility for his actions but not letting them define him is deftly handled, and his emotional growth is believable. By allowing the details of Jett’s story to unfold slowly, Smith gives readers the chance to empathize more fully with him and to feel his pain more intensely. He and Grandma Jo, as well as the book’s secondary characters, are all nuanced, realistically flawed and satisfyingly complex. The metaphor of the sea glass becoming something better after being beaten and battered is effective, and the non-linear progression of the story as the events of the past year weave through to the present allows it to resonate more profoundly with readers.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager at Woozles in Halifax.

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**Rooster Summer**

written by Robert Heidbreder

illustrated by Madeline Kloepper

Groundwood Books, 2018

978-1-55498-931-7 (hc) $16.95

978-1-77306-137-5 (eBook) $14.95

for Grades 2 to 5

*Fiction | Novel in Verse | Farm Life | Farm Animals | Family | Intergenerational Relationships*

Rexster the rooster struts in via an open window to rouse two children. The siblings are waking up to their first day at their grandparents’ farm where they will stay for the summer. Soon the children settle into the rhythm of farm life — riding Seed-Sack to the chicken coop to fetch eggs, the mule making frequent stops as the children slide off and on his back; racing with Grandma and Grandpa to the train tracks that cut the farm in two to catch the 11:58 as it chugs by, banging pots and pans and waving to the passengers; checking in on Tuftin’s newborn kittens, “Them are working cats,” Grandma and Grandpa warn, as the children want them as pets; bringing the cows home with Karmie the farm dog and stargazing in the evening after a tummy-filling meal, Grandpa and Grandma carrying the sleepyheads to bed.

There’s a day at the creek with town friends that turns into a run home in a rainstorm. A fox gets into the chicken coop. The days stretch on and the rhythm of farm life lodges itself deep inside the children’s being. Then summer is over. With a hayride on the last night, the children celebrate with their grandparents. But, wait! There is a surprise as the children load all of their belongings into the car — one toffee-coloured kitten is coming home with them, a gift from Grandpa and Grandma.

This bucolic novel-in-verse, a memoir of the author’s childhood summers on his grandparents’ farm, is graced with spot illustrations done in greys and yellows. The illustrations add to the feeling of nostalgia, warmth, caring and familial love, with moments of humour and rambunctiousness thrown in for good measure. It is a quiet novel, just asking to be read aloud.

Theo Heras is an author and a former children’s librarian living in Toronto.

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**The Game of Hope**

written by Sandra Gulland

Penguin Teen Canada, 2018

978-0-670-06702-2 (hc) $21.99

978-0-735-26265-2 (eBook) $10.99

for Grades 7 and up

*Historical Fiction | Hortense de Beauharnais | Josephine Bonaparte | Paris | Napoleonic Era*

*The Game of Hope* opens in Paris in 1798. It has been four years since the fall of Robespierre and the end of the Reign of Terror, which has left many across France grieving the deaths of their loved ones. Fifteen-year-old Hortense de Beauharnais is studying at a boarding school for aristocratic girls run by Maîtresse Campan, whom she adores. Hortense loves to compose and play music and...
daydream about her brother’s dashing friend, Christophe; but she, like many other girls, suffered a tragic loss during the Terror and is plagued by dreams of her father who was executed by guillotine.

Hortense, however, is not just any aristocratic girl. Her mother Josephine has just married Napoleon Bonaparte — the most powerful man in France — and Hortense is about to see the course of her life change drastically. As the stepdaughter of Napoleon, and to ensure her protection, she will be forced to leave her dearest friends and beloved school behind to live at court.

Sandra Gulland’s first foray into YA literature is a huge success. Having written an internationally bestselling trilogy of adult books based on the life of Josephine Bonaparte (published between 1995 and 2000), Gulland’s knowledge of this time period is extensive. Inspired by Hortense’s autobiography, she has written a historically detailed and truly intriguing story of this teenage girl from 18th-century France. Readers who are historical-fiction buffs or fans of the Napoleonic era will truly appreciate Gulland’s skill at recreating this fascinating period in history and empathize with Hortense at being thrown into a world that was not of her choosing.

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

Sadia
written by Colleen Nelson
Dundurn Press, 2018
978-1-4597-4029-7 (pb) $12.99
978-1-4597-4031-0 (eBook) $8.99
for Grades 7 and up

Fiction | Refugees | Basketball

Sadia Ahmadi just wants to play basketball and enjoy her Grade 9 experience. True, she is stressed and confused when her best friend, Nazreen, begins de-jabbing in the mornings at school, hiding her headscarf and asking Sadia not to say anything. Then the tryouts for an elite coed basketball team push her emotionally and physically. However, neither of these challenges prepares Sadia for meeting Amira, a recent refugee from Sadia’s former home, Syria. Everything is more complicated than she imagined, and Sadia attempts to make meaning of the shifts in her life. Her own identity is solid, but Nazreen’s choices raise uncomfortable questions for Sadia, and Amira’s situation makes Sadia acutely aware of the difference between the immigrant and refugee experiences. It is on the court, however, that Sadia centres herself and regains her equilibrium, despite the difficulties presented by playing in a hijab.

Nelson’s storytelling is thoughtful, and her characters are deep and well developed. Sadia is a protagonist worth rooting for, as are her friends and community. The discrimination Sadia faces on the basketball court is counteracted by a beautiful display of empathy, and the climactic scene of the novel is emotional and resonant.

This timely novel lingered for me after the last page, and I couldn’t wait to talk about it with other readers. The gentle way it deals with intense, emotional issues such as discrimination, the immigrant and refugee experience and empowerment gives this book quiet power, much like Sadia herself.

Jen McConnel is a teacher and graduate student with an MA in Children’s Literature.
**The Better Tree Fort**

**written by Jessica Scott Kerrin**
**illustrated by Qin Leng**
Groundwood Books, 2018
978-1-55498-863-1 (hc) $17.95
978-1-55498-864-8 (eBook) $14.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Father & Son Relationships | Tree Forts | Building*

Inspired by a huge maple tree in the backyard of his new home, young Russell devises a plan for a magnificent tree fort, complete with balcony, slide and skylight. After admitting to his lack of building skills, Russell’s father nonetheless agrees to assist his son with its construction. Following numerous trips to the lumber store and much effort, a very basic tree fort finally takes shape. Although the fancy additions from the original plan are absent, Russell is well pleased with the result and believes the structure to be perfect — until he observes another tree fort being built for a boy named Warren just three yards over. It looked bigger and straighter, had a slide for quick escapes, turrets like a castle and even lights. Feeling disappointed, Russell visits Warren in this grand abode and soon discovers that Warren’s father had not been involved in any aspect of its assembly. Russell then comes to realize that his father, though not the most accomplished builder, is definitely the ‘better dad.’

Jessica Scott Kerrin has written a delightful story about the genuine love between a father and son. Quality time shared between two people is more important than possessions, as Russell and his father demonstrate while building the tree fort and spending their first night there, eating peanut butter and jam sandwiches, sleeping up top in their sleeping bags and gazing at the glittering stars.

Qin Leng’s animated ink, watercolour and pencil crayon illustrations contain numerous details that will hold the attention of young readers as they follow Russell’s architectural adventures. The original sketch of his dream tree fort is nothing short of charming in its child-like simplicity.

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

**Blue Rider**

*storyline and illustrations by Geraldo Valério*
Groundwood Books, 2018
978-1-55498-981-2 (hc) $19.95
978-1-55498-982-9 (eBook) $16.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Imagination | Books | Colour*

A young girl peers from her apartment window, only to be faced with identical apartment windows in monotonous shades of grey and blue. When she ventures onto the bustling street below, she is surrounded by a dreary crowd on the move, many overly absorbed in their technology devices. She finds a book lying on the sidewalk and takes it to her bedroom to read. Upon opening the cover, a blue horse leaps out and gallops high into the sky, leaving behind a fantastic natural landscape created by a jumble of shapes and vivid hues that grows and mutates with each turn of the page. The child experiences immeasurable happiness. Not only has her bedroom been permeated with colour, but the scenery outside her window glows with a previously unknown vibrance. Because of the power of a book and art, an entire community has been transformed.

In creating this wordless picture book, Geraldo Valério was inspired by the German Expressionist group known as *Der Blaue Reiter* (the Blue Rider), which was formed in 1911. These artists, who included Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, found spiritual inspiration in art with a concentration on form and colour. Here, Valério demonstrates that art has the power to create inspiration and joy in an often beauty-starved, too predictable world.

*Senta Ross*

**Harry’s Hiccups**

**written by Jean Little**
**illustrated by Joe Weissmann**
Orca Book Publishers, 2018
978-1-4598-1562-9 (hc) $19.95
978-1-4598-1564-3 (eBook) $9.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

*Picture Book | Hiccups | Humour*

Harry has the hiccups. As family and friends offer advice on how to cure them, Harry dutifully tries every suggested remedy. He drinks water, holds his breath, drinks upside down, uses the wrong side of the cup and attempts a myriad of other solutions. But still he hiccups! Then, feeling tired and sad, he dejectedly hiccups beside a nearby stream. Suddenly, a large green frog startles him with a big splash as it leaps into the water… and Harry’s hiccups disappear!
Now, it's the frog’s turn for hiccups and Harry’s turn to provide advice!

Harry’s hiccups are particularly tenacious, but all readers will recognize the situation and the well-meaning advice. Harry is portrayed as a patient, good-natured fellow who amiably submits to the increasingly absurd ‘cures’ presented. The reader’s sympathy for him escalates as poor Harry becomes more desperate. Well within a child’s experience, this lively and amusing story would make a great read-aloud participation story and a vibrant addition to the bookshelf.

Little is a master at understanding subjects that appeal to children, and Weissmann is her match in capturing the quaintness of the plot through his cheerful, bold, humorous illustrations. Using acrylics on board, the artwork is full of rich, expressive detail that invites young children to peruse the pictures and understand the story even if unable to read the text themselves. In a humorous finale, the last full-page spread reveals the frog attempting every remedy Harry tried, including an unexpected surprise at the end!

Aileen Wortley is a retired children’s librarian from Toronto.

Lora Rozler uses spare text to describe situations and things that may give rise to a feeling of appreciation. Pancakes, mud pies, waves and sand — nothing is too small or too ordinary to inspire a little gratitude. After every one-line description, the word ‘thank you’ is written, each time in a different language with phonetic pronunciation in parentheses.

Jan Dolby illustrates each page in watercolour hues, conjuring a cast of diverse children intent on the activities of each new day. She splashes colour across the page, creating a celebratory atmosphere dotted with quiet moments of wonder.

It is not difficult to see the negative. We are all too aware of things, situations and interactions that we don’t appreciate. Thankfulness, on the other hand, is a feeling that often requires some cultivation; it is not always second nature. This is a book that will help young children to focus their attention — to meditate — on everyday wonders. It will help them to pause, to think and, hopefully, to appreciate some of the special moments of childhood.

Learning how to say thank you in 32 different languages is likely to open up a world of questions — get ready to appreciate the curiosity of small children!

Ilidiko Sumegi

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**Little Brothers & Little Sisters**

written and illustrated by Monica Arnaldo

Owlkids Books, 2018

978-1-77147-295-1 (hc) $18.95

for Preschool to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Siblings*

Four pairs of younger siblings yearn for a meaningful role in the lives of their older brothers and sisters. They long to be part of their team, allowed ‘turns’ in games instead of just watching. They want to enjoy instead of just doing the donkey work. They cannot express it but just want some basic rights! Initially, they watch with envy and resentment as the bigger kids have fun. But in a gradually evolving process, the older children take their small siblings under their wings. In doing so, they satisfy the younger children’s other longings… for a helper, a bodyguard, a partner, a teacher and a best friend!

Siblings will recognize the universality of the emotions captured in this honestly portrayed picture book. Using a deft touch, minimal text and large bold pictures, the author highlights the contradictory emotions of younger siblings. Through astute observation, the text reveals both the pathos and delight within sibling relationships.

Bright, colourful illustrations using mixed media reflect the cultural diversity of the large-eyed children as they play together. The spirited, whimsical pictures, across dramatic double pages, are full of life and action, reflecting a range of expression, emotion and subtle humour. They communicate the highs and lows of being a younger sibling as well as the total oblivion of the older children, unaware of the influence they wield. Beneath it all, true affection is apparent. The components of child-friendly text and vibrant artwork are so intertwined that one could not imagine one without the other.

Aileen Wortley

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**On Our Street: Our First Talk About Poverty**

(The World Around Us)

written by Dr. Jillian Roberts and Jaime Casap

illustrated by Jane Heinrichs

Orca Book Publishers, 2018

978-1-4598-1619-0 (eBook) $4.99

978-1-4598-1617-6 (hc) $19.95

for Kindergarten to Grade 3

*Non-fiction | Poverty | Homelessness | Mental Illness | Human Rights | Essential Services*

“Don’t ask kids what they want to be when they grow up; ask them what problem they want to solve.” — Jaime Casap

Children often ask difficult questions about the world and the different people they see in their community. The World Around Us series helps answer some of those questions by introducing children to complex cultural, social and environmental topics in a straightforward and accessible way. This title tackles the issue of poverty and some of the reasons that people might end up living on the streets.

Using clear, age-appropriate language, Jaime Casap, Chief Education Evangelist at Google Inc., and child psychologist Dr. Jillian Roberts, answer the kinds of questions curious children might ask, such as “What is it like to live on the streets?” and “Are there children who are homeless?” Young readers will find straightforward
answers to these questions along with short definitions of some key terms like poverty, homelessness, mental illness, essential services and refugees. Sidebars with insightful quotes from individuals and organizations such as UNICEF add further food for thought.

The authors view poverty through a compassionate and empathetic lens — as a societal problem rather than an individual one. There is a natural progression to the questions and answers, and the book is visually appealing, with large print and an uncluttered feel. Each spread includes a question, a small amount of text, colour photographs and a sidebar. Children are empowered to ask questions throughout, and the last page includes examples of things readers and their families can do to make an immediate difference.

A sensitive and thoughtful approach to a difficult subject, this book offers parents and teachers an opportunity to encourage kids to think more deeply about how we can make our world a better place for everyone.

Tracey Schindler

They Say Blue

written and illustrated by Jillian Tamaki
Groundwood Books, 2018
978-1-77306-020-0 (hc) $19.95
978-1-77306-021-7 (eBook) $16.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Colour | Nature | Observation | Imagination

As a young girl explores her immediate surroundings, she muses about the colours she sees and the feelings they evoke within.

“They say blue is the colour of the sky. Which is true today! They say the sea is blue, too... But when I hold the water in my hands, it’s as clear as glass.” She asks questions such as, “Is a blue whale blue?” Opinions are put forth regarding colours that are invisible to her — “I can’t see my blood, but I know it’s red.” Her imagination is clear as glass. Each spread includes a question, a small amount of text, colour photographs and a sidebar. Children are empowered to ask questions throughout, and the last page includes examples of things readers and their families can do to make an immediate difference.

A sensitive and thoughtful approach to a difficult subject, this book offers parents and teachers an opportunity to encourage kids to think more deeply about how we can make our world a better place for everyone.

Tracey Schindler

Walking in the City with Jane: A Story of Jane Jacobs

written by Susan Hughes
illustrated by Valérie Boivin
Kids Can Press, 2018
978-1-77138-653-1 (hc) $19.99
for Grades 1 to 4

Non-fiction Picture Book | Urban Communities | Biography

In just 36 pages, Susan Hughes gives readers an excellent introduction to Jane Jacobs’ life, her urban philosophy and her years of determined opposition to projects that would destroy what she valued in cities.

Hughes introduces us to the restless student who liked to be outdoors, observing and analyzing, and then the young woman energized by the “sidewalk ballet” around her in New York City, and eventually the persistent advocate for neighbourhoods who waged many (successful) battles against mega-highway projects in New York and later Toronto.

Hughes offers a remarkable breadth of information and expertise, weaving together facts and details, like the first time Jane saw a toothbrush or the statement of powerful planner Robert Moses that nobody opposed his plans, “NOBODY but a bunch of... a bunch of MOTHERS!”

Valérie Boivin’s stylish illustrations enhance the story with charm and verve. An afterword gives more details about Jacobs’ life and legacy.

Gillian O’Reilly is a Toronto editor and the co-author (with Cora Lee) of The Great Number Rumble: A Story of Math in Surprising Places.

What Happens Next

written by Susan Hughes
illustrated by Carey Sookocheff
Owlkids Books, 2018
978-1-77147-165-7 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 1 to 4

Picture Book | Bullying | Isolation | Empathy | Relationships

The devastating and far too common experience of being bullied is frankly conveyed in this powerful story told from a victim’s point of view. The opening pages set the scene as the tormented narrator, made to feel invisible and worse by a girl at school, issues a succinct account of the distressing interactions: Why I Don’t Want to Go to School Today: Bully B. What Bully B. Does at School Today: Blocks my way. Asks me questions that aren’t really questions. Like, “Why are you so weird?” What Her Friends Do: Laugh. What Everyone Else Does: Nothing.

At first, she hides her anguish at home by saying that everything at school is ‘fine.’ However, after several additional incidents and emotional upheavals, she unburdens herself to her mother and, together, they develop a plan to help the bully view the protagonist in a new way.

It is almost painful to read Susan Hughes’ text because it is so piercing in its description of what it feels like to be an outsider. The words are sparse, yet the emotions engendered near one’s heart.

Carey Sookocheff’s unembellished illustrations, painted with

Senta Ross
How to Spot a Sasquatch
written by J. Torres
illustrated by Aurélie Grand
OwlKids Books, 2018
978-1-77147-277-7 (hc) $17.95
for Grades 2 to 5
Graphic Novel | Camping | Sasquatch | Friendship

While on a camping trip, Jay is determined to photograph a Sasquatch even while being ridiculed by his three fellow Junior Campers. After finding a strange footprint, realizing their snacks have disappeared and discovering their campfire has been mysteriously drenched, everyone but Jay remains skeptical. While Sass the Sasquatch and her animal pals have enjoyed pruning the campers, her adoptive bear parents insist she stay away from humans. When Jay catches a glimpse of Sass while fishing, he follows her, only to fall into a rushing river. Sass manages to save Jay and soon, after the two finally connect face to face, they become friends. Thinking about the consequences of revealing Sass’s existence to the world, Jay promises to keep their friendship a secret.

Torres and Grand’s early-reader graphic novel features a simple narrative with a diverse cast of characters. The camp story is a familiar one in children’s literature but remains a popular trope. Grand’s artwork is crisp and enhances the playful elements of the story. Sass’s character design and facial expressions convey her free-spirited personality and her friendly good nature. The humour in this book lies in Jay’s insistence that the Sasquatch is real and the multiple near misses of spotting her. The most unexpected element in this graphic novel is Torres’s decision to make Sass a female Sasquatch adopted by a pair of bears and just as curious about humans as Jay is about her. How to Spot a Sasquatch is perfect for younger readers being introduced to graphic novels and also for more seasoned readers looking for a light fun read.

Scott Robins is a Children’s Services Specialist at Toronto Public Library and co-author of A Parent’s Guide to the Best Kids’ Comics.

Don’t Tell the Enemy
written by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch
Scholastic Canada, 2018
978-1-4431-2839-1 (pb) $8.99
978-1-4431-2840-7 (eBook) $8.99
for Grades 4 to 8
Historical Fiction | War | Friendship | Family | Ukraine

When the Soviets took over Krystia’s little town of Viteretz, Ukraine, they brutally killed Krystia’s uncle and cousin, but before she and her family even had time to grieve their loss, the Nazis had suddenly gained power. As a result, many Jews were forced to give up their homes and all their belongings to the Germans. Close friends of Krystia’s family were suddenly sent to live in the ghetto without permission to contact any Slavs outside the ghetto gates. Krystia must find a way to protect her friends from the Nazis and save them from starvation or worse — the death camps.

Skrypuch creates a very well thought-out protagonist in Krystia. At the beginning of the story, she is portrayed as a meek character who admires her younger sister for being so brave and strong. As the story develops, Krystia gains courage and becomes the brave heroine who clearly puts her friends and family before her own safety.

Don’t Tell the Enemy is based on true historical events. It is a powerful story about war, friendship, family and how far someone will go to protect the people she loves. Skrypuch writes with plenty of raw emotion, allowing the reader to understand what life was like in the Ukraine when the Nazis took over. This book is highly recommended as a read-aloud or novel study for junior/intermediate students studying about the history of the Ukraine. It can be utilized when learning about the Holomodor or The Great Famine of Ukraine.

Michelle Carabeo is a teacher at St. Catherine Catholic Elementary / Junior High School in Edmonton.

Fox Magic
written by Beverley Brenna
illustrated by Miriam Körner
Red Deer Press, 2017
978-0-88995-552-3 (pb) $11.95
for Grades 5 to 8
Fiction | Grief | Loss | Suicide | Hope | Magical Realism | Mental Health | Courage | Bullying

Twelve-year-old Chance Devlin should have died with her two best friends. The three girls made a suicide pact, but Chance couldn’t go through with it. Now, she judges herself to be a coward and a traitor who left them to die. Her feelings of guilt and the weight of her secret have become the ‘Bad Thing’ that stalks her. This heavy burden is compounded by bullying at school and cruel notes left in her desk that Chance keeps, believing she deserves them.

Chance does have a support system — a therapist, who encourages her to keep a journal of her thoughts, and her father, who is an undemanding but solid presence in her life. But in a lovely twist of magical realism, it is a mysterious fox named Janet Johnson who helps Chance find hope. After Chance and the fox pay a dream-like visit to her school, Chance’s multicultural classmates create a ‘mending wall’ to help themselves heal. And it is the fox who ultimately leads Chance to face the ‘Bad Thing’ and begin to forgive herself.

This slim novel packs a powerful punch. Brenna has poignantly captured the voice of a broken and lost young girl, and her difficult path to healing is written with clarity and candour. A touch of magic has been woven in, with Brenna leaving it up to the reader to decide if the fox is real or not. Miriam Körner’s evocative black-and-white sketches are effective, clearly expressing the mood of the story.

Tracey Schindler
A World Below
written by Wesley King
Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2018
978-1-4814-7822-9 (hc) $19.95
978-1-4814-7821-2 (pb) $9.95
for Grades 4 to 6

Fiction | Fantasy | Adventure | Caverns | Field Trip | Friendship | Self-discovery | Independence

When Mr. Baker’s Grade 8 class set out to explore the Carlsbad Caverns of New Mexico, they have little idea what awaits them. An earthquake strikes, and the ground swallows them up. In the dark depths, an encounter with a strange and unknown realm will test their courage, their wits and what they believe about themselves.

Three threads weave their way through the story. There is Eric, a boy who finds safety in solitude and must confront the pain of an absent father. Then there is Silvia, who struggles to overcome her anxiety and panic when her classmates look to her for guidance. And there is one more character living down in the dark — a boy king known as Carlos Santi.

Wesley King has given us a classic children’s adventure. Lost in a fantastical realm with no adult to guide them, the children must draw deeply upon their own resources to save themselves. In doing so, they learn something about their own nature and each other, emerging back into the light with new confidence and strengthened bonds. King has drawn his characters with real children in mind, and many will identify with the self-doubt and internal struggles of Eric, Silvia and Carlos.

This book requires a willing suspension of disbelief — in a world of flesh-eating beetles and giant luminescent mushrooms, it is the inner journey that is the true adventure. A World Below is a satisfying page-turner that will encourage a love of reading and an itch to explore one’s own potential.

Ilidiko Sumegi

Rising Seas: Flooding, Climate Change and Our New World
written by Keltie Thomas
illustrated by Belle Wuthrich and Kath Boake W.
Firefly Books, 2018
978-0-2281-0022-5 (hc) $19.95
978-0-2281-0021-8 (pb) $9.95
for Grades 4 to 6

Non-fiction | Oceans | Climate Change | Flooding

Imagine the Statue of Liberty or Peggy’s Cove under water. Rising Seas puts the impact of climate change into shocking and urgent perspective. Using sensational photos of endangered frontline cities and coastal areas, it portrays how they will appear by 2100 if sea levels continue to rise. Places highlighted include New York, Miami, Mumbai, Nova Scotia, the Nile Delta, Greenland and others. These startling forecasts are substantiated by facts on how water shapes the earth, how carbon emissions affect oceans and how efforts are being made to avert disaster through emission reductions and physical adaptations in the threatened areas.

The book is packed with solid facts made enticing through a layout that uses sidebars and information boxes to vary the text and humorous drawings and clear maps to enhance it. Three preliminary chapters provide the science of climate change and its impact. These are followed by highlights about specific coastal areas combined with large photos that show how these areas currently appear. A digitally adapted version of the same picture reveals its fate if no decisive action is taken. A glossary, index and comprehensive bibliography are included, and suggestions are listed to enable readers to further explore this issue and provide an opportunity to keep the lines of communication open around mental health.

Aileen Wortley

The 11th Hour
written by Kristine Scarrow
Dundurn Press, 2018
978-1-4597-4039-6 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 9 and up

Fiction | Mental Health Issues | Relationships | First Love

Annika Dietty is a popular cheerleader who comes from a stable home with a loving family. She is a high achiever with several extra-curricular interests, friends and a good part-time job. However, she begins to feel the pressures and restrictions of her parents and her commitments once she starts dating basketball star Dylan Sopick. His intense passion and spontaneity — the qualities that attracted Annika in the first place — become the very traits that threaten more than just their relationship.

The 11th Hour provides a fast-paced depiction of a young relationship spiralling quickly out of control as Dylan’s mental illness becomes evident. Scarrow provides a captivating account of events by switching between Annika’s and Dylan’s perspective. This unusual narrative structure enables readers to juxtapose Dylan’s ‘truths’ to Annika’s realities, creating a compelling tension that grips readers. The realistic inner dialogues place readers alongside these characters as they navigate the gaps between outside appearances and internal realities.

Sarrow’s novel captures the intensity of first love, and heightens that intensity by adding the impact of mental illness. Due to mature themes, the story is best suited for a high school audience. A notable lesson is provided — one that shows the dangers of underestimating mental illness and its treatments. The discussion questions and mental health references at the back of the book enable readers to further explore this issue and provide an opportunity to keep the lines of communication open around mental health.

Mellissa Connolly is a literacy consultant in Brantford, Ontario.
All That Was
written by Karen Rivers
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018
978-0-374-30246-7 (hc) $23.50
978-0-374-30247-4 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Friendship | Relationships | Death | Grief

When the police car pulls up in Sloane's driveway, she knows instinctively what they are going to tell her — Piper is dead. Piper, who has been her best and only friend since childhood. Sloane's grief, loss and confusion are vast, but overwhelming everything is her sense of guilt. The last time the two girls saw each other, Sloane was kissing Soup, Piper's boyfriend. Never mind that it was only after Sloane had admitted that she had feelings for Soup that Piper had started dating him. Sloane only sees her failure as a friend. Is it her fault that Piper ran off and was then found dead? As she tries to process the reality and enormity of her loss, and to imagine a future for herself without Piper, the story flashes back to the weeks and months before this, and the complex story of their friendship emerges. Piper was strong-willed and forceful, manipulative and oftentimes cruel. Sometimes Sloane wonders if she actually hates this girl whom she so fiercely loves. Theirs is/was a complicated relationship, and this book is an artful exploration of that friendship.

This is an intricate portrait of two girls and the terrible tragedy that brings everything to the surface for the one who is left behind. The story is told largely from Sloane's first-person point of view in a stream-of-consciousness style of narration that jumps back and forth in time, creating a finely nuanced plot and allowing a more honest and perceptive portrayal of their friendship to develop. Sloane's relationships with her parents and with their elderly neighbor, Mr. Aberley, though not central to the story, are genuine and heartwarming and help to soften the harsher aspects of this dark but compelling tale.

Lisa Doucet

Big Water
written by Andrea Curtis
Orca Book Publishers, 2018
978-1-4598-1573-5 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 9 and up
Historical Fiction | Shipwreck | Grief | Survival | Romance | Bravery | Family | Tragedy

Andrea Curtis weaves together an intense story that is based on the two survivors of the SS Asia steamship wreck in 1882. This novel has the reader ride the waves of a horrific shipwreck and dive into the hidden lives of two characters bound together by a terrible catastrophe.

Christina McBurney is a naive 17-year-old girl who struggles with the immense grief of losing her twin brother to consumption. While she battles anger and survivor's guilt, she decides to run away and find employment. She seeks out her cousin Peter, a first mate on the SS Asia to garner safe passage to Sault Ste Marie. Knowing her struggles with her parents, he agrees to bring her aboard and buoy her hopes of a new life. It becomes clear that there are many people aboard the ship with giant dreams, and Christina uses this as an opportunity to create a clear path for her happiness.

After a violent storm hits, the reader finds Christina adrift in Georgian Bay in a lifeboat filled with deceased passengers. The only other living person on the lifeboat is a young man named Daniel who the reader soon learns has an uncertain past. Navigating through starvation and desperation and fighting for the will to live, Christina and Daniel realize they must use what they know now and rely on each other to find help and dry land.

Big Water carries its weight in emotions and suspense for the reader. The novel is a great way to explore the many shipwrecks in Ontario and will engage readers who like historical fiction and survivorist themes.

Christine O'Sullivan is a secondary teacher-librarian in Brantford, Ontario.

The Disappearance
written by Gillian Chan
Annick Press, 2017
978-1-55451-985-9 (eBook) $12.99
for Grades 7 and up
Fiction | Mystery | Supernatural | Bullying | Death | Loss | Friendship

The Disappearance essentially starts at its conclusion. A teen, Jacob, has vanished, and another teen, Mike, is being questioned by police. The author, having raised questions in readers' minds, returns to the beginning and introduces Mike McCallum, aged 14, who, after three foster homes plus a group home, is being placed in yet another Hamilton group home. Three years earlier, Mike's mother's drunken live-in boyfriend killed Mike's younger brother, Jon, and, wielding a cleaver, significantly disfigured Mike's face when the boy tried to come to Jon's aid. Mike now uses his marred features to prevent others from seeing his deeper scar — his belief he failed Jon.

The Disappearance is a crossover novel, a mix of mystery, realistic fiction and time-slip fantasy, with the three genres working both independently and together. The mystery involves Jacob Mueller's identity as the teen chooses to remain basically mute and socially isolated. In the realistic fiction portion, Mike must navigate the existing bullying social structure of his new group home. Mike's solving the question of Jacob's identity leads directly into the time-slip fantasy — Jacob is actually from the 19th century, and Jacob's extreme emotional response to his enraged father's killing his younger brother had propelled him into the future. Jacob, who can commune with the dead, informs Mike that Jon has assured him, “You [Mike] will get me back to the real place.” Accepting Jacob's request as an opportunity to redeem himself, Mike must figure out how.

Though populated principally by males, The Disappearance will appeal to all middle-school-aged students.

Dave Jenkinson
**Fourth Dimension**
written by Eric Walters
Penguin Teen Canada, 2018
978-0-14-319844-4 (hc) $21.99
978-0-14-319846-8 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 7 and up

Fiction | Survival | Dystopia | Toronto | Power Outages

Fifteen-year-old Emma is miserable at being forced to move into a brand-new condo building with her ex-marine mother and her younger brother. The semi-regular power outages are the least of her worries, and she isn’t too bothered by the blackout that hits just as they are about to leave on a camping trip. But then the car won’t start, their cellphones are dead and it appears to be more than a blackout. They decide to canoe to the Toronto Islands just off shore and wait it out in relative safety. But as the days without power drag on, people become more and more desperate, and the threat of violence becomes increasingly real.

In this stand-alone spinoff of The Rule of Three series, Eric Walters revisits the theme of the original series with a new set of characters and circumstances. When the power goes out, Emma’s family is in better shape than most. Their camping gear is already packed and ready, and it’s a short trip across the lake to the Toronto Islands where they can wait it out.

Walters quickly ramps up the tension, and Emma and her family are almost immediately faced with danger. Cars may be dead, but the island is still reachable by boat and, as conditions in the city deteriorate, the island comes under threat. Worse, the tight-knit island community seems completely oblivious to the danger and are reluctant to take steps to protect themselves.

The vulnerability of the island makes this story work, and, as an added bonus, Walters incorporates characters and events from The Rule of Three series, showing readers the other side of events from those books. While reading the original trilogy is helpful in giving readers some additional background information, the book stands alone and can be enjoyed either way.

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

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**Ghost Boys**
written by Shenaaz Nanji
Mawenzi House Publishers, 2017
978-1-988449-13-5 (pb) $18.95
for Grades 6 to 8

Fiction | Human Trafficking | Human Rights | Camel Racing | India | Middle East

After his beloved oldest sister commits suicide for bringing disgrace upon her family, 15-year-old Munna vows to restore honour to his mother and sisters and secure their future financially. He turns to his Uncle Suraj, a wealthy man with many connections, who is happy to help. With the promise of working in a sheikh’s palace, Munna travels with his uncle from India to the Middle East, only to be sold into slavery to a man known as Master-ji. In the middle of the desert, Munna is put to work overseeing the sheikh’s camel farm, as well as the undernourished and poorly treated camel trainers and jockeys, who range in age from two to 12. Munna quickly bonds with the children — stuck just like

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him — and takes on the role of big brother. When Munna meets Avra, a Canadian teenager whose scientist father works for the sheikh, his plans for escape become possible, but first he must help win the Gold Sword camel race to earn the money he desperately needs.

_Ghost Boys_ is an eye-opening read about the trafficking of young boys from countries like Sudan, Afghanistan and Pakistan as camel jockeys in the Middle East. Munna is an amiable protagonist who assumes the role of man of the house — his father took off a decade earlier — with much pride and devotion. Unfortunately, there are moments that take away from the thought-provoking story of Munna and his young charges, among them Avra's role as white knight and the predictable ending. Otherwise, _Ghost Boys_ is a well-researched and richly written middle-grade novel about human-rights abuses for the sake of a multimillion-dollar sport.

Heather Camlot is a writer, editor and translator and the author of _Clutch_.

**Ophelia**

written by Charlotte Gingras
illustrated by Daniel Sylvestre
translated by Christelle Morelli and Susan Ouriou
Groundwood Books, 2018
978-1-77306-099-6 (hc) $18.95
for Grades 9 and up

**Fiction | Urban | Creativity**

When a published author speaks at a high school, her advice inspires a young girl who calls herself Ophelia. With the words of the author in her mind, Ophelia begins seeking opportunities to create art; one night she finds the perfect place and an abandoned warehouse becomes her creative sanctuary. But the solitude doesn’t last. Ophelia learns she has invaded the safe space of Ulysses, an overweight boy she has seen but never spoken with at school. The two forge an uneasy truce through candy bars, books and paint. Gradually, they become cautious allies, and then their relationship becomes something deeper.

Told in first-person letters that Ophelia never intends to send, this novel is complex and emotional. Ophelia and Ulysses are outcasts, but their characters are dimensional and lively, and the artwork that appears in the book is as haunting as Ophelia’s narrative. The interplay of text and art enhances the convention that the author is not the one telling the story, but that rather it is the intimate tale of Ophelia’s evolution as she recorded it in her notebook. Gingras has crafted a poignant novel that is both contemporary and authentic. Despite leaning on a few tropes of modern YA, and despite a rather tidy ending, this story goes beyond the standard outcast narrative. Ophelia’s search for a voice through her art rings true, and readers will likely empathize with her struggles.

Jen McConnel

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**Lizzie**

written by Dawn Ius
Simon Pulse, 2018
978-1-4814-9076-4 (hc) $23.99
978-1-4814-9078-8 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 9 and up

**Fiction | Lizzie Borden | Physical & Mental Abuse | Mental Health Issues**

Seventeen-year-old Lizzie Borden is a shy teenager who escapes from reality in the kitchen. There she can dream of being a chef and someday escaping her cruel and oppressive parents. Lizzie longs for freedom, but between her blackout episodes and her ‘job’ working at her family’s B&B, it seems impossible.

When new maid Bridget Sullivan arrives on the scene, Lizzie is instantly drawn to her free spirit and they quickly become more than friends. With Bridget’s support, Lizzie starts to transform. Bridget is confident and worldly and helps Lizzie find the courage to audition for cooking school. Chasing a dream is a theme that teen readers will easily relate to, and they will empathize with Lizzie’s frustration and anger at the cruel treatment she suffers at the hands of her parents. But as the blackouts get worse, Lizzie loses large chunks of time and does things of which she has no memory. Lizzie becomes less certain of reality and less able to trust her instincts. Is she going mad?

In her 21st-century version of the Lizzie Borden story, Dawn Ius leaves readers with a lot to unpack. In this version, Lizzie is a sympathetic and complex character. Her family life is unbearable. Her father and stepmother are emotionally and physically abusive and have made her completely dependent on them — so much so that she isn’t sure she can survive without them.

As the story progresses, Lizzie’s mental state deteriorates and the blackouts increase in frequency. When she wakes up to find her father and stepmother brutally murdered, she becomes the obvious suspect and is subjected to trial by public opinion. Did she do it, or didn’t she? Ius leaves it to the reader to decide.

Rachel Seigel

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**The Strange and Deadly Portraits of Bryony Gray**

written by E. Latimer
Tundra Books, 2018
978-1-101-91928-6 (hc) $21.00
978-1-101-91929-3 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 4 to 8

**Historical Fiction | Mystery | Friendship | Family**

This intriguing novel follows the trials and tribulations of Bryony Gray, an orphaned teenaged girl who has been locked up in an attic by her scheming aunt and uncle. Forced to paint for the wealthy upper-class members of London society, Bryony soon discovers that her portraits possess dangerous powers. As the long-lost daughter of Oscar Wilde’s infamous manipulator, Dorian Gray, Bryony appears to have inherited some of her father’s supernatural capabilities. When Bryony’s paintings begin attacking their subjects, she is forced into a world of danger and intrigue where she must discover the truth about her abilities.

Upon her escape from the attic, our defiant protagonist quickly befriends neighbouring siblings — the adventurous Mira and her pragmatic elder brother, Thompson. As she and her new friends venture around a chaos-stricken London, Bryony slowly unravels the mysteries of her past, and learns a dark secret about her absent author in her mind, Ophelia begins seeking opportunities to create art; one night she finds the perfect place and an abandoned warehouse becomes her creative sanctuary. But the solitude doesn’t last. Ophelia learns she has invaded the safe space of Ulysses, an overweight boy she has seen but never spoken with at school. The two forge an uneasy truce through candy bars, books and paint. Gradually, they become cautious allies, and then their relationship becomes something deeper.

Told in first-person letters that Ophelia never intends to send, this novel is complex and emotional. Ophelia and Ulysses are outcasts, but their characters are dimensional and lively, and the artwork that appears in the book is as haunting as Ophelia’s narrative. The interplay of text and art enhances the convention that the author is not the one telling the story, but that rather it is the intimate tale of Ophelia’s evolution as she recorded it in her notebook. Gingras has crafted a poignant novel that is both contemporary and authentic. Despite leaning on a few tropes of modern YA, and despite a rather tidy ending, this story goes beyond the standard outcast narrative. Ophelia’s search for a voice through her art rings true, and readers will likely empathize with her struggles.

Jen McConnel
father. Finally free from her aunt and uncle’s clutches, Bryony hopes to discover a real family to love and care for her. During her escapades, she crosses paths with the flamboyant Constantine and the unhinged Lottie, a character whose introduction will surprise readers. And as Mira and Thompson support their newfound friend through her many revelations, Bryony starts to realize that in her search for a true family, she has inadvertently built one along the way.

For fans of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, this will prove to be an equally alluring read.

Kayla O’Brien

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**Suitors and Sabotage**
written by Cindy Anstey
Swoon Reads, 2018
978-1-2501-4565-9 (hc) $23.50
978-1-2501-4566-6 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 7 and up

*Historical Fiction | Mystery | Romance | Regency Era | Art | Humour*

Imogene Chively is fresh off a successful season in London and she has attracted a suitor who has her father’s approval. But Imogene is uncertain of her feelings — that is until he comes to visit with his younger brother, Ben, in tow. Ben is an architect’s apprentice, but he can’t draw. An aspiring artist, Imogene offers to teach him and, as the lessons proceed, their feelings toward one another grow. When a series of accidents occur around Ben, Imogene realizes if they don’t figure out who’s behind them, hiding their feelings will be the least of their problems.

In Cindy Anstey’s third novel for young adults, she offers readers a lively heroine worthy of Jane Austen, and a charming stand-alone historical romantic mystery that does not disappoint. Expecting a proposal should make Imogene happy, but she barely knows her suitor and she needs time to see whether or not she has feelings for him. To further complicate things, Ernest’s brother Ben is charming, funny and attractive, and readers will love the forbidden romantic angle that Anstey draws.

Imogene is smart, sensible and capable. She knows her own mind and has talent and ambition beyond marriage. She also doesn’t want to settle. The mysterious accidents that occur add a level of tension and intrigue to the story. Readers will not likely guess who is causing the accidents or why, and the reveal does not occur until the end. Overall, this is a highly recommended romance that is sweet, funny, entertaining and perfectly suitable for tween readers.

Rachel Seigel
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