In Their Heads
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Jeremy Tankard, “Authorstrator”

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Moose Jaw is Reading Town Canada! From May 3–10, 2014 the National Reading Campaign created an exemplary model of what a reading Canada looks like. Here, Grade 6 students at St. Agnes School stage a reading flash mob at City Hall.

Opinion: Emotional Awareness, Honesty and Strength
Amy Mathers explains why teen books are excellent bibliotherapy tools.

News Roundup
Book Week 2015 highlights Aboriginal creations; Julie Flett chosen as Book Week artist; Waterloo study shows that picture books offer rich information and learning opportunities; Canadian books abroad; Robin Muller at the National Portrait Gallery; Patricia Storms 2014 Joanne Fitzgerald Illustrator in Residence.

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Keep Your Eye On …
Meghan Marentette

Profile: With Flying Colours
How a “stupid” idea about a cranky bird launched Jeremy Tankard’s “authorstrator” career.

In Their Heads
Sandy Bollenbach looks at books every teacher should read to understand their students who face challenges.
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When teacher and former CCBC intern Sandy Bollenbach described the children’s books that really enabled her to get inside the heads of some of her students, we were intrigued. These books, she said, were books every teacher should read to understand the children with ADHD or learning disabilities, the kids on the autism spectrum, the bullies and the bullied. You will be intrigued, too, by her article “In Their Heads.” It’s a thoughtful and impassioned take on books that can build empathy for all kinds of children.

Many of you know Amy Mathers from her astounding Amy’s Marathon of Books. She has another job, as well, as a consultant on bibliotherapy using teen fiction. In this issue, she describes her work and some of the books she has found useful. It’s a fascinating look at a genre that, as she says, offers emotional awareness and honesty to help people unlock their own feelings.

Summer reading can be such a fun and pleasurable encounter with books. Who doesn’t remember the joy of discovering a series and looking forward to the delights of a new book with familiar characters? Our Bookmark! column offers a treasury of great series for young readers to savour through the summer holidays.

And there’s more… a profile of “authorstrator” Jeremy Tankard, a Book Week photo album, a chat with writer Meghan Marentette and lots of reviews to enjoy.

Happy reading.
people cope with their emotions in an authentic way. Different books are meaningful at different times in a person’s life, and different readers will respond to books in different ways.

Clinical bibliotherapy involves medical professionals recommending non-fiction, self-help-type books to their patients in the hopes of giving them resources to deal with their medical issues through examples. A similar practice is found in creative bibliotherapy, done by lay people but also involving non-fiction self-help books in a way that fosters community discussions about an illness.

The use of non-fiction books is about providing practical answers. Dealing with issues such as divorce, anxiety, abuse or illness, self-help books provide readers with a step-by-step guide to getting through the challenges that face them. They can be used in an individual or group setting but the types of bibliotherapy that use them are geared more toward adults.

The type of bibliotherapy I practise is best described as emotional bibliotherapy and it fills a gap left by the other three. When it comes to dealing with a variety of life challenges, there is a practical component and an often-overlooked emotional component.

It is all very well to provide clients with practical resources, but how can we equip them to identify and handle the experiences of grief, loss, mourning and sadness that accompany major life events? People are emotional beings but they are not always aware of what they are feeling. This is especially true when it comes to children and teens because their younger age and developmental stage may mean they do not have the necessary emotional vocabulary to describe what is going on inside them. Also, experiences that happen at a pre-verbal stage in the child’s development still affect the child but are even more difficult to express.

My first experience of the power of emotional bibliotherapy was in Grade 7 English. My teacher had assigned me to the group of students reading Lois Lowry’s *A Summer to Die*. Based on Lowry’s real-life experience of losing her sister at a young age, it is about Meg and her sister Molly, who ends up dying from leukemia. I hated the book and was quite vocal about it during our book discussions — much to the dismay of other students — but it was because Lowry’s writing had touched a nerve in me. Deep down I knew exactly what Molly was going through during her long and solitary hospital visits, as well as her frequent nosebleed episodes, and the experience of reading her story dredged up memories and feelings I had not been able to express before. Because I understood the book on a different level than the other students, it got under my skin and really upset me.

The best feeling in the world for me happens when I read a book that speaks to my experience and shows me I am not alone. Born with a genetic illness that required me to have a liver transplant at the age of five, my childhood experiences were vastly different from those of other children in my life. I grew up in a small community in Perth County, and there was only one other person in town who had had a transplant (kidney). Ever since I was a little girl avidly reading whatever books I could get my hands on, I was constantly looking for stories that featured characters like me.

Books are a reader’s gateway to imagination, education, entertainment and self-discovery. For me, they were not only a way to explore the world, but also a way to make sense of everything that had already happened in my short life. I did not know it then, but I was practising bibliotherapy on myself.

The meaning of the term bibliotherapy is exactly what it sounds like: therapy with books, using people’s connection to the written word to help them deal with life’s challenges. This practice takes many forms because it is currently not a regulated therapy like psychiatry and psychology.

The best-known form of bibliotherapy is one that is popular in Britain, and I classify it as academic. Focusing on expanding your reading boundaries through recommendations made by a bibliotherapist, it also seeks to expose you to new genres. You might be familiar with *The Novel Cure: An A-Z of Literary Remedies*, written by prominent UK bibliotherapists Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin. Mostly they recommend fiction, but also some poetry and non-fiction.

I take issue with Berthoud and Elderkin because bibliotherapy is not about finding a book that is going to fix everything in your life. It is about facilitating self-discovery and helping people cope with their emotions in an authentic way. Different books are meaningful at different times in a person’s life, and different readers will respond to books in different ways.

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The right book is like a key turning in a door, opening and unlocking insights into the self and allowing the healthy release of pent-up emotions; the wrong book can make you want to lock the door securely. As a result, recommending books for emotional bibliotherapy is a largely intuitive process; it is about so much more than just matching up life experiences in books with the life experiences of a reader.

My childhood reading was driven by my search for books featuring characters dealing with illness or transplants, but the ones I found were usually sappy and often resulted in the death of the sick character. Transplant stories featured mystical connections between the recipient and the donor as well as complicated situations where the recipient knew the deceased donor’s family. Even when I encountered a character who had had experiences remotely similar to mine, I could not relate to them because the stories themselves were fantastical and unrealistic, designed more as issue books for emotional bibliotherapy is a largely intuitive process, it is about so much more than just matching up life experiences in books with the life experiences of a reader.

Shared experience does not always lead to shared emotions. I loved Jean Little’s books as a child but, even when they featured children dealing with disabilities, I had trouble finding common ground with them because disability is a visible issue and not usually life threatening, whereas my illness issues were invisible at that point and held the possibility of causing my death.

When I reached high school in the late 1990s and teen fiction started to really take off, I found the emotions caused by my illness were best expressed through what was then known as LGBT fiction. Though I was not gay, I knew what it was like to have something to hide from other students. I had intimate knowledge of being the ‘other’ — because being sick is not a desired state of being. It scares people and they do not understand that you can still live a fulfilling life despite dealing with illness. And while my genetic illness issues were at times life threatening, my illness issues were invisible at that point and held the possibility of causing my death.

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As a result, I have learned to look for the key emotions behind a story and how well expressed they are, rather than the specific experiences contained in the book.

I became a bibliotherapist when, after three years of York University’s Social Work program, I was diagnosed with heart failure. I was forced to reconsider my options while waiting to be listed for a transplant. My sister Holly Mathers is a therapist who was facilitating a support group for teens with family members dealing with cancer. We discussed the best way to get the teens to open up about how they were feeling and I suggested a couple of books.

For every session Holly led, I would read a book and write a report for her containing a book summary and relevant quotes to open up discussion. Sometimes the books were specifically about cancer, but books about the death of a parent were also helpful. Teens in the group identified with the characters and often ended up reading the books themselves afterwards. Plus, having a writer’s voice describe their experiences gave them a chance to say that yes, they identified with what was being said or it gave them a starting point to say why what happened to the character was different from their own experiences.

Since that initial group, I have expanded my consulting work to include advising other therapists because I firmly believe bibliotherapy is something that should be done with a therapist’s support.

Because emotional bibliotherapy is about helping readers identify and deal with their emotions, the books I use most often are from the teen-fiction genre. Teen books have an emotional awareness and honesty that adult books often lack, and because it is a time of growth and development, those emotions are often strong and vibrant, making them easily identifiable. Some of the Canadian authors I have used for bibliotherapy purposes are Rachel Hartman, Beth Goobie and Susin Nielsen.

I’ve used Seraphina by Rachel Hartman for a client dealing with a physical disability. In the book, Seraphina is part human and part dragon, and as such she is influenced by societal attitudes and feels great hatred for the dragon scales on her body. But one of the themes of Hartman’s story is Seraphina’s journey to accept her body the way it is, eventually embracing the dragon part of her and all that it means. Miles away from disability, yet similar at the same time.

When it comes to practising bibliotherapy on myself, I turn to Beth Goobie’s writing again and again. Her books are emotionally raw and honest, at times dealing with serious topics of mental illness and abuse. Not all of Goobie’s books are for everyone; when it comes to recommending her books to others I stick with her lighter works like The Throne and The Colors of Carol Molev. Her female characters are innovative thinkers who often stand up for themselves, serving as excellent role models for girls dealing with low self-esteem and infusing her readers with a bit of confidence that may be lacking in other areas of their lives.

Susin Nielsen’s book The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen is a masterpiece. One of the most overlooked areas of physical and mental illness is the sibling experience, and Nielsen tackles it head-on in her endearing story of Henry, a young teen struggling with grief after his brother takes a gun to school to kill both the kid who has bullied him and then himself. Henry’s journey is incisive and poignant, capturing the turmoil of being so close to someone affected by something out of your control. I’ve recommended it for siblings of people dealing with chronic illness, terminal illness and mental illness because the emotions behind the situations are all similar.

I love my job because connecting readers with the right books is an incredibly satisfying experience. Helping others find community and self-awareness through literature is something I am passionate about and I hope to keep sharing that passion with others in the future. 
News Roundup
AWARDS, BOOK LAUNCHES, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND THE LATEST NEWS

Book Week 2015 highlights Aboriginal creations
TD Canadian Children’s Book Week will take place from May 2 to 9, 2015. It will celebrate Aboriginal stories and the remarkable variety of topics, genres and voices being published by and about members of our First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Canada.

The list of touring authors will be announced in late August, along with further details regarding the 2015 tours. Visit www.bookweek.ca for more information.

Julie Flett chosen as Book Week artist
Julie Flett, the award-winning artist, will illustrate the 2015 Book Week poster. The Vancouver-based Métis and Cree artist and illustrator has written and collaborated on numerous projects over the years, including Lii Yiiboo Nayaapiwak Lii Swer: L’alfabet di Michif I Owls See Clearly at Night: A Michif Alphabet and Little You (authored by Richard Van Camp).

Flett’s latest book, Wild Berries, was recently named the 2014-2015 First Nation Communities Read selection. Her illustrations always have a simplicity and freshness as she skilfully uses colour, texture, painting, drawing and collage.

Born in Toronto, Julie began her studies in textile design at the Alberta College of Art. Following two years of studio work at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, she completed a Fine Arts degree at Concordia University in 1997. She is the recipient of numerous awards.

Canadian books abroad
The Canadian Embassy in Tokyo holds a monthly Canadian Children’s Book Centre book club. Some events are for adults who love children’s books; others are for young readers. A recent meeting featured a reading of Barbara Reid’s Picture a Tree by Vanessa Nostbakken, daughter of children’s book author and former chickaDEE editor Janis Nostbakken and niece of the Embassy’s Cultural Affairs Officer Laurie Peters; it was followed by a workshop where the children made their own Plasticene artwork.

The Canadian High Commission in London, UK, held a Young Adult Literary Salon on May 7, to celebrate Canadian authors living in Britain. Robert Paul Weston (Blues for Zoey), Moira Young (The Dust Lands trilogy) and Jeff Norton (the Metawars quartet) were on hand to discuss their influences and inspirations in writing for young people. The event, part of Social Book Week, was moderated by Julia Eccleshare, children’s book editor at The Guardian newspaper.

The study, by Professor O’Neill of the Department of Psychology at Waterloo, and Angela Nyhout, a graduate student, recorded 25 mothers while they read two books, each featuring six animals, to their toddlers. In one book, the animals were part of a story told in pictures. In the other book, a picture of each animal was presented against a blank background, in the usual style of “vocabulary-learning” books.

“What we found was that moms in our study used a special form of language — something called generics — as frequently when reading the picture storybook to their child as the picture vocabulary book,” said Professor O’Neill. “Generic language tells children about animals in general, not just about one animal. It’s the difference between saying ‘This giraffe has a long neck’ and ‘Giraffes have long necks.’ In the second case, we are more likely to learn something about all giraffes in general — that they all have long necks."

While this study looked at generic language, a previous study had looked at aspects of mothers’ complex language. “Our results are significant because they clearly show that books of all kinds can build children’s knowledge about the world, including picture book stories,” said Professor O’Neill.

She adds, “I think the biggest surprise was that we saw differences between the genres when the books were very short (six pages) and the book-sharing interactions very short (just a few minutes).”

“If one can see differences even with such short stories and interactions, this suggests that if parents and children are sharing such books regularly, and in longer interactions than just five minutes, children’s exposure to complex talk and their learning from such interactions has the potential to be quite significant. I think we, and other researchers, have just begun to scratch the surface of the potential of picture storybooks for children’s learning in many domains.”

The study appeared in the open-access journal, Frontiers in Psychology. It is continued on page 8.

The study’s author says that researchers “have just begun to scratch the surface of the potential of picture storybooks for children’s learning.”

“Marketers tell parents and educators that vocabulary books are more educational, so picture books are often dismissed as being just for fun,” says Professor Daniela O’Neill. “But our findings show that reading picture books with kids exposes them to information about animals in a way that allows children to readily apply this knowledge more broadly. This is key to learning.”

Picture books offer rich information and learning opportunities, Waterloo study shows
A recent study at the University of Waterloo has shown that children hear as much sophisticated information about animals when parents read them picture book stories about animals as when they read flashcard-type animal vocabulary books. The study’s author says that researchers “have just begun to scratch the surface of the potential of picture storybooks for children’s learning.”

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Julia Eccleshare reads Barbara Reid’s Picture a Tree at the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo
A PHOTOGRAPHIC LOOK AT CANADIAN CHILDREN’S BOOK EVENTS

At the Forest of Reading celebration in Toronto, George Brady, brother of Hana, and author Karen Levine are honoured as Hana’s Suitcase is named The Ultimate Silver Birch Book on the 20th anniversary of the award.

At the Forest of Reading Thunder Bay celebrations, author Hélène Boudreau (I Dare You Not to Yawn) enjoys a quiet moment.

Author and singer Jill Barber and illustrator Sydney Smith launch their new book Music is for Everyone.

At the Forest of Reading celebration in Toronto, Ted Staunton (Jump Cut) and Kelley Armstrong (Loki’s Wolves: The Blackwell Pages) meet with fans.
published as part of a special Research Topic entitled “An Open Book: What and How Young Children Learn From Picture and Story Books,” which brings together researchers from various disciplines to show the variety of ways young children learn from sharing books with their parents.

Robin Muller at the National Portrait Gallery
Illustrator and author Robin Muller is also a portrait painter. One of his works was recently chosen for one of the most prestigious international competitions, the BP Portrait Award Exhibition, administered by Britain’s National Portrait Gallery. Muller’s painting of a Toronto woman was one of 55 chosen for the annual exhibition, out of a record-breaking 2,377 entries. The award and the accompanying exhibition showcase the most outstanding and innovative new portraits from around the world. The painting will be part of the exhibit in London and later in Scotland.

Patricia Storms 2014 Joanne Fitzgerald Illustrator
IBBY Canada has announced that children’s book illustrator Patricia Storms has been selected for the 2014 Joanne Fitzgerald Illustrator in Residence Program. The Program is a one-month residency in a public library for a published children’s book illustrator.

Patricia Storms will be at the Northern District Branch of the Toronto Public Library for the month of October 2014. During her residency, she will engage children in art activities during class visits to the library, present workshops for the public, talk to students and teachers in art programs at high schools and colleges and schedule portfolio-review meetings with artists and art students.

The Toronto Public Library hosts the residencies in 2013 and 2014. In subsequent years, in partnership with the Canadian Urban Libraries Council, IBBY Canada will work with libraries in other provinces to host the Joanne Fitzgerald Illustrator in Residence Program.

Correction
The caption for the photo showing the Durham District School Board teacher-librarians with the many authors who visited for a day of presentations, book talks and fun (in our Spring 2014 issue) should have noted that the day’s events were organized by the Author Booking Service.

Tell us about your most recent book. My debut novel is The Stowaways, a middle grade novel about a family of mice who come from a long line of bold explorers. The young twins, Rory and Morgan, are itching for adventure, but Papa won’t let the family go anywhere after Grampa went missing on an outing long ago. After discovering a family secret, Rory becomes especially determined and convinces Gran that the two of them must ignore Papa’s warnings and go look for Grampa in the World Beyond. After escaping danger time and again, by only a tail, the Stowaways eventually end up on an even bigger journey, which I’m currently exploring in Book 2.

Tell us about the process of writing. I’m an all-or-nothing person. If I can get several months in a row to write without other obligations, I’m happy. In the morning, I read what I wrote the day before, edit until I can move on and then write 1000 new words by day’s end. I take 30 minutes at midday to walk in nature and chant a little mantra to myself that allows me to let go of the outcome of my work, and let the story take over.

How did you first get published? It was kismet! I had finished a new draft of The Stowaways, when a new client (I’m also a costume maker) contacted me. It happened to be Jill MacLean, another middle grade author from Halifax whose writing I greatly admire. She needed an outfit made for an event. During a fitting with her, I got up the courage to ask what I should do with my manuscript.

She suggested I have it professionally edited before sending it out to publishers. After lengthy hesitation (was my writing even worth it?), I finally sent it to Ann Featherstone, Jill’s highly recommended editor. After weeks with no reply, I convinced myself that my work was probably so bad that Ann couldn’t even bring herself to tell me! So I decided to abort mission. I was about to send her a “don’t bother” email, when there in my inbox was an email from her! She had given my manuscript to Gail Winskill from Pajama Press, who wanted to publish it!

What do you like about writing books for kids? Children’s literature is fearless in its pursuit of truth. I was born to read it, write it and live in it!

Tell us about writers who inspire you. I love writers who build suspense through all facets of a story — not just in the plot, but also through character development and setting. Richard Adams’s Watership Down is a masterpiece in that way. I’m also inspired by the sacrifices writers make in their lives to be able to write. I often read the Paris Review interviews to comfort myself that I am not alone in those sacrifices.

http://meghanmarentette.wordpress.com
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With Flying Colours
How a “stupid” idea about a cranky bird launched Jeremy Tankard’s “authorstrator” career

BY JENNIFER D. FOSTER

By the time Vancouver-based children’s author-illustrator Jeremy Tankard was eight years old, he’d been to four different schools on two different continents. Born in Cape Town, South Africa, Tankard lived there until he was four and a half. His family then moved to Columbia, South Carolina, followed by Hazard, Kentucky; Knoxville, Tennessee and finally Calgary, where Tankard lived until he was 25. His dad is a retired geologist and his mom is a retired school librarian.

Tankard “passionately hated reading” as a child. “I never learned to read quickly, and it was a chore,” he recalls. “When I did read, it was under duress for school or I had to be bribed with expensive toys.” He did, however, enjoy reading comics, and any free time he had was spent drawing. “I didn’t like reading books, but I loved making them. Drawing was my retreat, and it was never just about a piece of art. It was almost always about a story.” As he went through grade school, Tankard got a reputation. “By Grade 4 I was known as the kid who draws. I could draw anything.”

Tankard, now 41, comes by his award-winning storytelling skills naturally. His dad is a watercolour painter who loved telling his sons tales, teaching the boys early on the power of words and encouraging them to spend hours drawing pictures. “My dad always pushed creativity and thinking outside the box,” says Tankard. He attended Bishop Carroll High School in Calgary, completing his self-directed learning diploma in three years. The summer between high school and college saw him “drawing like crazy, thinking I could get a job drawing Spiderman and wouldn’t have to go to university,” he says. Instead, he received myriad form letters from Marvel, DC, Dark Horse and Valiant comics, saying, “No thanks, but please keep trying.”

So he did. Tankard attended the Alberta College of Art (ACA), and after a year there started receiving hand-written critiques on the rejection letters from DC Comics, saying he was nearly ready. He also befriended Cary Nord (now an award-winning comics artist) in first year and encouraged Nord to submit his illustrations. Within three weeks Nord had an offer from DC Comics. Tankard initially thought it was a great coup, but soon changed his mind after watching Nord struggle to meet deadlines. “I was stressed just watching him work, and he was a better draftsman than me,” says Tankard. “It was my first real glimpse into how the comic book industry works, and I realized DC Comics thinks I’m almost ready, but I know I’m not.” Tankard stopped pitching comics when he realized he was replicating the other artists. To stand out, he opted to study fine art, not illustration. “Illustration didn’t seem like a good road to finding your own voice. With fine art, I would do nothing but try to find my own voice.” His plan? Come back to drawing comics when he’d finished school, really knew himself and had his own style.

That path would take a little longer than expected. Tankard graduated from the printmaking program at ACA; then for nearly two years he worked as an in-house graphic designer. He built an impressive portfolio with his digital-production skills, landing full-time production work at Venture Communications, owned by Arlene Dickenson (of Dragon’s Den fame). A fast, efficient worker, he thrived in the collabora-
tive, creative environment, often doing illustration work for Venture and spending his free time building an illustration portfolio. "It looked like Marilyn Manson album-cover work — dark, serious, gothic-type images — a cross between photo collage and oil painting. It was layered, textured, cheesy and awful, with lots of ink, but I was pretty excited about it!" he remembers.

Tankard worked for Venture for one and a half years, leaving in 1998 for a month-long trip to New York City, England and Toronto to find illustration work, his true passion. His NYC meetings were "short, depressing and discouraging." People, including Stephen Hiller at The New York Times, told Tankard his work would "look nice on their walls, it was great, but they couldn't use it for illustrations." Toronto was more successful. He shared his sketchbook — quickly drawn cartoon-like images and characters — with an art director when asked if he had anything else. That art director couldn't see the connection between the sketchbook and the portfolio.

"It was the first time it occurred to me illustration didn't have to be hard work. Something I spent three minutes drawing might be more interesting than something that took me 10 hours. A light went on," he says, and Tankard started mixing the fun with the more textured, layered material. "Slowly it started to look like my own work. I started to develop a voice that was strong and mine, and the work started to look more unusual, more marketable." Tankard moved to Toronto in the fall of 1998 to market his illustration work, doing freelance jobs for The Globe and Mail, Time magazine and The New York Times, as well as ad campaigns. "It was a really fun ego trip. People were taking my illustrations seriously," he says.

The year 2001 was a serious turning point for Tankard. The dot-com crash, 9/11 and the birth of his daughter Hermione (he also has a five-year-old son, Theo, with wife Heather, who is the coordinator of the writing centre at Emily Carr University of Art + Design) altered his life forever. While Tankard rediscovered his love of children's books, his illustrations began to morph from conceptual (editorial illustrations for financial publications) to "cute." His work became increasingly populated with people and animals with real personalities, his niche got smaller and his portfolio grew more book appropriate. And that's when he decided he wanted to be published in children's books, despite the negative comments. "Everyone I met who had done kids' books said there was no money in it, it was a lot of work and you'd be turning down good, high-paying illustration work to meet your children's-book deadline." Tankard ignored the advice and in 2003 began his journey to becoming an "authorstrator" (a term coined by a Grade 3 student during one of Tankard's school presentations, and a term he readily adopted). He mailed 35 small portfolios to children's publishers, including the big six in NYC, and was determined to make his way down the list "until someone agreed to hire me to illustrate a kids' book."

One of the first to bite was Tracy Mack, author and executive editor at Scholastic Press in NYC. "I loved his work! It felt so fresh and fun, and unlike anything I'd seen before. He had a charming, one-of-kind art style." Mack was so impressed she told Tankard he could bypass all submission procedures on the condition that he write and illustrate his own book; if not, they'd find something for him to illustrate. Tankard met the challenge head on. He took Peter Carver's famous children's book writing class (offered through George Brown College) at Mabel's Fables bookstore and wrote a dozen manuscripts. A week before he headed down to meet Mack in February 2005, Hermione asked his dad to draw some "grumpy" things, including a grumpy bird. "I liked the grumpy bird. I laughed the first time I drew him for Hermione. He looked so grumpy, so ridiculous and so cute. I thought, Oh, I've got to do something with it."

"With all these manuscripts I'm going to write one more, and it's such a stupid idea about a bird that's too grumpy to fly, so he's going to go for a walk." Tankard wrote "this really dumb story in about 20 minutes with a brush in my sketchbook and drew one of each animal and Photoshopped a little book dummy, copying and pasting the same character on every page."

Tankard met Mack, and after politely looking over all his manuscripts, she asked if he had anything else. "I [hadn't shown] her the grumpy bird, because I knew I'd spent so little time on it, and we learned in writing class that you only have one shot to get it right. So while I'm saying I don't have anything else, my hand went into my bag and brought out the grumpy bird, then called Bird Takes a Walk."

Mack was beyond charmed. "His text made me laugh out loud, and I could see the kernel of genius right from the start," she says. "Jeremy has this amazing ability to make an over-the-top character like Bird outrageous and believable all at once, and I could see immediately this very pure line of thought: A bird wakes up grumpy. And what makes him feel better? Exercise and companionship. How true that is for all of us — children and adults alike!" Tankard left the meeting, and a week later Mack contacted him, wanting to publish the manuscript. After a month of fine-tuning, a book dummy was put together. Then, says Tankard, "she made me an offer, and the rest is history."

That history includes, of course, Grumpy Bird, as well as Me Hungry! and Boo Hoo Bird (all authorstrated by Tankard) as well as several books he illustrated: It's a Tiger! by David LaRochelle, Piggy Bunny by Rachel Vail and Here Comes Dinosaur! by Aaron Reynolds. Dennis Lee's new poetry collection, Melvis and Elvis, for which Tankard also did the illustrations, will be out in February 2015. Clover the Uncredible, which he's currently working on, will be his first book as authorstrator since Boo Hoo Bird. It takes him back to his love of comic books, will be his first foray into the chapter book/ graphic novel genre and will be 100-percent digital.

Just how does Tankard do his illustrations? He used to start by creating an ink drawing in a novel that his wife won as a door prize. "My dad bought me my first art pens when I was 13. He said real artists use pens when they sketch, so I learned to draw with a pen when I was more willing to live with mistakes, and I got really good at living with the mistakes." Why work in a novel? It helped him overcome the fear of a blank page. "There's nothing worse than staring at a blank piece of paper and thinking you're going to wreck it. Also, working in the pages of a book helped him acknowledge it was really still a collage," he says. After drawing in black ink, Tankard then scans the art and his photographs into Adobe Photoshop and creates a new document the size the final illustration
will be. He then places all the scanned pieces (such as animals, flowers and trees in *Grumpy Bird*) where he thinks they belong, building a colour-swatch document that will contain all the colours needed for the particular characters on every page. Finally, he extracts all the characters and exports them to Corel Painter (a paint-mimicking program), and using the colour swatch he built, he “cleans up” the characters, colouring them separately with digital oils using a Wacom Cintiq (an interactive pen display that acts as a digital stylus). “It’s simulates a real drawing experience,” explains Tankard.

Lately, Tankard says, he’s been doing more painting on the computer and using actual photographs less and less. And he says he’s getting better at drawing character and rendering body language and facial expressions. “I feel the art is evolving away from the complex and fancy, to the more simple, and I can rely increasingly on my drawing skills.

When he works has also changed. Tankard used to be a night owl, but parenthood has changed that. What hasn’t changed is his preference for working on paper versus on a computer. Tankard still does all of his drawings in a book, but it’s now a sketchbook with a Pentel Pocket Brush Pen (like a Chinese calligraphy pen, only smaller with refillable cartridges). Why? “I’m a neat freak and hate washing brushes.” He’s also interested in line quality, “and a brush makes a very interesting line; it can be thin, rough-edged or smooth.” Tankard’s work also used to focus on photo collage, with bits of torn paper that were scanned in to give texture to the art, but he’s using that process less and less. The smallest spread of *Grumpy Bird*, for example, has more than 100 layers in it.

James McCann, author, writing instructor and a bookseller at Vancouver’s Kidsbooks, says he can always pick out a Tankard book. “The drawings appeal to an age that enjoys fine lines and active emotions, connecting the reader with the book through the lively characters.” And, says McCann, “Tankard’s writing and illustration each tells a part of the story and complements the other one. He understands character arcs, suspense and humour.”

Leslie McGrath, senior department head, Osborne Collection of Early Children’s Books, Toronto Public Library, where Tankard gave the Sylvia Pantazzi lecture in the fall of 2013, adds, “his marriage of style and content is perfect. The use of bold outlines, rich colours and overlaid patterns makes these among the most dramatic books on the shelf.”

Melissa Bourdon-King, general manager of Mabel’s Fables bookstore in Toronto, comments, “Jeremy’s books have made a fantastic contribution to the world of children’s literature and to the imaginations of children exposed to his work. His books are an important part of our catalogue, and I am happy to know that my staff and I are able to put his books into the hands of people who may never have discovered him otherwise.”

Whose work has inspired Tankard over the years? He cites renowned comic book artist Jack Kirby, Japanese illustrator Chihiro Iwasaki, American children’s author and illustrator Chris Raschka and English comic book artist and graphic designer Dave McKean as the major ones. Hergé of Tintin fame and Arnold Lobel (Frog and Toad series) are his biggest influences. “Lobel influenced me the most as a writer and continues to inspire a lot of my writing. I aspire to write stories of that quality.”

And just what are Tankard’s other aspirations, if he weren’t the award-winning, bestselling authorstrator that he is? “I would love to have been a musician, but I don’t have it in me. I played classical violin for many years, but I quit in my third year of art college, realizing I couldn’t be a visual artist and a violinist.” But, he says, “maybe I could make a living painting pictures, which is just as stupid a dream, but, as it turns out, sometimes when you follow your dreams they come true.”

Jennifer D. Foster is a Toronto-based freelance writer and editor.

### Titles illustrated by or written and illustrated by Jeremy Tankard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Grumpy Bird</em></td>
<td>Scholastic Press</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Me Hungry!</em></td>
<td>Candlewick Press</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<td><em>Boo Hoo Bird</em></td>
<td>Scholastic Press</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>It’s a Tiger!</em></td>
<td>written by David LaRochelle</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td><em>Piggy Bunny</em></td>
<td>written by Rachel Vail</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Here Comes Destructosaurus!</em></td>
<td>written by Aaron Reynolds</td>
<td>2014</td>
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Let your imagination take flight

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In our schools, in every part of the country, there are thousands of teachers responsible for educating students who are struggling with challenges, illnesses and situations that often surpass anything in the teachers’ own lived experience. Regardless of whether the students have an abusive parent, have immigrated from a war-torn country, are living in fear of a bully or are dealing with learning disabilities or mental health issues, we as teachers are responsible for their learning and also for their well-being at school. So, because most of us are not experts in the fields of child psychology or mental health, we go home and “Google,” read and research, and then toss and turn as we struggle to understand their behaviour. For me, the academic journals, textbooks and self-help books don’t get to the heart of the matter and tell me what I really want to know: what it is like to be in their shoes and what is going on in their heads.

What I have discovered is that children’s literature, both fiction and non-fiction, can provide a window into the mind, heart and soul of my most challenging students. Children’s literature has expanded my thinking, sparked insight, stirred my emotions and, most importantly, has fostered empathy deep in my soul — making me more sensitive and responsive to students with challenges. I would like to highlight some Canadian children’s books that have impacted my thinking and my relationships with the special children in my classes.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

In Anna Kerz’s book *Better Than Weird*, we meet nine-year-old Aaron who has ADHD. The book starts off with pages of nagging by Aaron’s grandmother because Aaron needs to be reminded of everything he has to do, every day: to brush his teeth, shower, eat and even to wear underwear. I recognize this behaviour in my ADHD students who, despite the same routine every morning, still have to be reminded on the 200th day of school to take off their coat and put their lunch kit in the bin. What this insightful book provides is the internal dialogue that pinballs around in Aaron’s head while he gets ready for school. It goes something like this: *I am going to watch the water spin down the toilet when I flush; look how I can make my hair stand up; the shower water feels like rain (then he sings a rain song); oh I forgot my underwear, maybe no one will notice; no, they will call me weird.* Then he carries on a conversation, out loud, with a friend who he imagines is in the room. With all of this internal noise, how could Aaron possibly remember that he was there to brush his teeth? I wonder if my students even hear what I am saying, amidst all the self-talk?

Over the course of many incidents, Kerz makes it painfully clear how difficult it is for Aaron to focus. When his motor kicks into overdrive, he makes weird sounds, he laughs inappropriately and when he is really afraid or upset, he hides under his desk rocking and chanting.

I recently attended a talk by Dr. Stuart Shanker, Canada’s leading expert on self-regulation in children. He said something that struck a chord: when humans are afraid or upset, their biological flight or fight response kicks in, and one of the physiological effects is that they find it hard to hear the human voice and it is difficult for them to speak. When he is under the desk, does Aaron even hear someone talking to him? Sometimes, when being reprimanded for a wrongdoing, a child has looked at me with those “deer in the headlights” eyes and been seemingly struck deaf and mute. Maybe I have misinterpreted their response. Perhaps they were not being defiant or disrespectful; maybe it was their adrenaline at work.

The behaviour of children like Aaron can really annoy and irritate other people, especially other children. As a result, they have trouble making and keeping friends; it also makes them a target for bullies. So, as in many of the stories about kids who are in some way different, Aaron’s life just keeps on getting more complicated. That is why it is so important that there is someone in a kid’s life who understands and goes to bat for him or her. In this story it is Mr. Collins, Aaron’s teacher, who takes his side, not only with the other kids but also with other teachers who don’t have the same degree of understanding about Aaron’s condition.

Sometimes the kids teach us. Here is my story of one of the “Aarons” in my classroom: *There is a screech in the room; I*...
of fear that spins round and round. Even as Brick starts to see what is happening to himself, as the violence escalates, he seems helpless to stop it. Everybody needs a hero, and the guy who drives the garbage truck becomes Brick’s hero. He does an amazing thing. He teaches Brick karate not only for self-defense but also to learn self-control, gain physical strength and muster his courage. I was reminded again of how it just takes one observant, thoughtful and caring adult who sees through the bravado to the underlying truth and has the courage to step in and help. This story also reinforced for me the importance of understanding the relationship between students and their parents before I contact home when there are problems, in case the repercussions at home are not in the best interest of the student.

Bullying, from the victims’ and the bullies’ perspectives, is also explored in MacLean’s three linked books, The Nine Lives of Travis Keating, The Present Tense of Prinny Murphy and The Hidden Agenda of Sigrid Sugden. Travis has just moved to Newfoundland with his dad and is the new kid in a very small town. It doesn’t take long before the school bully picks him out to be humiliated and embarrassed. He eventually befriends Prinny and other outcasts who band together to save some stray cats and in doing so find their strength and voices. In the third book, our hearts go out to Sigrid, one of the girls who bullies Prinny as she struggles to get out of a gang and clear up her reputation. There are sympathetic characters on every side when you are allowed inside the head of each of the main players.

A shocking and sadly familiar story evolves in Susin Nielsen’s book, The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen. Henry is seeing a therapist who suggests that he write a journal. Through Henry’s accounts, we become acquainted with his mother’s breakdown, his parents’ breakup, his family’s loss and the subsequent relocation of Henry and his dad. As Henry struggles to find his way, we are privy to his candid thoughts, his crippling guilt and often his humorous observations. What this story makes so achingly clear is the life-altering trauma that every family member suffers after a tragic event, regardless of whether they are related to the perpetrator or the victim. (This is a very timely topic, considering the recent, seemingly random killing by a police officer’s son of five young people at a house party in Calgary. Following an emotional press conference by the killer’s parents, an article by the National Post columnist Christie Blatchford asked, “Where is our empathy for the parents and families of the killers in these tragic cir-

izes that if it doesn’t take them he spins out of control physically, doing cartwheels, running and jumping. In his own words, “There is nothing worse than being tired but having a body that kept on going.” Billy also knows that without his meds, the voice inside his head will not stop.

Both of these stories made me aware of how these kids (and maybe all kids) believe you when you say you will do something. They expect you to follow through. They can’t comprehend the many reasons why something might not happen even if it seems very logical to the adults who have disappointed them. Abandonment is a theme running through many stories of children with intellectual, mental and physical struggles because the stress on parents is phenomenal. Aaron is waiting for his dad to come back after he left eight years ago because he could not take the stress of his son’s situation. Billy’s father left home but promised to come to his talent contest, and even though his mother tried to prepare him for disappointment, he did not lose faith. So “note to self”: be very careful when making promises because they will take you at your word, and what these kids don’t need is more disappointment.

Bullying

A number of years ago I attended a presentation where the speaker said that he had never met a bully who had not been bullied first. This proved to be the case in the back story of a number of books in which bullying is the theme. Home Truths by Jill MacLean is the heart-rending story of a bully who gives to others what he got from his father at home. Brick’s bullying runs the gamut from stealing lunch money from little kids to throwing stones at dogs. It is a heartbreaking cycle, born out
circumstances?"

As Henry’s parents struggle to come to terms with the actions of their eldest son, Jessie, who was the victim of horrific acts of cruelty, they must endure the hateful exploits of misplaced retaliation from members of their own community. I was left deeply saddened with many questions when I finished this book. Do adults really know what goes on in kids’ lives these days? When the community most affected by tragedy is a school, what can be done to shelter and protect the individuals involved from the actions of their fellow students? For Henry and his dad, moving, anonymity and starting again are the only courses of action.

In these and many other stories on bullying (see sidebar), what struck me was how teachers, parents and other adults, who should have been there to protect and defend, were so oblivious to what was happening and in some cases actually turned a blind eye. If what we see is only the tip of the iceberg, in terms of the amount of bullying that takes place and the degree of cruelty involved, why is that? Are we so seemingly powerless to stop it that the victims don’t feel safe enough to seek our help? Or is the potential for retaliation so terrifying that it isn’t worth taking the chance? Bullying is complicated and dangerous, even more so in cyberspace, and if current events are any indication, clearly we are not doing enough.

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

Having had little experience with someone who has obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), I found Teresa Toten’s *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* very informative. Our hero is Adam (almost 15) who attends group therapy for teenagers with OCD. It is there that he falls head over heels for Robyn, one of the other group members. This teenage love story forms the backdrop for the very complicated and multifaceted life that Adam is forced to lead. I say forced because it is the demands and pressures put on him by the adults in his life that make it impossible for Adam to recover from his counting, tapping, threshold clearing and other ritualistic behaviours. Once again I was captivated by the self-talk in Adam’s mind — the whirling thoughts that make his head so full he can’t think clearly. On top of all this, he feels responsible for protecting his mother from her own destructive behaviour, and he is the only one who can break through to his younger stepbrother, who is showing signs of a condition much like his own.

I imagine being Adam’s teacher, unaware of the family pressures, putting increasing demands on him related to school work, being impatient with his behaviour in class and thereby becoming one more adult who escalates his condition instead of helping him. It is no wonder, then, that, in many of the stories included in this article, it is not the adults who help the kids but their friends and peers who take on the bully, help their friend control his behaviour or make him feel better about himself. So the message here is know your kids and their parents; try to find out more about their situation; cut them some slack where you can and don’t be part of the problem. Make sure that the family is referred to other appropriate professionals in the system who can link them up with support services in their community.

**Learning and Intellectual Disabilities**

*Ink Me* by Richard Scrimger is a fascinating read as it is written in the first person by the main character, Bunny, who is 15 and has an intellectual disability. The grammatical errors and phonetic spelling add to the story’s authenticity. It is one of the “Seven series,” in which seven linked books have each been written by a well-known Canadian author. The overarching theme is about a grandfather whose will leaves a task for each of his seven grandsons. Bunny’s task takes him into an unfamiliar situation for which he is ill prepared.

Seeing this world through Bunny’s eyes gives a first-hand understanding of just how he gets himself into so much trouble. His childish perspective and incredible vulnerability stem not only from his limited understanding of how the world works but also because he is so desperate for a friend. He is very trusting and sees the good in people, all the while being blissfully unaware of the danger. The book emphasizes the incredible power of belonging and demonstrates how easy it is to get caught up in gangs while trying to fill an emotional void. It becomes clear that special needs students like Bunny need protection, supervision and a circle of friends who have the empathy and kindness to protect rather than take advantage of them. They need an adult who is connected to their lives enough to help interpret what is happening, to point out the consequences of their actions and to teach them how to navigate the world on the other side of the door.

**Asperger’s Syndrome**

Beverley Brenna has written an endearing trilogy of books about a young woman named Taylor who has Asperger’s Syndrome. *White Bicycle* is the third book in the trilogy. We experience from Taylor’s point of view her struggle to control the symptoms of her condition so that she can get a job and become an independent adult living on her own. The author, a former special education consultant, has carefully researched this topic in order to give a realistic perspective of the internal dialogue, symptoms and experiences of a person with Asperger’s. Through Taylor, I became aware of how important order, routines and familiar surroundings are to help her keep calm and in control. So, for these students, keeping firmly established routines is important, and also helping them manage transitions and change by preparing them in advance will reduce their stress.
Taylor’s funny, insightful and explicit internal dialogue made me realize how hard people with Asperger’s have to work to engage in social situations. Over the years, Taylor has been learning how to carry on a simple conversation. She has developed strategies like “social stories” that she memorizes so that she knows what to say. She does not understand clichés and takes the spoken word very literally so it is important to be very clear and direct when communicating with someone with Asperger’s.

Students with Asperger’s can also be very sensitive to textures, smells, sounds and colours. In Taylor’s situation, the colour yellow can trigger a complete meltdown. Breaking the alarm clock that she loves or being let down by someone she trusts can bring on an episode of anger that in her words, “puts her IQ in the single digits” and makes her see white. It is an impressive effort that Taylor expends to gain control over her symptoms. Her intelligence affords her the ability to see patterns, recognize triggers, predict outcomes and avoid trouble. The ways that Asperger’s Syndrome manifests itself in individuals and their capacity to cope are unique, so it is important to know the student really well to understand their triggers and the coping mechanisms that work for them.

The stories cited in this article are only a few of the Canadian children’s books that deal with the plight of young people who have special needs or are coping with challenging life situations. They are wonderful stories that have the power to enlighten and move us beyond empathy to a more sensitive approach and a deeper understanding of their behaviour and how we can help. So the next time you are perplexed and want to form a better understanding of one of your students, turn off your computer and head down the hall to the library instead.

Sandy Bollenbach is a primary teacher for the TDSB. She did her internship with the CCBC during her teacher education, which fuelled her love of children’s literature.

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More Books That Inspire Empathy

**SPECIAL NEEDS / LEARNING DISABILITIES**

- **Lily and the Mixed-Up Letters**
  written by Deborah Hodge
  illustrated by France Brassard
  (Tundra Books)

- **Nix Minus One**
  written by Jill MacLean
  (Pajama Press)

- **The First Stone**
  written by Don Aker
  (HarperCollins Canada)

**ASPERGER’S / AUTISM**

- **I’m Here**
  written and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds
  (Atheneum Books for Young Readers)

**EATING DISORDERS**

- **Tyranny**
  written and illustrated by Lesley Fairfield
  (Tundra Books)

**REFUGEE CHILDREN / WAR TRAUMA**

- **Last Airlift**
  written by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch
  (Pajama Press)

- **Kids of Kabul**
  written by Deborah Ellis
  (Groundwood Books)

- **Children of War**
  written by Deborah Ellis
  (Groundwood Books)

**HOMELESS, FOSTER CARE**

- **A Tinfoil Sky**
  written by Cyndi Sand-Eveland
  (Tundra Books)

- **Jason’s Why**
  written by Beth Goobie
  (Red Deer Press)

- **The Ballad of Knuckles McGraw**
  written by Lois Peterson
  (Orca Book Publishers)

**SHORT STORIES — COLLECTIONS**

- **Something To Hang On To**
  written by Beverley Brenna
  (Thistledown Press)
“BOOKMARK!” HIGHLIGHTS BOOKS FOR A VARIETY OF GRADE LEVELS AROUND A PARTICULAR THEME.

What can be better than discovering and enjoying a wonderful series during the long days of summer? Whether it’s fact or fiction, there is something for everyone — as you can see from this list, assembled by CCBC Library Coordinator Meghan Howe.

Series for the Lazy Days of Summer

PICTURE BOOKS FOR KINDERGARTEN & UP

**Chicken, Pig, Cow**
written and illustrated by Ruth Ohi
(Annick Press)

The series follows the adventures of Chicken, Pig, Cow — and later Horse — who live together in a Popsicle® stick barn made by Girl. Six titles in the series.

**Kitten**
written and illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes
(Kids Can Press)

A lovable feline explores the farmyard, encountering different animals. Each title in the four-book series is set in a different season.

**Piggy and Bunny**
written and illustrated by Geneviève Côté
(Kids Can Press)

*Me and You, Without You* and *Starring Me and You* — endearing tales that celebrate friendship, and encourage individuality and self-acceptance. Fans of Côté will also want to read her Mr. King series.

**Scaredy Squirrel**
written and illustrated by Mélanie Watt
(Kids Can Press)

When Scaredy leaves the safety of his nut tree, look out! Eight titles in the series. Fans of Watt will also want to check out her Chester books.

**Stanley**
written by Linda Bailey
illustrated by Bill Slavin
(Kids Can Press)

Stanley is a good dog, but sometimes temptation proves too strong to resist. Five titles in the series.

**Stella and Sam**
written and illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay
(Groundwood Books)

This nine-title series follows the endearing relationship between Stella and her little brother, Sam, as they discover the world around them.

Wanda
written by Barbara Azore
illustrated by Georgia Graham
(Tundra Books)

Exuberant illustrations delight readers in this three-book series. Titles include *Wanda and the Wild Hair, Wanda and the Frogs* and *Wanda’s Freckles*.

GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR GRADES 2 TO 12

**7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga**
written by David Alexander Robinson
illustrated by Scott H. Henderson
( портage & Main Press)

Only by learning about his family’s past — as warriors, survivors of a smallpox epidemic and casualties of a residential school — will Edwin be able to face the present and embrace the future. Four titles in the series. Readers will also want to check out Robinson’s new series — Tales from Big Spirit.

**Bigfoot Boy**
written by J. Torres
illustrated by Faith Erin Hicks
(Kids Can Press)

After discovering a magic totem in the woods near Grammy’s house, 10-year-old Rufus suddenly has the power to transform into Bigfoot Boy. Two books in the series.

**A Binky Adventure**
written and illustrated by Ashley Spires
(Kids Can Press)

Binky (an ordinary house cat) thinks he’s a gallant space cat out to save his space station from alien domination. Five titles in the series.
Do You Know?
written by Alain M. Bergeron, Michel Quintin and Sampar
illustrated by Sampar
translated by Solange Messier
(Fitzhenny & Whiteside)
Hilarious illustrations are paired with fascinating facts about toads, spiders, crocodiles, crows, chameleons and more! Twelve titles in the series.

Graphic Guide Adventure
written by Liam O’Donnell
illustrated by Mike Deas
(Orca Book Publishers)
Combining pulse-pounding adventure and survival skills in a colourful graphic novel format, the Graphic Guide Adventure books are sure to be a hit with young readers. Six titles in the series.

Kill Shakespeare
written by Conor McCreery and Anthony Del Col
illustrated by Andy Belanger
(IDW Publishing)
An action adventure series that puts all of the Bard’s greatest heroes against his most menacing villains, on a quest to either save or kill a mysterious wizard by the name of William Shakespeare. Three volumes in the series.

Max Finder Mystery
authors include Liam O’Donnell and Craig Battle
illustrators include Michael Cho and Ramón Pérez
(Owlkids Books)
Follow the clues, analyze the data and solve the crimes with amateur detective Max Finder and his best friend, Alison Santos. Seven titles in the series.

Three Thieves
written and illustrated by Scott Chantler
(Kids Can Press)
Circus performers Dessa, Topper and Fisk are on the lam after trying to rob the royal treasury. But the thieves are also on a quest of their own: they are searching for Dessa’s twin brother. Four titles in the series.

The Boy Sherlock Holmes
written by Shane Peacock
(Tundra Books)
This six-book series follows the untold adventures of the world’s greatest detective, set in the frightening streets of Victorian London in the 1860s.

Disaster Strikes!
written by Penny Draper
(Coteau Books)
This series features fictional stories based on real-life natural disasters in Canada. Events include the Frank Slide, the Red River flood, Newfoundland’s 1929 tsunami and the Quebec ice storm.

Discover Canada Province by Province
authors include Lovenia Gorman, Susan Tooke, Dawn Welykochy, Marilyn Lohnes, Larry Verstraete, Hugh MacDonald, Linda Aksomitis, Janet Skirving, G. Gregory Roberts and Michael Kusugak.
illustrators include Melanie Rose, Susan Tooke, Lorna Bennett, Brian Lund, Brenda Jones, Odell Archibald, Bob Doucet and Iris Churcher.
(Sleeping Bear Press)
Written in a two-tier alphabet format, using poems and expository text, this lushly illustrated series introduces readers to the rich and diverse landscapes, wildlife, cultures and folklore of each of the Canadian provinces and Territories.
Easy-to-Read Spooky Tales  
written by Veronika Martenova Charles  
illustrated by David Parkins  
(Tundra Books)  
This 10-book series, which features the same three characters telling multicultural stories based on a cautionary theme, offers a little shiver of anticipation along with the thrill of accomplishment. Young readers will also want to check out Charles’s Easy-to-Read Wonder Tales.

Ecosystems  
written and illustrated by Karen Patkau  
(Tundra Books)  
Each title celebrates the world’s diversity by presenting a different ecosystem: its land and water, its animals and plants. Three titles currently in the series with three more being released in fall 2014.

Great Idea  
written by Monica Kulling  
illustrators include Bill Slavin, David Parkins and Richard Rudnicki  
(Tundra Books)  
This fun, informative non-fiction series introduces young readers to inventors. Five titles in the series.

The Hunchback Assignments  
written by Arthur Slade  
(HarperCollins Publishers)  
Steampunk adventures through an alternative Victorian London. The character of Modo was inspired by Victor Hugo’s Quasimodo in The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Four titles in the series.

Jasper John Dooley  
written by Caroline Adderson  
illustrated by Ben Clanton  
(Kids Can Press)  
Chapter books featuring a charismatic and funny central character—an only child with active, loving parents. Three titles in the series, with more to come! Young readers will also like Adderson’s Bruno books in the Orca Echoes series.

Jobs in History  
authors include Kristin Butcher, Laurie Coulter, Priscilla Galloway and Sarah Tsang  
illustrated by Martha Newbigging  
(Annick Press)  
A fun, informative series that introduces young readers to various occupations that were held by people during different historical periods. Six books in the series.

Justine McKeen books in the Orca Echoes series  
written by Sigmund Brouwer  
illustrated by Dave Whamond  
(Orca Book Publishers)  
Meet Justine McKeen, the Queen of Green. She talks a little too much, bosses a little too much and tells the truth, just not all at once. Five books, with the sixth one being released in fall 2014.

Kasper Snit  
written by Cary Fagan  
(Tundra Books)  
A girl who can fly, her younger brother who thinks he is a superhero, and a truly dastardly villain provide a funny adventure with a dash of wordplay. Three titles in the series.

The Land Is Our Storybook  
written by Mindy Willet et al.  
photography by Tessa Macintosh  
(Fifth House Publishers)  
This is the first-ever series of books for children about the diverse lands and cultures of Canada’s Northwest Territories. Eight books currently in the series, with two more to be released.

Learn to Speak  
authors include John Crossingham, Ann-Marie Williams, Laura deCarufel and Michael Glassbourg  
illustrated by Jeff Kulak  
(Owlkids Books)  
A fun, informative series that gives young readers the inside scoop on the following industries: music, dance, fashion and film. Four titles in the series.

The Lobster Chronicles  
written by Jessica Scott Kerrin  
illustrated by Shelagh Armstrong  
(Kids Can Press)  
A trilogy about how life changes for three boys in a small coastal town when a giant lobster is caught. Each book is told from a different boy’s perspective. Younger readers will enjoy Kerrin’s eight-title Martin Bridge series.

Lost Gargoyle  
written by Philippa Dowding  
(Dundurn)  
What do you do when a 400-year-old gargoyle moves into your backyard? Three titles in the series.
The Lunch Bunch
written by Susan Glickman
illustrated by Mélanie Allard
(Second Story Press)
Follow the adventures of the bright, funny and science-loving Bernadette and her friends in the Lunch Bunch—Annie, Keisha, and Megan—as they make their way through Grade 3. Three titles in the series.

Macdonald Hall
written by Gordon Korman
(Scholastic Canada)
Look out Macdonald Hall: here come Bruno and Boots—roommates, troublemakers and practical jokers extraordinaire. Boarding school will never be the same! Seven titles in the series. Readers will also want to check out Korman’s Swindle Mystery series.

Math in Nature
written by Lizann Flatt
illustrated by Ashley Barron
(Owlkids Books)
The wonders of nature, shown in vibrant cut-paper collage, help children grasp the concepts of number sense and numeration; patterning, data management and probability; symmetry and spatial sense and much more. Four titles in the series.

The Morgan books in the First Novel series
written by Ted Staunton
illustrated by Bill Slavin
(Formac Publishing)
Morgan’s life is complicated by his parents; his friend/enemy Aldeen Hummel, the Queen of Mean, and others as he tries to negotiate his way through Grade 3. Humour and familiar predicaments. Sixteen titles in the series.

The Neil Flambé Capers
written and illustrated by Kevin Sylvester
(Simon & Schuster Canada)
Mystery, adventure and lots of fun, as arrogant 14-year-old chef with an extraordinary nose solves crimes around the world. Four books in the series, with more to come.

The Nine Lives of Travis Keating and sequels
written by Jill MacLean
(Fitzhenry & Whiteside)
Jill MacLean’s debut novel introduced new kid Travis Keating and a group of local outcasts and bullies. Other titles include The Present Tense of Prinny Murphy and The Hidden Agenda of Sigrid Sugden.

Nose from Jupiter
written by Richard Scrimger
(Tundra Books)
Life changes for Alan when a lively, opinionated alien from Jupiter makes his home in Alan’s nose. From school bullies to camping trips to the streets of New York, funny stuff happens. Four titles in the series.

Owen Skye
written by Alan Cumyn
(Groundwood Books)
As the middle of three brothers, Owen’s life is full of small mysteries and adventures. Then, on his way home from hockey practice one evening, he falls hopelessly in love. Three titles in the series.

Real Mermaids
written by Hélène Boudreau
(Sourcebooks Jabberwocky)
An entertaining four-book series about a plus-sized, aquaphobic but resourceful teenager with mermaid tendencies as she navigates both underwater rescue missions and pressing homework assignments.

Screech Owls
written by Roy MacGregor
(McClelland & Stewart/Tundra Books)
A mystery series for young readers that features a pee wee hockey team from Tamarack, Ontario. Twenty-five titles in the series, with more to come!

Submarine Outlaw
written by Philip Roy
(Ronsdale Press)
Young Alfred teams up with a junkyard genius to build a submarine that he sails around the world, with a rescued dog and a seagull. Six titles in the series.

Tales of Prehistoric Life
written by Daniel Loxton
illustrated by Daniel Loxton and Jim W.W. Smith
(Kids Can Press)
Movie-quality images and a suspenseful story blend together to illustrate what dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures might have looked like and how they behaved in their natural environment. Three titles in the series.
Whatever After
written by Sarah Mlynowski
(Scholastic Press)

Once upon a time, Abby and Jonas’s lives were normal. Then the mirror in their basement slurped them up and magically transported them inside Snow White’s fairy tale. Five titles in this fractured fairy tales series.

Words That Start with B and sequels
written by Vikki VanSickle
(Scholastic Canada)

Brilliant. Best ever. That’s how Grade 7 was supposed to be, but so far things aren’t turning out as well as Clarissa Louise Delaney had planned. Other titles include Love Is a Four-Letter Word and Days That End in Y.

SENIOR FICTION FOR GRADES 7 AND UP

The Agency
written by Y.S. Lee
(Candlewick Press)

An engaging series about a Victorian orphan girl who joins a detective agency. Three titles currently in the series, with the fourth being released in February 2015.

Alice MacLeod
written by Susan Juby
(HarperCollins Canada)

In this funny coming-of-age series, caustic realism blends with keen insight into the daily obstacles facing teens. Three titles in the series.

The Apprenticeship of Victor Frankenstein
written by Kenneth Oppel
(HarperCollins Publishers)

Victor Frankenstein, his twin brother, Konrad, their cousin Elizabeth and their friend Henry have explored all the hidden passageways and secret rooms of the palatial Frankenstein chateau. Except one—the Dark Library. Two titles in the series.

Darkest Powers Trilogy
written by Kelley Armstrong
(Doubleday Canada)

Chloe Saunders finds herself in the middle of some really strange situations, now that she can see dead people. Fans of Armstrong will also want to read her Darkness Rising Trilogy.

Dust Lands Trilogy
Written by Moira Young
(Doubleday Canada)

When Saba’s brother Lugh is captured by four cloaked horsemen, she embarks on a quest to get him back.

The Fallen World Trilogy
written by Megan Crewe
(Disney-Hyperion)

A deadly virus. An isolated island. One girl’s desperate journey to save humankind.

Gypsy King Trilogy
written by Maureen Fergus
(Razorbill)

A runaway slave with a shadowy past, 16-year-old Persephone has spent four years toiling beneath the leering gaze of her despised owner and dreaming of a life where she is free to shape her own destiny.

Podium Sports Academy
written by Lorna Schultz Nicholson
(James Lorimer)

Each book features one of a recurring multicultural cast of six boy and girl characters as they train for a future in pro sports at an elite high school. Six titles in the series. Younger readers may want to check out Lorimer’s Sport’s Stories series.

Seven (the series)
written by Eric Walters, Shane Peacock, Richard Scrimger, Ted Staunton, John Wilson, Sigmund Brouwer and Norah McClintock
(Orca Book Publishers)

A beloved grandfather and avid adventurer leaves behind a very unusual will that outlines the seven tasks he has set for his seven grandsons. Readers will be thrilled to know that the Seven sequels are being released in fall 2014.

Wildlings Trilogy
written by Charles de Lint
(Razorbill)

Something has been happening to young people in Santa Feliz. Week after week, there’s news of another teen changing shape, transforming from human to wild animal and back again. Two titles currently in the series with the third being released in fall 2014.

Wondrous Strange
written by Lesley Livingston
(HarperCollins Canada)

An urban Faerie trilogy set in New York City. Teens will also want to read Livingston’s Once Every Never trilogy and Starling series.
A Book Week Album

Above: Matt James enjoys the Northwest Territories.
Right: Karen Krossing at MacNeill Secondary School in Richmond, BC.

Top: Helaine Becker hams it up for the camera
Middle: Michael Martchenko & Linda Granfield share a moment
Right: Sandra O’Brien, coordinator of Book Week, relaxes with author/illustrator Patricia Storms

Marsha Skrypuch with Kim Kiolet from Shawinigan High School in Shawinigan, Quebec.

In Calgary, Jill Bryant got together with Nicole Robertson of Muskwa Productions, one of the ten women featured in her latest book, Phenomenal Female Entrepreneurs.

Photographs: Camilia Kahrizi
The Classroom Bookshelf
Intriguing Answers for Inquisitive Kids!
BY SANDRA O’BRIEN

Do you know a kid who’s always asking questions? You know, that inquisitive kid whose thirst for knowledge is unquenchable. In this month’s selection of books we look at some interesting topics: robots inspired by real animals, all you need to know about food and cooking, and how finding clean water can be a daily challenge for some children in the world. Perhaps one of these books will appeal to that child in your classroom or on your couch whose curious mind has got you searching for answers.

If you’re curious about robotics, this is the book for you. Author Helaine Becker introduces readers to 12 different robo-animals that are being developed by today’s most daring roboticists. By combining mechanical and electrical engineering with computer science, they have designed and built animal-inspired robots to carry out some very specific tasks. These robots can do things humans can’t: explore human organs, aid in search-and-rescue missions, reach difficult-to-get-to areas, and so much more. These creatures can slither, stalk, swoop, squeeze and swarm just like their living counterparts. They are simply fascinating! Illustrations by Australian artist Alex Ries give readers a glimpse of what these robotic creatures will look like and how they compare to the creatures they evolved from. The descriptions explain what the robots can do, how they will help humans and what makes them special.

Robotics is not a topic I very am well versed in, but after reading this book I was truly impressed by the creativity and ingenuity of the scientists who invented these creatures. The book is very nicely laid out with a good balance of information and illustration so that young kids will not be overwhelmed, but older kids will still be drawn in. If you’re a teacher in a school with a robotics club, then this is definitely a book for your library or classroom. It would also be an excellent resource to complement the science curriculum in the areas of zoology, biology and technology.

As stated on the back of this book, this is not a cookbook but a book about food; it includes only a few basic recipes that author Sarah Elton says, “you may find yourself using again and again because they are simple and good to eat.” The book does, however, include a wealth of knowledge about the science behind cooking, taste and flavour, the tools and supplies you need to stock a kitchen, how to read a recipe, what groceries to buy and how to make healthy, creative meals. It’s a wonderful guide for anyone who enjoys spending time in the kitchen or for anyone who just enjoys eating! Jeff Kulak’s illustrations add whimsy and colour to the book, which makes it even more enjoyable.

I loved this book and learned a whole lot while reading it. My favourite section is the “What Goes with What” guide that gives you a list of foods and spices that go particularly well together. It’s a brilliant guide for someone who is just starting out in the kitchen. I love to cook and bake, and if you know a kid who is interested in food or enjoys spending time in the kitchen, then this is an excellent resource for that child. I would also recommend it to teachers in the family studies department for their food and nutrition classes.

Zoobots: Wild Robots Inspired by Real Animals
written by Helaine Becker
illustrated by Alex Ries
Kids Can Press, 2014
978-1-55453-971-0 (hc) $18.95
for Grades 4 to 8
Non-fiction | Robots | Engineering | Animals

Starting from Scratch: What You Should Know about Food and Cooking
written by Sarah Elton
illustrated by Jeff Kulak
Owlkids Books, 2014
978-1-926973-96-8 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 4 to 8
Non-fiction | Food Science | Cooking
Many Canadians don’t realize what a precious resource water is; being surrounded by fresh water lakes and having running water in our homes, we rarely have to worry about water shortages or clean drinking water. But this is not the case in many other parts of the world, and the responsibility for gathering water often falls to children. Accessing water can take up the better part of a child’s day, thus leaving little time for school. In *Every Last Drop*, author Michelle Mulder talks about the history of water use in various parts of the world, discusses the water cycle, explains how wells and clean drinking water improve the quality of people’s lives and introduces readers to some innovative water-conservation ideas. Filled with photographs and diagrams that complement and help explain the text, this book is a must-have for young environmentalists.

As an advocate of clean water and water conservation, Michelle Mulder uses a personal anecdote at the beginning of the book to help us to understand why clean drinking water is of such importance to her and to communities around the world. And as she did in *Pedal It* and *Brilliant*, Mulder has written another clear and concise guide to teach students about the importance of water conservation that encourages them to get involved in the preservation of our water supplies. I would highly recommend this book as a resource for environmental studies and as an excellent addition to both school and classroom libraries.

Sandra O’Brien is the CCBC Interim Program Coordinator and a former teacher with an M.Ed. in Children’s Literature.
Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival.

— C. S. Lewis

There are few things more important in childhood than friendship. In E.B. White’s Charlotte’s Web, Wilbur asks Charlotte why she would help him when he has done nothing for her. She responds, “you have been my friend... that in itself is a tremendous thing.” Friendship helps children define themselves outside of their family. Friends share secrets and common experiences; they laugh at inside jokes and support each other when things get hard. Of course there is a darker side, too; the betrayal or loss of a friend or finding oneself friendless can cause some of childhood’s saddest moments. Friendship is a universal constant and an ever-present theme of childhood.

How wonderful, then, for children to be able to read stories that reflect and reveal all manner of friendships. Friendships that mirror their own lived experiences, friendships as complicated, messy affairs, and friends as sources of both happiness and sorrow. This diverse quartet of books for middle school readers offers kids opportunities to see themselves and their own friendships reflected in ordinary characters coping with many aspects of friendship—from the loss of a best friend to an unlikely friendship born from shared circumstances.

In Behind the Scenes, Meg Tilly’s sequel to her novel A Taste of Heaven, best friends Alyssa and Madison can’t wait for the end of Grade 5. They have planned a whole summer of just hanging out before starting junior high, but everything changes when Alyssa announces she has to move back to Los Angeles. They are devastated at the thought of losing each other; Madison cannot imagine her life without her BFF, and there is a lovely moment when her father shares his own poignant childhood experience of a friend’s moving away. “I do… remember feeling gutted, like life would never be the same.” He tells his daughter that she is right to feel sad and lonely. Tilly assures her readers that their friendships have value and that the loss of a friend is no small thing.

Fortunately, their separation is delayed when Madison is allowed to go to Los Angeles and spend two weeks with Alyssa. There, Madison must come to terms with her fear of dogs and of sleeping away from home. Alyssa sees her absentee father for the first time and must deal with his rejection. They discover that in sharing their fears and confronting them together they become stronger, both as friends and as individuals. Their friendship is authentic, with its ups and downs, misunderstandings and shared moments of pure joy. When Madison returns home, she is happy but is still “left with a hole where Alyssa had been.” Friendship is bittersweet indeed.

In Sarah Ellis’s Outside In, friendship is both surprising and complicated. Lynn has two best friends—nicknamed the Diode—
and the three girls share everything. When Lynn discovers that her free-spirited mother has ended her stable relationship, lost another job and, worst of all, forgotten to send in Lynn’s passport application, preventing her from attending a school choir trip, she leans on her friends. “Lynn’s need for them flowed right out of her fingertips.”

Now her friends have gone to Choirfest, and Lynn is facing the prospect of being alone. Angry with her mother for their precarious living situation and feeling lost without her two best friends, Lynn is unexpectedly befriended by Blossom, a mysterious girl who saves her life with the Heimlich manoeuvre. Blossom is an “Underlander”—her family lives off the grid, existing on all the stuff “citizens” throw away. Blossom has lived in relative isolation with her family and is also in need of a friend. She chooses to share herself and her family with Lynn who is captivated by them. The friendship deepens quickly and at the heart of it is Blossom’s secret—her family’s very existence—and Lynn feels honoured to be entrusted with that secret.

The clandestine nature of their friendship becomes more difficult to sustain, however, when Lynn’s school friends return and Lynn tries to keep her two worlds separate. Her friendship with Blossom creates a rift between the Diode and herself that is difficult to bridge. When she is caught in a lie and captured on a video out late at night with the Underlanders instead of at a sleepover, it sets off a chain of events that ultimately leads to the discovery of the Underlanders. Deceiving her oldest friends and unwittingly betraying Blossom and her family causes Lynn anguish. She must find a way to repair the damage she has done to the Underlanders as well as make amends to her school friends.

In this deceptively simple story, Ellis beautifully captures both the joy and the sorrow of friendship. Her characters ring true on all levels, and her vivid descriptions of both Lynn’s precarious living situation and Blossom’s Underland world are absolutely enthralling.

The world of 1912 may seem completely different but is equally captivating in Sylvia McNicoll’s book Revenge on the Fly. It is late spring when young Will Alton and his father arrive in Hamilton. Poor immigrants, Will and his father have journeyed from Ireland where his mother and baby sister were taken by disease. Will is heartsick and struggles against the discrimination he and his father face as poor Irish newcomers. Not long after his arrival, his school is visited by Dr. Roberts, Hamilton’s public health officer. The lowly fly, he tells the students, is responsible for spreading germs that cause disease and so much death. The local paper is sponsoring a fly-catching contest with a top prize of $50. Kill flies and stop the spread of disease, he exhorts Will’s class. It is a message that Will latches onto with deadly seriousness, and he is galvanized into action. Perhaps it was the dreaded fly that was responsible for the deaths of his mother and sister. He is determined to win the competition and gently pushes him to consider some of his actions. Ginny is poor and belligerent, a prickly friend who decides to help Will win the contest. Ignoring her rough exterior, Will likes her spunk and her devotion to her younger siblings. “And Ginny... seemed as tough as a horseshoe, her loyalty made her gentle and kind, just in a different way than Rebecca.” The friendship of both girls helps Will to understand that winning is not everything, and that true friends are far better than friends bought and paid for.

Vividly narrating the story in Will’s voice, McNicoll brings this intriguing bit of Canadian history to life, deftly weaving rich historical detail into the tale, immersing young readers in the sights, sounds and smells of early 20th century Hamilton. Will’s struggles with friendship and against bullies are timeless, and young readers will be cheering for him all the way.

Friendships are often a product of happenstance, which is the case for Sullivan Mintz (aka Dexter, the Accidental Juggler) and his three compatriots in The Show to End All Shows, Cary Fagan’s sequel to The Boy in the Box. In this quirky story, Sullivan and his friends remain trapped with Master and Mistress Melville, travelling in a horse-drawn caravan and performing shows in fields and abandoned lots along a mysterious route known only to Master and Mistress Melville.

When Clarence outgrows the chess-playing automaton, “Napoleon,” Master Melville tricks Sullivan into giving him the name of Lilly, another chess prodigy they previously encountered on their journeys. Despite Sullivan’s efforts to prevent her abduction, Lilly is kidnapped and imprisoned with the other kids. Lilly proves to be quite the sparkplug and ignites a new effort to discover what the Melvilles are really after and how to finally escape their captivity. Meanwhile, Sullivan’s sister Jinny and her elderly friend, Manny, continue their search for him, joined at last by the families of other missing performer children. The excitement ramps up as clues to the mystery of Master Melville’s Medicine Show start to add up and the stories begin to converge.

Despite being thrown together, Sullivan, Clarence, Frederick, Esmeralda and now Lilly have developed fast friendships that see them through the difficult and sometimes frightening times. Sullivan depends on his friends and trusts them with his plans for a new, more complex juggling act. And that is one of the most fascinating twists in Fagan’s tale. Despite being held against their wills, the five kids really like performing and want to improve their acts to take themselves to the next level. And despite their desire to go home to their real families, they are strongly attached to the “family” they have formed within the travelling caravan and—in the end—they perform a final show for their families, “the show to end all shows,” before going their separate ways.

Fagan’s fantastical tale is a rollicking, at times comedic and action-packed ride, with delightful and wacky characters. He does a wonderful job of building the action, alternating between the travelling caravan, the search by Jinny and Manny, and Sullivan’s hometown (where he unknowingly has friends pulling for him) before bringing the story to a satisfying close.

Tracey Schindler is a teacher, currently working at the Ajax Public Library.
We Recommend
NEW AND NOTED BOOKS FOR TODDLERS TO TEENS

What Can You Do With Only One Shoe? Reuse, Recycle, Reinvent
written by Simon Shapiro and Sheryl Shapiro
illustrated by Francis Blake
Annick Press, 2014
978-1-55451-642-1 (pb) $9.95
978-1-55451-643-8 (hc) $22.95
for Preschool to Grade 3

From a shopping cart converted to a chair to an ambulance incorporated into a slide and climbing apparatus, this collection of 13 poems explores the art of re-purposing different objects. An old bike can be taken apart and transformed into a dog that is perfect for living “in our condo/that won’t allow pets.” Sometimes, re-purposing is exactly what an object has in mind, such as the boat that is tired of being “bombed by a gull” or “smashed by the tail of a whale” and no longer wants to endure “the smell of the sea.”

These poems vary in length, style and rhyming pattern; the beat of each poem is strong and natural. The artwork combines British artist Francis Blake’s whimsical ink and watercolour illustrations with photos from various sources of the reinvented objects. The writing and art are laced with humour and engaging to readers, as in the poem about the planter that was once a toilet yet is now appropriately blooming “with flowers that start with a P.”

Readers will also be encouraged to consider even more ways of re-purposing both this assortment of objects and others that they encounter in their own experience. However, aside from using a shoe as a hat or as a tool for flattening pancakes, even they must agree that it is useless “to nail that lonely old/shoe to a tree”... mustn’t they? Hmmm... maybe that wren in the picture has an idea.

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.

Starring Me and You (Piggy and Bunny, Book 3)
written and illustrated by Geneviève Côté
Kids Can Press, 2014
978-1-894786-39-3 (hc) $16.95
for Preschool to Grade 1

They’re back! The two animal friends, the pig and the rabbit from Me and You (2009) and Without You (2011), have returned for another adventure, namely the production of a play with the starring roles going to none other than themselves. Challenges abound due to their contrasting dispositions and interests. Their back-and-forth banter regarding their insecurities and the subject of the play escalates until the production is nearly derailed. The show must go on and, following apologies and a few concessions, all’s well that ends well.

Once again, Geneviève Côté succeeds brilliantly in conveying the universal sentiments of the two protagonists in a manner with which any child (or adult) can identify. The same emotion in both characters can bring forth very different reactions. “When I’m shy, I always hide. / Well, when I’m shy, I fake a smile. / ...No, when I’m scared, I freeze like this. / Oh, when I’m scared, I SCREAM like this.” With only dialogue for text, a clever detail is the use of two kinds of typeface to differentiate who is saying what.

No one will be able to resist the lovable pig and rabbit as portrayed in Côté’s distinctive and spirited mixed-media illustrations. A raised eyebrow here, a pursed mouth there... all contribute to well-rounded characters who exhibit wide emotional ranges in the most charming manner. Their sidekicks, the frog and butterfly, have returned as well, playing supporting roles.

Geneviève Côté should take a well-earned bow for creating such a captivating and engaging series. The pig and rabbit are definitely shining stars who will live on in the hearts and minds of readers for years to come.

Senta Ross is a former teacher-librarian and elementary teacher in Kitchener, Ontario.
Half for You and Half for Me: Best-Loved Nursery Rhymes and the Stories Behind Them

collected by Katherine Govier
illustrated by Sarah Clement
Whitcap Books, 2014
978-1-77050-212-3 (hc) $22.95
for Preschool and up

Nursery Rhymes

Gathered by noted author Katherine Govier, Half for You and Half for Me is a collection of traditional and modern rhymes, a collection rich in her memory of hearing them on her mother’s lap and rich in her belief that the rhymes are to share. Govier acknowledges her debt to Peter and Iona Opie’s The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes and to several other collections, including her copy of The Jessie Willcox Smith Mother Goose, which has survived three generations.

What makes this such an interesting, if flawed, collection are Govier’s comments. In some cases, Govier gives a thorough explanation of the origin of the rhyme and its possible meaning(s). At other times, hers is a personal response to the rhyme. There are instances when she comments not at all. It is this inconsistency as well as the eclectic nature of the collection that is so intriguing and turns the flaw into an asset. With each page turn there is a new surprise.

The illustrations contribute to the pleasure of this collection. Generously interspersed among the rhymes are illustrator Sarah Clement’s full-page, bold, full-coloured illustrations and smaller, mostly sepia-toned traditional illustrations selected from the Osborne Collection of Early Children’s Books (Toronto Public Library). These collide with one another in a modern-day mash up.

It is these contrasts and surprises and the unusual combination of traditional and modern rhymes placed side-by-side that truly give the collection verve and bring a smile to the reader’s lips. It is Govier’s willingness to share what she likes and what she knows that makes Half for You and Half for Me a delightfully quirky, inspired and entertaining collection that would grace any classroom or family’s book shelf.

Theo Heras is a children’s librarian and author.

The Most Magnificent Thing

written and illustrated by Ashley Spires
Kids Can Press, 2014
978-1-55453-704-4 (hc) $16.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

A girl and her dog — aka her “assistant” — (both of whom remain nameless) are trying to build, as the title of this book suggests, the most magnificent thing. After a series of failed attempts to see her invention through, the young perfectionist becomes quite angry. In the end, it’s being able to calm down, see what has worked and being willing to try again that brings her success in the form of a sidecar for her scooter, sized to accommodate her canine helper.

British Columbia-based Ashley Spires, the creator of the Binky the Space Cat books, has produced a book that is quirky, funny and engaging for child and adult readers. It’s nice to see a girl-centred story about building and innovation. The pacing and images work well and are consistent.

Preschool-aged readers may have questions about some of the vocabulary (e.g., tinker, pummel, ratio), which works if you’re not reading in a hurry, and likely means the book will age well with a younger reader. The girl winds up taking a walk to ease her anger, which I love in sentiment but not in its literal interpretation of a kid going for a walk alone — another opportunity for discussion as the book unfolds. This book is likely to go over well in classrooms, as it offers various lessons about perspective, perseverance and managing anger.

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

From There to Here

written by Laurel Croza
illustrated by Matt James
Groundwood Books, 2014
978-1-55498-365-0 (hc) $18.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

A young girl has moved with her family from her much-loved, remote Saskatchewan community to a house in the big city of Toronto. “It’s different here, not the same as there,” she observes as she compares both environments. Her current reality consists of pavement, tall buildings, street lamps and loneliness, and not the gravel roads, forests, aurora borealis and friends of her former home. However, a knock at her door makes all the difference when Anne, a neighbour of similar age, invites our narrator to accompany her on a bike ride. Revelling in her new friendship, the girl returns to her opening statement, but with a subtle variation. “It was different there. Not the same as here.”

In this sequel to I Know Here, author Laurel Croza conveys the insights and emotions of a child who has been displaced from all that is familiar and dear. The narrator often uses phrases, rather than sentences, which contributes to the spontaneity and candidness of her reflections: “There. A brush fire upriver, the smell of home. Here. The carpet, it smells new.” One notes her quiet strength and resilience when she meets a new friend and, at last, Toronto becomes a more inviting place.

Matt James’s India ink-on-board illustrations are energetic and vibrant, juxtaposing urban and rural scenes as observed from a child’s perspective. The book’s endpapers, depicting a map of the route from Saskatchewan to Toronto, are enhanced with the flora and fauna a child would find fascinating.

From the prairies to Toronto — From There to Here — Croza and James take readers on a journey not only through geography but also inside the heart and soul of a memorable character who will resonate with anyone who has experienced loss and finds hope for a brighter future.

Senta Ross
**Nine Words Max**  
written by Dan Bar-el  
illustrated by David Huyck  
Tundra Books 2014  
978-1-77049-562-3 (hc) $19.99  
for Kindergarten to Grade 4

*Picture Book | Humour | Fairy Tale*

Maximillian is a prince with an abundance of information to share. His three older brothers, Kurt, Wilt and Tripp, find his exuberance for words and wealth of knowledge tiring and unnecessary. These three boys say as little as possible and amusingly share their words between each other. This makes reading aloud very fun. They keep asking Max to stop talking, but Max can’t help himself as there’s just so much to tell them.

When their parents go away, the three older brothers visit the wizard and beg him to cast a spell that will stop their youngest brother’s constant chattering. The wizard’s spell limits Max to nine words at a time, but Max doesn’t seem to notice that his sentences have no endings.

When Queen Spark from the land of Flint announces a visit, the brothers are worried. If they say or do anything to offend the queen, it could end the peace between their countries. The one person who knows how to make the visit go perfectly cannot finish any of his sentences. Kurt, Wilt and Tripp beg the wizard to reverse the spell; they are happy to hear the sound of Max’s ramblings and have him save the day.

Award-winning author Dan Bar-el creates a charmingly sweet story that makes readers laugh. David Huyck’s illustrations are amusing and engaging. The pictures and the words work well together to make a wonderful story come to life.

Children and adults of all ages will enjoy looking at the pictures and be captured by the tale. Great for a classroom read or a bedtime story, it would suit children in Grades 2 to 3, or up if reading independently.

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

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**When Emily Carr Met Woo**  
written by Monica Kulling  
illustrated by Dean Griffiths  
Pajama Press, 2014  
978-1-927485-40-8 (hc) $19.95  
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Emily Carr | Art History | Pets*

The team that created *Lumpito and the Painter from Spain* returns with yet another charming story featuring a renowned artist and her pet. This time the spotlight shines on Canadian painter Emily Carr and her monkey Woo.

Today, an Emily Carr masterpiece is much sought after by galleries and private collectors. However, when these iconic paintings of native culture and the wild beauty of the West Coast were being painted in the early 1900s, they were either misunderstood or ignored. The citizens in Victoria, BC, where Carr lived, were surprised when this eccentric individual adopted Woo, a small, forlorn monkey, to join her burgeoning menagerie. Although the mischievous Woo often created bedlam when she accompanied Emily, the monkey provided the artist with much joy and became her favourite pet. All went well, until one of Woo’s pranks nearly ended the monkey’s life.

Inspired by Emily Carr’s *The Heart of the Peacock*, published in 1953, Monica Kulling has written a captivating tale about the devotion between an unappreciated artist and her animals, Woo in particular. Using simple prose, Kulling portrays the joyous chaos in the team that created *Lumpito and the Painter from Spain* returns with yet another charming story featuring a renowned artist and her pet. This time the spotlight shines on Canadian painter Emily Carr and her monkey Woo.

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Dean Griffiths’ delightful watercolour and pencil illustrations depict the ambience of 1920s Victoria and its environs. The images of Carr and her social circle (both human and animal) are infused with a vitality that makes them much more than caricatures. This publication contains historical photos, reproductions of Emily Carr’s art and an abbreviated biography, where one learns that Woo and Carr lived together for 15 years, until the artist became too ill to care for her pets. Woo lived out the rest of her days at Vancouver’s Stanley Park Zoo.

Senta Ross
Wow Wow is a clever young fox who is named after the sound he makes when he is excited. He has already mastered a variety of survival skills: how to hunt and hide, how to steal eggs from chickens, how to find fresh water, and much more. To his chagrin, his repertoire lacks one critical aptitude: how to get rid of fleas. Being proud of his red, white and black fur, Wow Wow is devastated when faced with this very itchy dilemma. Scratching, rubbing, rolling and dunking do not ease the situation. It is only through the ingenuity and guidance of a wily crow named Haw Haw that the fox’s problem is resolved, allowing him to return to his flea-free existence once more.

In consummate storytelling style, George Murray has transformed a Celtic legend into a rollicking and intriguing fable, one that will entertain readers and listeners alike while exercising their problem-solving skills. Through Murray’s love of language, one can sense the growing desperation of the fox: “Wow Wow went to the river and dunked his head under the water, but the fleas just ran up to his tail, jumping all the way — PING! PING! When Wow Wow turned around and dunked his tail in the water, the fleas turned around, too. They ran up to his head — PING! PING!” One can’t help but empathise with the flea-bitten Wow Wow who is foiled at every turn until he meets his unlikely ally.

What remarkable illustrations! Michael Pittman’s paintings, a fascinating melange of acrylic paint, charcoal, graphite and India ink on a hard wooden surface, are a joy to examine. Patterns and textures have been created by carving, sanding or scraping back through the surface. Pittman’s immense artistic talent is a welcome addition to the world of children’s literature, and one hopes that this publication will not be his last.

Sentra Ross

Skydiver: Saving the Fastest Bird in the World
written and illustrated by Celia Godkin
Pajama Press, 2014
978-1-927485-61-3 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 1 to 3

Picture Book | Peregrine Falcons | Birds | Pesticides

Because of the effects of the now-outlawed pesticide, DDT, few peregrine falcon chicks were hatching in the wild in the 1970s, which resulted in the breed’s disappearance from much of North America. This story describes the challenges a mature male and female peregrine falcon face in raising their young in the wild, and the determined efforts of scientists and volunteers who appropriate their first clutch of eggs to a sanctuary where the chicks will have a better chance of survival.

Author-illustrator Celia Godkin, renowned for her award-winning picture books concerning environmental issues, once again inspires young readers with an informative account about the natural world—in this case the successful conservation of a species. The operation of a bird sanctuary is outlined, from the arrival of the peregrine eggs to the release of the chicks. Also included are additional facts and websites about these magnificent birds.

Godkin’s beautiful and dramatic oil-on-canvas illustrations, be they of the sweeping vistas in the wild or of the skyscraper-filled cities where peregrines thrive, depict these fascinating creatures from a variety of perspectives. Readers will gain a deeper understanding of the fragile balance and immense survival challenges facing this breed from egg to chick to adult, and how humans, ultimately, have the power to right the wrongs of the past in order to help these raptors, the fastest birds in the world, to flourish.

Sentra Ross

Jasper John Dooley: NOT in Love
(Jasper John Dooley, Book 3)
written by Caroline Adderson
illustrated by Ben Clanton
Kids Can Press, 2014
978-1-55453-803-4 (hc) $16.95
for Grades 1 to 4

Fiction | Humour | First Crushes | Friendship

Jasper John Dooley, the boy who brought us laughs with his sensitive yet eccentric sevenish-year-old perspective, returns in this exceptional series for young readers. Isabel, a freckly classmate with no front teeth, has come between Jasper and his best friend, Ori, with the siren call of her trampoline. Jumping on it gives Jasper such a joyous “flip-floppy” feeling that he agrees to play dates and overcomes, if temporarily, his disgust at Isabel’s aggressive affections. Despite his growing desperation to escape the impending schoolyard marriage, he must concede that his preconceptions about females and their “boring” interests do not fit Isabel nor, indeed, his own mother. The story resolves with not a little drama, irony, comedy… and strawberry jam.

Author Adderson maintains the sweetly funny tone of Jasper’s world while including realistic content that adults would understand as more serious, like Isabel’s absent mother or the inequity in Jasper’s parents’ domestic duties. Though this instalment does not include the same poetically beautiful insights Jasper has in earlier books, the reader still enjoys his unique observations and creative vocabulary.

Illustrator Clanton’s charming, wonderfully expressive pencil drawings of Jasper and his friends match the tone and complete the high quality of this hardcover series. His deceptively simple, child-like drawings appeal to adults and children. (Watch for the tribute to Charlie Brown.)

This series would make a delightful read-aloud for the classroom and should be found on all school and public library bookshelves.

Aliki Tryphonopoulos is a Literacy Coordinator in Parkland, Saskatchewan, and a former children’s librarian.
**Bunny – Detectives Extraordinaire**

Flushed with the success of their first literary work, Mr. and Mrs. Bunny best to satisfy all these interests, how can anything go wrong?! The outlandish cast, with numerous supporting characters, hurdle through equally preposterous scenarios, each increasingly hilarious and far-fetched. Kindly Prince Charles; the famous author, Oldwhatshername (aka J.K.Rowling); aristocratic hedgehogs and the Bunnys’ translator, who all make their entrances, as indeed, does Mr. Bunny playing King Lear at Stratford! Ingenious situations, droll humour, dash dialogue, illogical logic and zany characters abound. Toss in plenty of British lingo and some ongoing wapishipness between Mr. and Mrs. B., and the end result is a laugh-out-loud, fast-paced read, ably complemented by simple, slyly detailed illustrations.

Like Flo (Madeline’s dad), the reader feels the “synchronicity” of it all as, despite all its devious twists and turns, everything seems meant to be! Another offbeat Bunny book that makes a superb read-aloud, with eccentricity aplenty for everyone. Can’t wait for the translation of the next in the series!

Aileen Wortley is a retired librarian living in Toronto.

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**Shifting Sands: Life in the Times of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad**

In Pharaoh’s Egypt, 14-year-old Dina, a Hebrew slave, must decide whether to follow Moses into freedom and hardship or remain as a favoured slave in the Queen’s comfortable court. Thirteen hundred years later, Mattan, a young shepherd, hopeless and impoverished under the cruelty of Roman oppression, leaves his family in Nazareth and finds meaning in the stories of Jesus’s miracles and philosophies. Six hundred years forward in Arabia, Fallah and his brother witness the death of their father as part of a continuing tribal blood feud. Breaking out of the cycle, they are inspired by stories of Muhammad’s defiance against corruption and cruelty and become his followers.

Dina, Mattan and Fallah each live in different eras and places but all live under oppressive regimes wherein charismatic leaders offer an alternative way of life. Each story is presented skillfully and told with directness and immediacy. The reader is enticed by the dilemmas the protagonists face, is horrified by the routine cruelty of the times but always identifies with the humanity of each individual. We lose ourselves in these deftly portrayed worlds and in the process learn a lot while wishing to know more.

This book is not a history of the three prophets or of their religions, but Lowinger has captured the spirit of how it might have felt to live in such dramatic historical times. Authentically and thoroughly researched, complete with maps and notes, it is a well-balanced addition to libraries, providing a catalyst for discussion on the three religions as well as the culture and history of the area.

Aileen Wortley
Red Wolf
written by Jennifer Dance
Dundurn, 2014
978-1-4597-0810-5 (pb) $12.99
for Grades 4 and up

Fiction | First Nations | Anishnaabe | Residential Schools

Jennifer Dance’s Red Wolf pays homage to the Anishnaabe nation — collectively known as the Ojibwa — and the devastating effects of the Indian Act and the residential school system in Canada during the late 19th century. When Red Wolf’s father HeWhoWhistles is tricked by an Indian agent into signing away his parental rights, the five-year-old boy is forced to leave his home and community to live at the Bruce County Indian Residential School, a fictional amalgamation of such schools across Canada.

Red Wolf’s experience of racism and intolerance at the hands of the Christian-based school is paralleled with that of an orphaned timber wolf named Crooked Ear, who must also follow the rules of a scrupulous pack leader. When both boy and wolf try to return home, each discovers that he no longer belongs.

Dance imbues the novel with lyrical prose and lilting rhythms, and the essence of what we’ve come to recognize in First Nation storytelling. There is a lovely poem, “Requiem,” at the beginning of the novel, which sets the tone, weaving its way throughout. Yet, because of the novel’s structure, we don’t always know whose point of view we’re in, making this a possibly confusing read for some.

Still, Dance’s passion for this topic is contagious. She includes a letter at the beginning, explaining why this story is so important to her and what she hopes readers will get out of it. The thorough Author’s Note at the end, giving a full history of the Anishnaabe nation and the wolves, will also make this an excellent novel for classroom discussion.

Melanie Fishbane is a freelance writer in Toronto and a graduate of the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA program.

The Hidden Agenda of Sigrid Sugden
written by Jill MacLean
Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2013
978-1-55455-279-5 (pb) $11.95
for Grades 5 to 8

Fiction | Bullying | Newfoundland

As American YA author Sarah Dessen has written, “Life is an awful, ugly place to not have a best friend.” Twelve-year-old Sigrid is lost without her best friend, Hanna. Adrift in loneliness and anger, she becomes a Shrike, one of three girls who bully and terrorize vulnerable classmates. When the Shrikes endanger another girl’s life, Sigrid knows they have gone too far and calls for help. In the aftermath, Sigrid chooses to reform herself and attempts to make amends to those she has harmed. But repairing the hurt and pain she caused proves much harder than she imagined. She also finds herself the target of a relentless campaign of terror from the Shrikes she betrayed.

MacLean’s engaging characters are flawed, damaged and extraordinarily genuine. Sigrid has a mean side that she must come to terms with, and Hud, who becomes her greatest ally, is the town’s most brutal tormenter. MacLean offers young readers insight into bullying and bullies as well as the difficult road to redemption. Sigrid’s naive attempts to make amends and find friends are poignant, as are her efforts to hold together her fragile family. MacLean, however, never lets the story sink into hopelessness and, while Sigrid learns that making things right is never easy, she also discovers that the struggle can have unexpected rewards.

This is award-winning author Jill MacLean’s third book set in the Newfoundland coastal towns of Ratchet and Fiddler’s Cove. Readers were first introduced to the setting and cast of characters in The Nine Lives of Travis Keating and The Present Tense of Prinny Murphy. Each book is narrated by a different character, and together they weave an intricate, multilayered story that is simultaneously heart wrenching and uplifting. While reading all three books is highly recommended, each story will stand on its own.

A must-have book for every middle school classroom and bookshelf!

Tracey Schindler

Camp Outlook
written by Brenda Baker
Second Story Press, 2014
978-1-927583-35-7 244 (pb) $11.95
for Grades 5 to 8

Fiction | Anger | Loss | Summer Camp | Down Syndrome

When her mom becomes pregnant — after years of trying, a period of depression and a miscarriage — Shannon finally dares to believe that her dreams of becoming a big sister and having a “normal” family are going to be realized. But her new baby brother is born with Down Syndrome, and as Shannon’s parents struggle to come to terms with this latest development, Shannon is sent to Camp Outlook, a church camp where she, too, wrestles with many conflicting emotions. Angry at God, her parents, her best friend and all the people who make life hard for people like Gabriel, Shannon is surprised when she actually enjoys camp. She meets a wide range of people, makes new friends and she also experiences Six Bizarre Events. Together, these people and events help her to accept her family’s new version of normal and to learn more about the person that she herself wants to be in the world.

This beautiful book succeeds in so many ways that it is hard to know where to begin. It perfectly captures all of the joys and frustrations and quirksness of summer camp, as well as the seemingly inevitable experience of the reluctant camper who grudgingly comes to realize how much she has loved it after all. It is also an easily accessible but nonetheless powerful exploration of family, friendship and disabilities. Shannon is a forthright and believable protagonist whose fears and concerns for both herself and her family are touchingly genuine and relatable. Her anger at God and the mystical experiences that she has at camp provide a thoughtful look at questions of faith and personal growth without overwhelming the story. The fact that neither of these is too neatly resolved adds to the story’s depth and heart. An absolute gem, this book is a heartwarming story that leaves readers with much to think about.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager of Wozzles, the Halifax bookstore.
When a creepy young zombie named Imre Lazar, in spite of a few special challenges, is integrated into a regular classroom at Dresden Public School in Ontario, no one is less sure about the school board’s decision than Bob, Imre’s classmate. But Bob’s fearless best friend, Evil-O (that’s Olive spelled backwards), is Imre’s greatest defender. Clashes and heroics ensue as the community’s tolerance for difference—and Bob’s tolerance for an undead rival—are pushed to the limit.

Richard Scrimger, known best for his zany humour, takes a slightly more toned down approach in his newest middle grade novel.

Taken in by the army after a radiation leak wipes out his entire community, Imre is put in school in an attempt to give him an ordinary childhood. Ordinary becomes impossible, however, when an amazing feat of strength draws the media’s attention and stirs up strong emotions in the town. Soon the CBC decides to do a reality-show-style documentary, protesters surround the school, and the students treat Imre like a freak or a curiosity.

Bob is refreshingly honest in his feelings about the whole situation. While he doesn’t exactly dislike Imre, he confesses that he is somewhat frightened by him in the beginning, but puts up with him for the sake of Evil-O. Eventually, he stops seeing Imre as a Zombie and does consider him a friend. By contrast, Evil-O is bold and fearless with a strong sense of justice that he tries to impose on her classmates and her community.

While the allegory on racism and desegregation might feel on her classmates and her community, Imre is put in school in an attempt to give him an ordinary childhood. Ordinary becomes impossible, however, when an amazing feat of strength draws the media’s attention and stirs up strong emotions in the town. Soon the CBC decides to do a reality-show-style documentary, protesters surround the school, and the students treat Imre like a freak or a curiosity.

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young son of Odysseus. There, countless suitors for the hand of Penelope, the widow of Odysseus, are occupying the palace. Alexi meets a mysterious old beggar—his former commander in disguise. When the beggar challenges all the suitors to shoot an arrow through the rings of 12 axe heads, as the old king used to do, Alexi plays a part in the general’s dramatic reclamation of his kingdom.

This is the third and last book in the Odyssey of a Slave series and it continues this dramatic and exciting introduction to Homer’s Odyssey. Sticking closely to the original tale (including its gory bits) and with meticulous attention to historical detail, Bowman has crafted a fast-paced and satisfying story of adventure, intrigue and quest.

The sudden ability to fly hardly seems weirder to Gwendolyn Golden than the dramatic growth spurt, menstruation and raging hormones that are playing havoc with her body. Her numbness, however, hides a reservoir of anger, loneliness and sadness that has plagued her since the mysterious disappearance of her father seven years earlier. Her new gift of flight could be a catalyst for her to communicate again with her mother, develop self-esteem and find meaning in her life, but it could also become another stigma for a 13 year old already bullied by peers for being different.

In telling the story in the first person, Dowding has set herself a challenge. Gwendolyn is a complex narrator who withholds information from the reader for the purpose of suspense and because she is not introspective. A “less-than-willing” reader who believes herself stupid, she is not a descriptive storyteller. Since adults keep secrets from her, and the reader rarely gets an unbiased view of how others perceive her, important information about Gwendolyn is sometimes received later than necessary.

Gwendolyn’s flight offers rich possibilities for metaphor but eludes easy interpretation. It is a “difference” that can lead to death or fulfillment. One option is withdrawing, denying her gift and, worse, suicide. The other, more preferable choice is embracing her ability, learning from mentors and ignoring the lies and snubs of peers. These are incredible challenges, but Gwennie chooses the better option and even improves her reading, another avenue of support and escape.

Dowding’s novel, which leaves room for a sequel, will appeal to tweens who enjoy realism touched with magic.

Rachel Seigel is Sales and Selection Strategist at EduCan Media.

The Trojan slave, Alexi, taken by Odysseus at the end of the Trojan War, has been travelling with the wily commander for years, earning the general’s respect for his intelligence and knowledge of healing. But their ship is completely destroyed by the vengeful sun god, Helios, and Alexi appears to be the only survivor.

The young Trojan makes his way through Greece looking for his lost sister—in the process encountering the nasty intrigues among the victors of the Trojan War and visiting the Oracle at Delphi—and finally finds himself in Ithaca along with Telemachus, the

Aliki Tryphonopoulos

Gillian O’Reilly
**Unspeakable**  
written by Caroline Pignat  
Razorbill, 2014  
978-0-14318-755-4 (pb) $15.99  
for Grades 7 and up  
Fiction | Loss | Marine Disasters | Empress of Ireland | Canadian History

As a stewardess on the *Empress of Ireland*, Ellie is drawn to the solitary fire stoker who stands by the ship’s rail late at night. After a magical evening spent together in Quebec City, Ellie believes that she’s finally found happiness. But everything changes that awful night when the *Empress* sinks. Ellie tries to tell herself that Jim survived, but it’s hard to believe when so many didn’t. When Wyatt Steele, a journalist at *The New York Times*, asks for her story, she refuses at first. But then he names a price Ellie can’t refuse — the chance to read Jim’s journal and find out for herself what happened to him that terrible night.

May 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the *RMS Empress of Ireland*, which is to date the largest Canadian maritime accident in peacetime. In her new young adult novel, Caroline Pignat masterfully weaves a tale of love, loss and survival into a vivid historical narrative.

Told from Ellie’s point of view, the novel is framed by the interviews she gives journalist Wyatt Steele, and wonderfully chronicles what life was like on the ship for both workers and passengers. Also included are the pages from Jim’s journal that Ellie is allowed to see, and through those entries, a romantic hero emerges.

The novel is rich in historical detail, and Pignat does a fantastic job of creating a compelling story without getting bogged down by the history. The characters are complex and multi-dimensional, and while there is a fair amount of drama and angst, it doesn’t ever feel exaggerated or excessive.

This is a highly engaging novel that wraps an important piece of Canada’s history in an exciting and accessible package that both teens and adults will enjoy.

Rachel Seigel

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**Jewel of the Thames**  
*(A Portia Adams Adventure, Book 1)*  
written by Angela Misri  
illustrated by Sydney Smith  
Fierce Ink Press, 2014  
978-1-92774-651-6 (eBook) $7.99  
978-1-92774-652-3 (Kindle) $7.99  
for Grades 7 to 11  
Fiction | Mystery | Sherlock Holmes

At the tender age of 19, Portia Adams finds herself alone in the world when her beloved mother dies. Almost immediately, she discovers several equally shocking things: her mother has left her in the care of a mysterious, wealthy stranger named Irene Jones; she has inherited a house in London; her hitherto unknown grandfather was none other than the renowned Dr. John Watson (of Sherlock Holmes fame). Her new guardian whisks her off to London where she takes up residence in her new home: 221b Baker Street. She starts studying law at the local college and strikes up an easy friendship with the young constable from Scotland Yard who lives downstairs. Needless to say, it is only a matter of time before she finds herself involved in a number of enigmatic goings-on. A string of jewellery thefts, an inexplicably dying man and his strangely protective daughter, and the perplexing disappearance of a little girl on a train... all of these provide opportunities for Portia to exercise her brilliant mind and put her inductive skills to the test. Ultimately, however, her most challenging case may just prove to be the mystery of her own heritage.

A noteworthy addition to the growing body of literature that pays homage to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s legendary Sherlock Holmes, this book is a beguiling mystery in its own right. Portia Adams is a thoroughly charming protagonist. Exceedingly smart and capable, her vulnerability and occasional moments of self-doubt make her relatable to readers of any age. The more elegant, formal writing style suits the setting and tone of the story while also subtly paying a nod to Conan Doyle’s much-loved tales. The mysteries that Portia unravels are entertaining and showcase her striking inductive abilities without feeling either too predictable or obscure. A promising new series, I look forward to seeing much more from Miss Portia Adams!

Lisa Doucet
Demon Gate
(The Ehrich Weisz Chronicles, Book 1)
written by Marty Chan
Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2013
978-1-55455-306-8 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 8 and up
Fiction | Steampunk | Alternative World |
Harry Houdini | Immigration | Prejudice

The first book of Marty Chan’s steampunk series follows the adventures of Ehrich Weisz, an impulsive, streetwise, rough-and-tumble teen, racked by guilt at the death of his younger brother, Dash. The bizarre circumstances surrounding Dash’s death, which include both brothers passing through a portal to an alternate dimension, compel Ehrich to remain as an illegal alien in a parallel version of his late-1880s New York City until he can solve the mystery.

Joining the Demon Watch, a military force that apprehends illegal immigrants or “demons” from other worlds, Ehrich spends two years hiding his own illegal status before he stumbles on a clue to his brother’s fate. His ensuing search uncovers hidden alliances, underground organizations, astounding technology and a heinous plan to change the course of US history. With a motley cast of demons and humans as allies or enemies, Ehrich (or Houdini, as his acquaintances call him) must call upon all his resources—including his burgeoning knowledge of magic tricks—to stay alive.

The discombobulating changes in time and place at the start of the novel quickly give way to an entertaining, intricate and creative tale, which, among other things, reimagines the origins of Harry Houdini. This series will appeal to teen and adult fans of steampunk or action novels with a noirish feel (there are questionable ethics, violence and some horror). The ending satisfies the most pressing questions while propelling the reader toward the second novel in the chronicles.

A Breath of Frost
(The Lovegrove Legacy, Book 1)
written by Alyxandra Harvey
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014
978-0-80273-443-3 (hc) $19.99
for Grades 8 and up
Fiction | Fantasy | Regency England

For 16-year-old Emma and her cousins, life in Regency London is a whirlwind of parties and suitors. When a binding spell is broken, the three girls discover their family lineage of witchcraft and are now able to claim their powers. Unfortunately, in doing so, they accidentally open the gates to the Underworld; now something is hunting and killing young debutantes. Emma knows that she is somehow connected to the murders, and now she and her cousins must find a way to seal the gates before another girl is killed or, worse, their powers are stripped away.

In the first book of her new young adult trilogy, Alyxandra Harvey departs from modern day vampires and turns her attention to witches and magic.

Emma, Penelope and Gretchen are unlike the other girls in their circle, and there is immediately a lot to like about them. Emma is strong, smart and tough. Gretchen prefers the company of books to society, and retreats to the library of whatever home she’s in to avoid the party. Penelope, whose parents allow her more leeway than the others, is as powerful and interesting as her cousins, and readers will enjoy the easy banter and the closeness between them.

Harvey also wastes no time in setting up the novel’s romance; teen readers will quickly fall in love with Cormac, the brooding and conflicted witch hunter to whom Emma is attracted. As with most romances, there are obstacles in the way of their being together, but the formula works here and the author does a great job of creating enough romantic tension to keep teens interested.

Full of mystery, romance and magical creatures, this is a satisfying new twist on supernatural fiction.

Rachel Seigel

Blue Gold
written by Elizabeth Stewart
Annick Press, 2014
978-1-55451-634-6 (pb) $12.95
978-1-55451-635-3 (hc) $21.95
for Grades 8 and up
Fiction | Global Consumerism | Gender | Human Rights

The award-winning author of The Lynching of Louie Sam, Elizabeth Stewart, forces readers to challenge their notions about global consumerism and the constructions of gender in Blue Gold. The lives of three teens from three continents are affected by the mining, production and consumption of coltan, a mineral used to make cellphones and laptops.

After her father is killed over coltan, Sylvie and her family live on the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Africa. Raped and mutilated when she was 10 years old, Sylvie dreams of coming to Canada and becoming a doctor. In Asia, Laiping goes to Shenzhen to work in a factory that makes cellphones. Dreaming of sending money to her impoverished family, she discovers the deplorable working conditions. Across the world in North America, Fiona feels so insecure about her relationship that, in a drunken moment, she uses her cellphone to send her boyfriend a photo of her breasts. When the photo is posted online, her peers ostracize her.

Stewart builds a rich social, cultural and political framework around each girl’s circumstances that ties back to her gender. Fiona’s choice leads to slut shaming, forcing her to re-evaluate how she dresses and behaves; Laiping wants to dress like the city girls but is also beaten when she stands up for herself; Sylvie, constantly reliving the rape and told by her mother that it was her fault that she was scared, is sold into marriage by her brother.

This complex and intricately woven novel shows the interconnectivity of these girls’ lives, perhaps inspiring readers to see that by living in North America, like Fiona, they have the power to effect change.

Melanie J. Fishbane
Rabbit Ears
written by Maggie de Vries
HarperCollins Canada, 2014
978-1-44341-662-7 (pb) $14.99
for Grades 8 and up
Fiction | Families | Addiction | Child Abuse

Kaya has a dark secret that makes her withdraw from her loving mother and her devoted, responsible sister, Beth, wander off at night and—worst of all—hate herself. Her craving for danger and self-sabotage worsen, until she runs all the way to the squalor and terror of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

Kaya is an enigma, even to herself. Her heartbroken family can’t seem to reach her. Kaya is repelled by their love and support, and drawn deeper into the trouble and poisons that will hurt her most. She even feels betrayed by Sarah—the sex worker who insists that Kaya keep away from prostitution and drugs, go home and stay there. She wishes that her family would stop insisting she’s worth saving, but she has no such “luck.” Beth undertakes a relentless hunt to bring her lost sister home.

Beth escapes her own pain through food and magic tricks. She also has resentments and questions. Why won’t Kaya behave herself and come home? Does she feel like an outsider because she’s multiracial, while her adoptive family is white? Is she feeling abandoned because the girls’ father died of cancer? Nothing about Kaya’s downfall makes sense, until Beth faces the dreadful intuition that her sister was attacked on a night when she wandered off. Then the suicide of a neighbour who has always been drawn to children makes Beth suspect something worse. Could this man have been the source of betrayal and violation, so that Kaya’s downward spiral took root not recently, but when she was a little girl? Beth is determined to find out.

This novel was no doubt very difficult for de Vries to write—as it is a fictionalized version of the story of her own sister, Sarah, who was killed by the notorious Robert Pickton. Rabbit Ears is a brilliant, complex, important novel that makes readers understand and confront the dangers of the sex trade, the violation of sexual abuse and the terrors of drug addiction. This is mesmerizing fiction, and although it is heartbreaking to witness Kaya’s pain and the horrors to which it leads, de Vries has composed a hopeful novel that takes readers through the dark but also back to the light again—to healing, hard-won trust and the reclaiming of life and self-worth.

Christina Minaki is a Toronto writer and reviewer.

Moon at Nine
written by Deborah Ellis
Pajama Press, 2014
978-1-927485-59-0 (pb) $16.95
978-1-927485-57-6 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 9 to 12
Fiction | LGBT | 1980s Iran

Growing up in Tehran in the 1980s, Farrin’s entire life has always been filled with secrets. As secret supporters of the Shah who was overthrown by the Revolutionary Guard in 1979, Farrin’s parents’ illegal activities in support of the Shah could land them all in serious trouble. Her mother has always warned her not to draw attention to herself. Consequently, Farrin has never had close friends at school where she endeavours to keep a low profile. But everything changes when she meets a new girl named Sadira. Sadira’s friendship brings colour and brightness to her days, and soon Farrin knows that her feelings for Sadira are stronger than friendship. But this is Iran, and being gay is considered a crime. Farrin and Sadira cling to a desperate hope that they can somehow be together. But when the truth about their relationship is discovered, they are confronted with the harsh and terrible penalty that they must face for loving one another.

True to form, Deborah Ellis has crafted a stark, riveting and uncompromising account of life in a country and era that is markedly different from our own. Even the day-to-day details of Farrin’s life—the cruel, ever-suspicious school monitor always looking for an excuse to report her to the principal; her father’s driver stealing food from Farrin’s house to feed the other Afghan workers—create a strong sense of the political and religious climate of this time and place. Although the evolution of Farrin and Sadira’s relationship is not shown or explored in any real depth, their plight is nonetheless dramatically depicted. The strength of this novel is in its ability to highlight the social injustices that are still sadly present in our world today. Its heartbreaking and unflinching honesty will both engage readers and create heightened awareness.

Lisa Doucet

Anywhere But Here
written by Tanya Lloyd Kyi
Simon Pulse, 2013
978-1-4424-8070-4 (hc) $19.99
978-1-4424-8069-8 (pb) $11.99
for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Grief | British Columbia

Cole feels trapped in the small town of Webster. He and his friends call it “the Web,” and a web it is, of the overlapping lives of its youth, parents and teachers. Cole’s mother has recently died of cancer. He has broken up with his long-term girlfriend; she was supposed to be perfect, but they wanted different futures, and he wasn’t feeling connected to her anymore. His best friend isn’t acting like a best friend. And there’s a new girl, but Cole doesn’t want a new girl—he wants to get out of town.

Anywhere But Here is well executed: the characters—who are finishing up high school—seem authentic. With minor exceptions,
most are well rounded and steer away from clichés. Cole is inconsistent, and some of his inconsistency is unexplained—which feels accurate for a 17 year old who at the same time just lost his mother and is trying to plan his entry into the adult world. He doesn’t always make the right decisions, and he doesn’t always make epically wrong ones either—something that readers can relate to.

Tanya Lloyd Kyi takes on big themes of relationships, family and friendship as well as place, home and ambition. She balances these well without being too heavy-handed. This book may particularly speak to a teen who has lost a parent, or who is grappling with her options after high school, but it is also a good read for any teen eager to move towards independence and new things. While the specifics of the town of Webster won’t be relatable to all, young people who have grown up in a rural area, small town or suburb and longed for city life will identify with Cole’s desire to flee. Ultimately, Cole finds peace with Webster, but it’s the rocky road that gets him there that readers will fall for.

Tara-Michelle Zmiuk

To This Day: For the Bullied and Beautiful
written by Shane Koyczan
illustrated by various international artists
Annick Press, 2014
978-1-55451-639-1 (hc) $19.95
for all ages

Poetry | Bullying | Hope

Shane Koyczan’s poem “To This Day” first burst onto the public scene in an animated video in 2013. It went viral—with over 13 million views on YouTube to date—and the spoken-word poet’s work inspired an international movement against bullying in the schools. It continued the work of his 2008 title, Stickboy (a BBKT selection), also relating to bullying.

Now “To This Day” has been adapted in the format of a richly illustrated and powerful book being released in September 2014. Thirty artists from Canada, the US, France, New Zealand, Peru and many more countries each contributed a double-page spread.

Starting with a very personal story of being called names at school, Koyczan’s poem also tells of different types of bullying experienced by other children. He goes on to describe how he survived his experiences and found inner beauty. The book includes a list of resources in several media.

This is a very affecting reflection on the cruelty experienced by many children. It is also an inspiring message that we can survive the uncaring acts that are perpetrated by others and support ourselves throughout our lives. It is a call to action for both children and adults.

“To This Day” richly deserves a book treatment such as this one. Both deeply personal and profoundly universal, this poem has affected millions of people who have watched the animated version of this poem spoken very movingly by Shane Koyczan himself. Read this book if you have been bullied, if you have bullied or if you have witnessed bullying. And isn’t that all of us?

Willow Moonbeam is a math professor and librarian.
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