A Shout Out for Canadian Poetry

Sarah Ellis: A Major Player in Kidslit

Bookmark! Poetry, Rhyme, Free Verse

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For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people around the world, Pride is both protest and celebration. It’s about embracing diversity. It’s about fighting for freedom and equality. It’s about history, and it’s about the future. It’s about all of us.

“A fantastic achievement.”
—CM MAGAZINE

“Timely...Using Pride as a way to talk about LGBTQ gives the information a new slant.”
—KIRKUS REVIEWS
When I was a teacher, I used to love teaching poetry to my students. You can have a lot of fun reading poetry, chanting poems, adding soundscapes and illustrations to them and having students create their own poems. The walls of my classroom would be plastered with poems written on flip-chart paper, and the shelves would be stocked with as many poetry books as I could find. Poetry can make kids laugh, it can make them think and it can help kids express themselves in a variety of ways. In this issue, we hear from Robert Heidbreder, one of Canada’s most renowned children’s poets, as he regales us with stories of his own childhood experiences with poetry, a speech he shares with us from the opening of the Reading Lights initiative in Vancouver. We also hear from Larry Swartz and David Booth about the experiences they have had with poetry, from compiling poetry anthologies to teaching and writing poetry for young children. And to complement these two articles, Meghan Howe, CCBC Library Coordinator, has compiled a list of poetry books, books written in rhyme and books written in verse in this issue’s “Bookmark!”

I would like to take a moment here to thank our former editor, Gillian O’Reilly, for her dedication and service to the CCBC for the past 20 years. Gillian began editing Canadian Children’s Book News in 1996, and helmed her last issue this spring. Over the years, Gillian has worked with many people in the children’s book industry, and a few of them have written tributes to Gillian in a special section in this issue. I hope you will enjoy reading the wonderful things people have had to say about Gillian. On a personal note, I would like to add that Gillian has been a wonderful friend and mentor and I am deeply humbled to be taking her place on this issue. I hope my efforts will prove worthy.

I am also very happy to announce the CCBC’s two new sponsors for Canadian Children’s Book News. Friesens has agreed to sponsor the printing of the magazine and will do so at their Altona facility in Manitoba. Debi Perna and Eric Siegrist of PS Design will also donate a large portion of the design costs for the magazine. Both sponsors have enabled the continued production of Canadian Children’s Book News, for which we are extremely grateful.

In this issue, Sylvia McNicoll profiles the award-winning author, Sarah Ellis, who has written over 20 books for children and recently toured Saskatchewan during TD Canadian Children’s Book Week. A photo spread from this year’s Book Week is also featured, so be sure to have a look at what the 30 authors, illustrators and storytellers were up to across the country this May. Amy Mathers writes about junior and intermediate books for summer reading in our “Book Bits” column, Tracey Schindler reviews books about animals in “The Classroom Bookshelf” and we have reviews of 30 new books for you to enjoy.

Sandra O’Brien

Your feedback is important!
EMAIL COMMENTS TO SANDRA@BOOKCENTRE.CA

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Gillian O’Reilly has been an integral part of the Canadian Children’s Book Centre for over 20 years. She has not only been the editor of Canadian Children’s Book News, but also a familiar face at countless children’s book events, a fountain of knowledge on all things relating to kids’ books and the industry and, most importantly, a friend to us all.

As the long-time editor of CCBN, Gillian has shone a spotlight on this country’s children’s books and their creators and helped bring a greater awareness to quality books available to young readers. Her ideas for articles and focus pieces were endless, and she found innovative ways to address industry issues in a meaningful and interesting manner.

Gillian possesses impressive Jeopardy!-like trivia knowledge of Canadian books. Many phone calls and emails were made seeking her expertise as book lists were created, events were planned and ideas were hashed out. We will miss Gillian and all that she brought to the CCBC. Her passion and excitement for Canada’s children’s book industry was, and still is, infectious.

As news of Gillian’s retirement spread throughout the children’s book community, we heard from countless people about how much she was going to be missed. She was not only important to us, but to many others, as evidenced in the tributes below.

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Gillian O’Reilly has just completed a 20-year stretch as the highly talented editor of Canadian Children’s Book News (a publication I edited for just seven years in the 1980s), but this is just the latest sterling accomplishment in a long and varied career in the Canadian book-publishing industry.

Since she first worked for NC Press in 1978, Gillian has been a significant figure in the publishing industry, whether working at the Association of Canadian Publishers, the Canadian Booksellers Association, the CCBC (including a period of belonging to the Friends of the CCBC at a time when the Centre was navigating some rough waters), volunteering for CANS-CAIP — or writing two sparkling non-fiction books for children: Slangalicious: Where We Got That Crazy Lingo (2004) and The Great Number Rumble: A Story of Math in Surprising Places (with Cora Lee, 2007), both with Annick Press. The thing about Gillian is that you always know that she will deliver quality wherever she is. She’s energetic, imaginative, skilled and devoted to every project she commits to. I wish her well in her future endeavours.

— Peter Carver

---

Gillian and I met at a time in our lives when we were balancing books and babies. Gillian was editor of Canadian Children’s Book News, I was the librarian at the CCBC and we were both new moms. I remember Gillian coming in for meetings, pushing a stroller, and I would have new-book meetings with baby Sandy lying in the middle of a table piled with books.

Both babies and the young children’s book industry needed lots of mothering. For two decades, Gillian nurtured and championed our writers, illustrators and publishers with skill and passion — each issue of CCBN a heartbeat in a growing, thriving industry.

Now 20 years later, the Canadian children’s book industry has grown up, and Gillian has had a big part to play in building the strong foundation of children’s books in Canada. Our kids have grown up, too, and I am so lucky that Gillian and I have stayed friends through this chapter of our lives, sharing many a wonderful chat about books, writing, kids, life, love and everything in between.

Thank you, Gillian, for all you have done for the creators and readers of Canadian children’s books. Best of luck with the next chapter and the wonderful books you will create.

— Carol McDougall
If you’ve ever had an email from Gillian you will have received this Philip Pullman quote as part of her signature:
“...There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children’s book.”

That sums up her attitude about the importance of children’s literature. With 20 years as a superb editor of Canadian Children's Book News, an author herself, and her involvement in the broader community with IBBY, the National Reading Campaign, CANSCAIP and Friends of the Osborne, among others, Gillian has long demonstrated her passion for children’s books and their authors and illustrators in years of reviews and her columns.

As I began a new career post-Tundra as consultant working on a variety of publishing projects, our contact increased. I always looked forward to coffee meetings around the city to talk about books and share ideas for promoting the richness of Canadian writing through one or more of her various outlets. Always in search of a good story, she has helped ensure people keep thinking and talking about key issues. I am confident that interest will continue as she finishes her next book and moves on to other projects.

Cheers, and thanks for your great contribution, Gillian!
— Catherine Mitchell

Here’s the thing about Gillian: whether it was in conversation or on a project undertaken together, I knew the bar was set at the highest level. Her understanding, her insights and her wisdom ensured that a perceptive and insightful response was in the offing. And, to my everlasting gratitude, Gillian knew how to translate that understanding into action. I’ve thought that if Gillian’s vision could be imposed on the factors that shape policies and practices, creators and publishers in this country would be substantially better off! I’m one, among many, in this industry who say thank you, Gillian, for your insights and your commitment. You’ve spoken out on the issues and got us talking. In whatever direction you choose to take in the future, I know you’ll continue to advocate for the richness and rewards derived from reading Canadian books.
— Rick Wilks

Has it really been 20 years since you assumed the editorship of CCBN? Well, you have truly raised your “child” well over these past two decades, nurturing it with love and much imagination. There were, I’m sure, times when you needed to administer some tough love to those, like myself, who missed deadlines. And I’m equally positive that you also found it necessary to quietly correct (gasp — a split infinitive) our “manners” when we were grammatically incorrect. But be assured that you can move on to new projects with the confidence that you have given your “child” a solid foundation for whatever comes next.
— Dave Jenkinson

I met Gillian when I thought I was done reviewing Canadian children’s books. After several decades of writing weekly columns for pittance in regional papers, every title seemed the same, and I had given it up. But then, I met Gillian at a book trade show. Some years, reviews and articles later, I still feel excited, optimistic and full of pride whenever we have a passionate conversation about books for Canadian kids. Gillian generates excitement over Canadian kids’ books, and I will deeply miss her at the helm of CCBN.
— lian goodall

A key individual who has brought Canadian children’s books to the attention of the public is Gillian O’Reilly. During her term as Editor of Canadian Children’s Book News, she has introduced readers to many Canadian authors, illustrators, publishers and publications.
Gillian has developed a network of reviewers from coast to coast to share their thoughts about the variety of Canadian children’s books being published. It has been my good fortune to be one of them. Every few months, I would receive a personal message from her, letting me know which picture books she was inviting me to review. A package would arrive in the mail a few days later, and my reading and writing would begin. It has indeed been an honour to review books for her.

The children’s publishing industry in Canada, as well as all of us who love Canadian children’s books, extend our sincere thanks to Gillian for her dedication, vision and spirit. We have been privileged to enjoy her leadership. Best wishes, Gillian, as your next chapter begins to unfold. May it be well marked with creativity and fulfillment.
— Senta Ross

A Salute:
What a stellar contribution to Canadian literature for young people! Thank you.
Gillian, I always looked forward with anticipation to each new issue of Canadian Children’s Book News to discover exciting new titles lurking around the corner, a wide range of interesting articles and an unabashed enthusiasm for remarkable work.

When I was teaching at UBC, I often came to Toronto. It was an unwritten tradition that you and I met in the late afternoon to toast the best of our recent books. I remember we had l-o-n-g conversations! You have an ability to detect the best in books — fine writing and insightful illustrating.

On behalf of those of us promoting Canadian books for children at universities or in school and public libraries, Thank You!
— Dr. Ron Jobe
Save the Date!
This year the TD Canadian Children’s Literature Awards Gala will be held on Thursday, November 17, 2016. Please ensure you have an active CCBC membership if you wish to receive an invitation.

Atwood’s Wandering Wenda to Become Animated Television Series
An animated series from Breakthrough Entertainment, inspired by Margaret Atwood’s alliterative children’s book, Wandering Wenda: And Widow Wallop’s Wunderground Washery, will air during the winter of 2017, on Kids’ CBC. Aimed at early readers, The Wide World of Wandering Wenda series began production last November. Each eight-minute episode will follow Wenda and her pals Wesley the woodchuck and the bookish boy, Wu, as they travel around the globe on wonderful adventures. “The best thing for kids is to combine something that’s fun for them with something that also allows them to absorb stuff they might need to know, like how to read,” says Atwood, “but also it’s a very painless way of teaching the alphabet because when you’ve been through a show with about 100 ‘W’ words, you know what a ‘W’ is.”

Atwood is best known for her adult fiction with titles like The Handmaid’s Tale, Alias Grace and Oryx and Crake, to name a few. Over the years, however, she has also published a host of children’s books, including Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut, Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes and Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda. Atwood first began creating entertainment for kids in high school when she and a friend performed puppet plays for kids’ parties.

The Osborne Collection
Visiting Toronto before September 3, 2016? Drop in to the Osborne Collection of Early Children’s Books to see Three Bears and Beyond: Children’s Books About Bears. This exhibition encompasses the real, the fictional, the iconic, the comic and, of course, the cuddly bears of children’s literature, shown in books, antiquarian and modern.

Imaginary Places and Enchanted Realms runs from Saturday, September 10, 2016 – Saturday, December 3, 2016. From Neverland to Narnia, Middle Earth to the Island of Sodor, this exhibit celebrates kingdoms of the imagination in children’s books and book art held at the Osborne Collection of Early Children’s Books.

The Osborne Collection is located at the Lillian H. Smith Branch of the Toronto Public Library, 239 College Street, 4th floor. Hours are Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Larry Loyie, 1933-2016
Award-winning Cree author Larry Loyie passed away on April 18, 2016, in Edmonton, Alberta. Larry was born in Slave Lake, Alberta, and attended the St. Bernard Indian Residential School. As a young man, Larry worked as a fisherman, logger and First Nations counsellor and served in the Canadian Armed Forces. Later in life, Larry made his dream of becoming a writer a reality and went on to write many impressive titles.

Larry won the Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children’s Non-Fiction in 2003, for As Long As the Rivers Flow, and his latest book, Residential Schools: With the Words and Images of Survivors, written with Wayne K. Spears and Larry’s partner, Constance Brissenden, was published in 2014. It was a finalist for the 2015 Norma Fleck Award. Larry had the ability to communicate with readers of all ages, but especially the young, telling stories of his youth before and during his residential school experience. Larry’s books reached young people across Canada and beyond. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to his partner Constance, his family and friends.

Canadian Children’s Book Authors to Welcome Syrian Refugees in Guelph
A group of Canadian authors will be on hand to welcome new Syrian refugee families and their children to Guelph this fall. The event will take place at Westwood Public School on September 17, and will be open to Syrian refugees, their families, and their sponsors and families.

Authors Eric Walters, Werner Zimmermann, Jean Little, Kathy Stinson, Janet Wilson, Kira Vermond, Jo Ellen Bogart, Lisa Dalrymple and Robert Munsch will be in attendance. Several publishers and the Ontario Library Association have agreed to donate books to be given to the families.

In conjunction with the Islamic Society and the Upper Grand District School Board, the mayor of Guelph, Cam Guthrie, and the local MP, Lloyd Longfield, will also be attending.

Hana Hashimoto Hits the Stage in Ontario
The book Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin, written by Chieri Uegaki, illustrated by Qin Leng and published by Kids Can Press, has been adapted for the stage by Jessica Carmichael, Artistic Director of Carousel Players. The play’s world premiere was launched in April 2016, with April Leung performing the role of Hana. Over a six-week period, the play for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 toured throughout the Niagara and Hamilton regions, with public performances at the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines, the Grand Theatre in London and the Midland Cultural Centre. Ontario Power Generation sponsored the Spring 2016 tour.

Amy Mathers’ Book Deal
Our very dear friend, Amy Mathers, has signed a book deal with Orca Book Pub.

Amy Mathers’ Book Deal
Our very dear friend, Amy Mathers, has signed a book deal with Orca Book Pub. We look forward to reading about Canadian children’s literature and the latest news in our next issue of Canadian Children’s Book News.
Invite a Canadian children’s author, illustrator or storyteller into your classroom during TD Canadian Children’s Book Week!

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Tell us about your newest book. My latest book, *Buddy and Earl Go Exploring*, came out in March of this year. It is part of a series written by Maureen Ferguson and published by Groundwood Books. The first book, *Buddy and Earl*, came out last year, and there are two more titles in the works. In this book, Buddy and Earl continue their adventures, this time in the kitchen, at night!

Tell us about the process of illustrating a picture book. I spend a lot of time at the beginning, thinking about the story and what I can add to it as an illustrator. I don’t just want to provide a visual version of the written story, but I want to contribute to the story in my own way. I do a lot of sketching at the start and figuring out what the layout is going to be. Michael Solomon, Art Director at Groundwood, has trusted me a lot in terms of making decisions on the layout, which I really appreciate. While I’m sketching, I’m doing a lot of thinking about the details of the story and what the color palette is going to be. Once the sketches are finalized and I have approval, the finished artwork seems like the easier part of the process for me. I enjoy the painting part, I paint the illustrations with acrylic gouache and then scan everything into the computer and assemble it in Photoshop.

How did you first get published? My first book was *Buddy and Earl* with Groundwood Books. I took some time off from being an illustrator when I had my kids. When I got back to work, I decided to make a shift from editorial work to children’s books. I did two things… I wrote a children’s book manuscript and I put together a promotional postcard that I mailed out to 250 publishers. The manuscript helped get me the job doing *Buddy and Earl*. Although they rejected the manuscript, they kept me in mind for a future project and a couple months later they called me about working on *Buddy and Earl*. The postcard was picked up by Tara Walker at Tundra Books and it has been developed into a full picture book called *Solutions for Cold Feet and Other Little Problems*, due out in October. That postcard also led to another opportunity at Henry Holt and Company, and my book *Wet* will be out in 2017. It’s crazy when I think that those two little things led to all these books. I know it’s not a typical story and I am incredibly grateful for the chances I’ve been given. I just can’t wait to see what happens next!

What do you like about illustrating picture books? I really like telling a story. Even when I’m not writing the words and am just responsible for the illustrations, I still feel like I am telling a story. I’m developing characters, adding details. It’s lots of fun to think about kids noticing little details or laughing or thinking about the images I’ve made.

Tell us about illustrators who inspire you. When I think about who inspires me, I realize they are artists whose work doesn’t look like mine at all. I suspect that is because I wish I had some of their qualities in my work. Isabelle Arsenault, Carson Ellis, Julie Morstad and Sydney Smith are all on my list. Also Quentin Blake (I was looking at his drawing from *The BFG* last night and I love how crazy his hands are) and John Burningham. And Maurice Sendak, of course.
Telling Tales Festival

Sunday, September 18th, 2016
Westfield Heritage Village, Rockton, Ontario

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I must have been a troubling child, lodged as I was so firmly in my own world. My parents tried to dislodge me, tried to get some reading and wider-world lights to switch on. But, like many children I later taught, I resisted. In trying to learn my ABCs, I would surge ahead to the ‘naughty’ letters I loved: M N O Peed Q, then would fold into laughter.

Yes, my parents tried. They read and told me stories, though children’s books in our house were few because of the expense. They sent me to Sunday school, for more stories, but I was slightly alarmed by the bible stories that shuffling Mr. Bruffenhoff told us. Despite the sunny story climes, the bible world seemed dark, a little scary. All those people with long crooks, funny bath robes and sandals made me think of what we then called the Old Folks’ Home, where we had to visit unpredictable Uncle Art, famous for his habit of unexpectedly taking off his robe for visitors, revealing his full ancient glory.

My parents also took me with the neighbourhood children to the public library story time at an original Carnegie Library, with gleaming floors made for sliding and bum twirling. I remember loving the nursery rhymes that we all recited together, and Miss Finerboom, the laughing, declaiming librarian. We got to act out the rhymes with all the wiggles and squiggles I needed, and I always left with words in my mind, in my body and on my tongue.

I remember that once Miss Finerboom posted on the wall a sad chart with “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Mary had a haunted look, as though she had escaped from a failing farm with a rather sinister-looking lamb, who eyed everyone suspiciously. But a light glimmered in my distracted mind. Words on the wall matched the words from my mouth. Inner was becoming outer. Fuller word pictures were lighting my mind.

When I told Grandma how I saw words I knew up there, in the air, she hugged me and taught me another poem, which I repeated so endlessly that Mother banned it from the dinner table. I think it wasn’t as much the poem as my annoying baa-ing afterwards.

Mary had a little lamb.
You’ve heard this tale before.
But did you know she passed her plate,
And had a little more! BAAAAA

After that there was no stopping my asking for more silliness to delight mind, body and spirit. Seeing the Mary words in the public library had set off some connections, had made some meaning clearer, deeper. Words in rhymes became playmates in my pre-book-reading days. And I wanted more.

My dad gave me more, with a poem for which I still have an inordinate fondness. From it I learned the profound power of words.

Teacher I don’t care.
I can see your underwear.
Is it black? Is it white?
   Ask all day. Ask all night.

In those dutiful Sunday school sessions (where an empty chair was always reserved for JESUS and many of us sat in it before the teacher came, our arms splayed as if on a cross, our heads hanging down) we were asked by Mr. Bruffenhoff to share “some uplifting religious I-tem with the group.” I
decided on Dad’s poem, but clever me, I changed ‘teacher’
to ‘preacher’ and wiggled it out. This got me banned from
Sunday school for two joyful weeks, which convinced my
mother I’d be a “heathen” forever.

Finally, school days came — with parental hopes of my
learning “real reading.” (I was, of course, reading, just not in
the way tradition dictated.) Early on in Grade 1 we had a little
test. We got real paper with real lines and real pencils with real
erasers — and we got to sit and write while the teacher said
some words. This I could do.

I knew how to spell my name B-O-B, in satisfying scrabls,
and I knew some other letters, too. So I wrote down every-
thing I knew, bedazzled by the enormous fun of the task. I
had the paper turned the wrong way, so the light blue lines ran vertically instead of horizontally, and it looked kind of
cool seeing all those large letters I knew in blue columns.

Mrs. Meyers collected them and gave them back — marked
—at the end of the day. I was ecstatic; real work with real marks
on it, at last. Pretty red x’s everywhere. (Now in my world
x’s meant kisses and o’s meant hugs and red, well, red was
the colour of love.) I ran home, waving my paper, shouting:
“Mother, Mother, look, the teacher loves me!” I remember
mother taking the paper, smiling, giving me a big hug. “I’ll
talk to your teacher,” she said.

Until Grade 6, I carried on, in a humdrum Muzak kind of
way. Reading was hard, writing was hard, math was hard, but
home and play were easy. My parents made sure of that. They
understood my struggles and allowed me time to grow into
learning.

Then in Grade 6 something clicked. I found a book I loved,
The Golden Mare, by William Corbin; I had a teacher, Mrs.
Hall, who found me funny and smart. I took off.

I was Bob the late Bloomer, blooming now because of my
parents’ patience, love of rhyme, a special teacher and the
gift of time. The school puzzle piece made of a part, a whole.
My learning/reading life was lighting up. Meaning was
happening.

When I first started teaching primary children in 1975, I
remembered my own schooling and my parents’ growing
ease with my learning. I wondered how I could join the chil-
dren I was to teach to the institution I was part of; how their
school lives, their out-of-school and inner lives could inter-
sect, intertwine as mine hadn’t; how I could let children grow
into themselves in their own time; how I could shine lights in
the children’s learning.

This was, and is, not an easy task, but it is one that is worth
striving for, as parent, as teacher or writer and illustrator. It
is, in essence, the prime goal of any work with children. It is
a challenge that in small and large ways is always possible, if
your vision of children, like water, finds different levels, dif-
f erent states of being, and sustains.

I think I did manage — well, mostly — to let my teaching
flow, change states and honour children as a cherished
resource. I played with the children, tried fresh approaches
and I learned that the most powerful tool any of us have is
language — lively, living, out-loud language, from stories,
from poems, from the children themselves.

Still, one connection was missing: children need to see
themselves and their learning as valued. And this was the ray
they pulse out to the greater world, to find their place. The
classroom, the library, the home, the movie theatre are indoor
contained places. Even when we visit schools and libraries as
authors and illustrators we are ‘planned encounters.’ Though
all these do reflect the larger world, they are not out en plein
air. They do not say to children that the world out there on the
streets, by the bus stops, in the parks, values your humour,
your interests and you. They do not make the brighter light of
the world flash out to them.

But the Reading Lights initiative of the Vancouver Public
Library (VPL) just might. (How I wish this had happened when
I was teaching.) We walked the sidewalks and read what was
around, but there was almost nothing that reflected children.
It was an adult world out there, with stop signs, bus shelter
posters, the endless assaults of advertising. Reading Lights
provides a missing connection to their world, that chance
encounter, the world outside, beyond classroom, beyond
home. The posted plaques seem an almost theatrical experi-
ence, a happening. That gives them their power.

Imagine happening upon more than 20 local Canadian
children’s books to read, to explore, outside. It is a powerful
validation of childhood. It is adults reaching into their culture
and it adds another layer of culture to Canada’s multi-cultur-
alism, the often forgotten culture of childhood.

So thank you to Vi Hughes, to the VPL, to all of you whose
bright vision has made Reading Lights happen and continue
to happen. Yes, reading lights: reading does light: it lights our
minds, it lightens our lives and these reading lights plaques
are a beacon from us to children to enter our shared larger
world of delight in reading and books, just as this experience
of mine showed:

One rainy day I decided to visit the reading light Rae Maté
and I share for Crocodiles Play! by the Pacific Coliseum in
Vancouver. By chance there was a small child, maybe four
years old, and his father looking at the post. The child was
laughing; he looked at me and said in the open spirit of
sharing what delighted him: “Look, that alligator is going to
play hockey. That’s funny!”

I laughed, thanked him for showing me and walked away
smiling. For one brief moment, I did think of telling the child
that I wrote the book, but the moment was about him, his joy,
his laughter, his bright delight, his happenstance encounter,
not about me. My telling him would have intruded on that.
The lampost at that moment was for him, not me, and that is
how it should be.

Robert Heidbreder taught primary children in Vancouver for 30 years. From the children, he
re-discovered the joy of playful poetic language, which led him to writing over 15 books for
children. In 2002, he won the Prime Minister’s Award for Teaching Excellence.
Reading Lights

The Reading Lights project in Vancouver started with a visit to the library. It was November 2014. I was there to advocate for early literacy, specifically to ask the Vancouver Public Library to consider placing some permanent reading opportunities, especially for young children, in their outdoor spaces.

It was a serendipitous meeting. The library was launching ‘Literary Landmarks’ to celebrate writers who had lived in BC. Twenty-six permanent plaques had been installed on city lampposts across Vancouver. Each plaque featured an author, information about their published works and their connection to Vancouver.

Sandra Singh, Chief Librarian, suggested a project modelled on Literary Landmarks but aimed at children. And so, Reading Lights was born. The VPL and The Children’s Writers and Illustrators of BC (CWILL BC Society) became the natural partners. The library had the working model in place with Literary Landmarks. The library’s design team would create plaques featuring excerpts from children’s books. They already had city permission to install plaques on city lampposts. The books came from the creative talents of BC writers and illustrators. In the first year, 20 books were selected. It was challenging for the jury to select only 20 from the nearly 100 books that were submitted. All the books were donated to the library, another wonderful result of the project.

Reading Lights was officially launched on Family Literacy Day, Wednesday, January 27, 2016.

Imagine it — a walk and a delightful encounter with children’s literature on a lamppost.

Each post features a plaque that looks like the page from the original book. It is fabricated of metal, 7 inches by 24 inches, and permanently fixed onto posts near schools, parks, playgrounds or libraries. The information there links the reader to the library to see the whole book, the titles of other books and information about the author and illustrator. Families can even borrow the book on the spot! The placements are strategic. Teachers can take their classes on a ‘book walk,’ then go back to school and enjoy an author study or research a particular topic. Families can play in the park and read along the way. It makes for fun and fitness, too.

The books featured celebrate the diversity of the people in Vancouver and the province of BC. The range of titles guarantees that there is a book to appeal to every child. For many of the very young children living in our city, this might be their first encounter with the world of books. What a beautiful gift we have given them!

You can check out the official website to see more about the project and BC writers and illustrators. www.vpl.ca/ReadingLights

Reading Lights will install 20 more ‘lights’ this year. Those titles will be announced in July.

It’s a very good thing, giving children direct access to the world of books.

Vi Hughes is a former principal and sessional instructor at UBC. She has written several children’s books and is a passionate supporter of early literacy initiatives. Reading Lights is just such an initiative.
Celebrate the TD Grade One Book Giveaway and the 2016 shortlist for the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award on TD KidStreet.

Website: www.thewordinthestreet.ca
Sarah Ellis
A MAJOR PLAYER IN KIDSLIT
BY SYLVIA McNICOLL

When Sarah Ellis first began her career as a children’s librarian in 1976, she despaired over the shortage of Canadian children’s literature. Today, she says, “I wish I was 11 years old now because there are so many good Canadian books to read.” There’s a huge choice of Canadian books, from board and picture books, to easy reads and novels. Says Sarah, “We’re here. We did it, we made our own literature.”

Over the course of the last 40 years (and the life of the Canadian Children’s Book Centre), the industry has burgeoned, and Canadian children’s books have achieved their place in literature. Sarah herself contributed to the creation of this literature. She wrote over 20 books, won a Governor General’s Literary Award, the TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award and the Vicky Metcalf Award for Literature for Young People and was nominated twice for the prestigious international Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

Sarah says she achieved all this by “playing.” But she hastens to explain that play is not the opposite of work; work, when creative, is play. “Play occupies that sweet spot between freedom and discipline, which is where good writing also comes from.”

Beginnings
Sarah was a quiet child who grew up loving to read but who never thought of becoming a writer. There were no author visits back then, and she didn’t know any artists except the church organists. Her father was a minister and excellent raconteur who no doubt influenced her storytelling, and she had two kind older brothers who called her Sally after the baby-sister character from the Dick and Jane readers. She enjoyed school and writing essays and hung around the library a lot. Later, she earned a degree in English and attended library school at the University of British Columbia. Her passion for children’s literature continued to grow, and she pursued an MA in it at Simmons College in Boston.

When she finally put all the school behind her, because she was well behaved she took a job as a librarian to be self-sufficient and have a dental plan. But it proved an excellent choice. She continued to work full-time for seven years in the second-best job in the world for her; she enjoyed a culture dominated by women, appreciated the female management style and loved working with her colleagues, kids and books.

In 1985, she began playing with three ideas: a teenage brother who turns into a lout, two best friends who are opposites and a family project. Within a year, her puttering evolved into a poignant story about a family struggling with a profound loss. The Baby Project was published in 1986, winning the Sheila A. Egoff Children’s Literature Prize and earning a place on The Horn Book fanfare list as well as being translated into French, Japanese and Spanish.

Her second novel, Next-Door Neighbours, depicts a family life that most closely resembled her own. In it, shy 12-year-old Peggy struggles with finding new friends after her dad’s ministry forces them to move. Sarah feels because of this resemblance to her own life, which perhaps lacks dynamism, the book did not do as well. “In my family when somebody says ‘annoyed,’ what they really mean is, ‘I’m furious.’ And I think I pass this disability on to my characters!”

What she injects into her stories instead is her quiet comfort and optimism. In her picture book, Big Ben, illustrated by Kim La Fave, she further mines her own family experience, this time as the youngest child envying older siblings and all their activities, even their report cards. The endearing main character continues to mobilize other childhood pangs: homesickness in Ben Over Night and parting with a friend in Ben Says Goodbye. One thing Sarah deplores is stories where parents step in and save the day, so Ben solves his own problems through the use of his imagination and perhaps some help from his siblings. Sarah continues to write about all kinds of families who find strength through their quirkiness and imagination. Governor General’s Literary Award winner Tim Wynne-Jones, author of The Emperor of Any Place, says, “Apart from being a brilliant writer and extraordinarily funny, Sarah is one of the wisest women I ever met.”
Mid Career and Beyond
When a part-time colleague sought a full-time position in the library due to a financial crisis, Sarah generously swapped jobs. She began working as a librarian halftime and devoting the other half of her time to more play. Sarah says she never tried to earn a full income from writing; she admires those who do, but fears she might begin to resent it then. Besides, she was always lucky enough to get leaves when she needed to tour for TD Canadian Children’s Book Week or act as writer in residence.

Sarah also wrote non-fiction: a regular column and some reviews for The Horn Book Magazine, some articles for Quill & Quire, as well as two books — The Young Writer’s Companion and From Reader to Writer: Teaching Writing Through Classic Children’s Books. To Sarah, writing non-fiction harkens back to her love of school and “getting an assignment.” She still considers it playing, but at a game that has complicated rules, something she also loves.

Writing Process
At the start of the day, Sarah likes to begin with busy work, answering email and other business, which she finds soothing. Then she completes research for the rest of the morning and writes in the afternoon. For deadline projects like the Dear Canada books, she wrote Days of Toil and Tears and That Fatal Night, Sarah maintains the classic 1,000-words-a-day schedule where she rereads her previous day’s work, edits it and then continues on for four pages. If the word count takes all day, then that’s how long she works, but if she’s done quicker, then she’s free.

Currently, she writes in an 8’ x 10’ attic office with bookshelves and a view of a nice tree outside. A cat named Memo curls up in Sarah’s inbox or sometimes tramps across her keyboard. A new, more playful writing routine she adopted for eight years, but despite the fact that she was around students’ stories made her too analytical and self-conscious so that she had even less time. She taught in the program accepted, and ironically the two jobs overlapped for a month so that she had even less time. She taught in the program for eight years, but despite the fact that she was around great company, she found the intense focus and analysis of students’ stories made her too analytical and self-conscious about her own writing. She retired from teaching in 2015.

She is finally devoting herself entirely to playing and putting at words and life, reading, strumming the ukulele and walking, a favourite activity she loves. She has a walking tour planned for Dordogne, France. “Pretty scenery and good food,” Sarah quips. For the first time in her adult life, she reads books she doesn’t have to review; currently it’s Time Travelling with a Hamster.

Sarah feels happy about the great improvement in Canadian books and their supply and she looks both backwards and forwards on a wonderful career. She has enjoyed the amazing travel opportunities her writing has given her. How else would she have ever visited Haida Gwaii, Newfoundland or Japan? This year, she travelled in Saskatchewan for TD Canadian Children’s Book Week. Why else would a child recognize and excitedly point Sarah out to her mom in a grocery store? Sarah plans to keep playing with some characters who have been floating around in her imagination, one a draft dodger in a 1980s setting, and we can look forward to a new chapter book, Liam and Sophie, with Pajama Press. On her website, Sarah Ellis says she is one “lucky ducky.”

Most Recent Work
One of her fiction assignments for Marthe Jocelyn’s First Times anthology, a short story called “Easy Girl” played with the idea of an underground family who forage and recycle for their necessities and enjoy more time as a result of their lack of materialism. Sarah recognized immediately that the main character, Blossom, deserved her own larger story because she exuded an authentic sense of her own competence. “Blossom knows that she is essential to her family’s economy. She can knit, speak French, remove a bee sting from a dog, repair a bike and handle herself on the subway.”

In the earlier drafts of what became Outside In, Blossom was one of two viewpoint characters, but the story evolved into the solo voice of Lynn. Lynn’s flaky one-parent family makes her admire Blossom’s self-sufficient non-blood-related clan even more. While her usual best friends are off on a school trip, Lynn is free to spend more time in Blossom’s “Underlander” world, but when they return, a pressure for explanations causes an accidental betrayal. While admiring another non-conventional family, Lynn somehow comes to a better place with her own. Outside In was shortlisted for the Ontario Library Association’s Red Maple Award, the Manitoba Young Readers’ Choice Award and the Red Cedar Book Awards.

Retirement?
In 2007, Sarah decided to retire from the library so she could enjoy more time writing. But then, she was offered a position with Vermont College of Fine Arts as professor in their writing for children and young adults program. She accepted, and ironically the two jobs overlapped for a month so that she had even less time. She taught in the program for eight years, but despite the fact that she was around great company, she found the intense focus and analysis of students’ stories made her too analytical and self-conscious about her own writing. She retired from teaching in 2015.

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A true Underlander, Sylvia McNicoll spent Sundays with her dad foraging at the dump for parts with which to repair and build radios and televisions. Best Friends Through Eternity is her recent young adult book; her middle grade novel, The Best Mistake Mystery, will be published in 2017.
Cross Country Reading

CELEBRATING TD CANADIAN CHILDREN’S BOOK WEEK 2016
FROM COAST TO COAST TO COAST

Nova Scotia author Vicki Grant with a group of aspiring writers at Whitehorse Public Library.

Kanaka Creek Elementary School in Maple Ridge, BC welcomes illustrator Graham Ross.

Canadian Children's Book News
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WWW.BOOKCENTRE.CA

British Columbia Interior

Students at Juniper Ridge Elementary School in Kamloops, BC make skinks with Lisa Dalrymple.

Ontario

Margriet Ruurs entertains young readers at Innisfil Public Library in Ontario.

Ontario

A young fan listens for the creature inside the magical egg with BC author Kallie George.

Manitoba

Author Allison van Diepen and Manitoba coordinator Gail Hamilton visit Niverville Collegiate Institute.

Yukon

Rebecca Bender’s Giraffe and Bird come to life at Hudson’s Hope Public Library in BC during Book Week 2016, and a watercolour sketch Rebecca did for the students at Tumbler Ridge of the black bear she saw as she was leaving town.

Northern British Columbia

Northern British Columbia

British Columbia

British Columbia

British Columbia

Students at Kanaka Creek Elementary School in Maple Ridge, BC welcomes illustrator Graham Ross.
A volunteer “sea otter” gets ready to hunt at Grand View Public School with Karen Autio.

Ontario

Danika Dinsmore with students at Whitney Public School in Whitney, ON.

Quebec

Wallace Edwards wows young readers with his wonderful artwork at Georgetown Genevieve Soloman Memorial Library in PEI.

Photo: Denise Faccini Bowman

Prince Edward Island

Newfoundland welcomes author Maureen Fergus with a Buddy & Earl cake!

Newfoundland

Ontario

Ontario

Pierre Elliot Trudeau Elementary School in Blainville, QC welcomes LM Falcone during Book Week!

Quebec

Robin Stevenson celebrates Book Week with bookseller / school librarian Alissa Rossellini, Quebec coordinator Carol-Ann Hoyte and owner Maya Munro Byers at Livres Babar Books in Pointe-Claire, QC.

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From Alligator Pie to Meatless Pies
A SHOUT OUT FOR CANADIAN POETRY
BY LARRY SWARTZ

Alligator Pie, Alligator Pie,
If I don’t get some I think I’m gonna...

You, along with generations of Canadian readers, can easily complete the lines to one of Canada’s most famous poems by Canada’s famous poet laureate, Dennis Lee. “Alligator Pie” has echoed off classroom walls since it was first published in 1974. Lee is a word wizard and a genius at rhyming and rhythm, with treasured poems that can amuse and/or touch the heart. As poet laureate, winner of the Governor General’s Literary Award and author of over two dozen poetry books for children, Lee represents the best of Canadian poetry for young people.

It is a bit worrisome to me that when 100+ titles have come across my desk over the past six years, when I have served as a juror for the TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award and the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award, only a very few poetry anthologies have appeared in the pile, one of them being Melvis and Elvis, written by, you guessed it, Dennis Lee and published in 2015. I wonder where all the Canadian poets have gone! I recognize that publishing poetry for young people is a tough game, perhaps a hard sell (perhaps an even harder sell in a technological age), certainly a challenge to make a living from. If we want to give respect to Canadian poetry and help children understand that poems can bring solace and joy to their lives, we need to blow the dust off the covers of the poetry books that have perhaps been hiding on bookshelves for the past 40 years. Moreover, any new poetry collections that emerge from amongst the hundreds of picture books, information books and novels that continue to be published each year need to be recognized and celebrated.

David Booth: Anthologist, Poet
As an anthologist, David Booth has edited important poetry collections that have been shining on Canadian bookshelves in libraries, classrooms and homes for over 25 years. Published in 1990, ‘Til All the Stars Have Fallen, illustrated by Kady MacDonald Denton, is a core collection that paints a Canadian landscape of natural and human scenes. David has also served as editor for three other popular poetry collections, including Voices on the Wind, illustrated by Michèle Lemieux, Doctor Knickerbocker and Other Rhymes, illustrated by Maryann Kovalski and Images of Nature, which paid tribute to the 30th anniversary of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. More recently, I had the privilege of working alongside David to create another important poetry anthology, entitled The Bully, The Bullied, The Bystander, The Brave, which gathered together poems by Canadian and international poets whose words have the potential for arousing feelings and touching the hearts of readers, thus helping to move them toward a more compassionate concern for others.

David Booth knows poetry and with Head to Toe Spaghetti and Other Tasty Poems he serves a banquet of poetic forms to help readers contemplate and celebrate meals, snacks and international cuisine that may or not be familiar to them. This is a delicious collection of poetry that builds connections through the topic of food, pays tribute to both rhyming and non-rhyming poems and would be a great addition to Canadian bookshelves. BON APPETIT! As well, we must applaud Les Drew’s witty illustrations that appear throughout!

An Interview with David Booth
In the following interview, David Booth shares his thoughts about creating Head to Toe Spaghetti as well as offering advice about sharing poems with young people inside and outside the classroom.

What is the story behind Head to Toe Spaghetti? Why food poems?
The poems in this book come from 40 years of events that occurred around food, from watching my son and his friends, from family celebrations, from nights when there was nothing in the fridge, from dining at friends’ homes or unusual restaurants and a couple from my childhood. What matters to me is that these poems are really about the events rather than the food, but food links them all together. I had in mind young readers from 8 to 12 years of age, but as I am finding out, poems connected to food seem universal.

I was surprised at the number of food types mentioned in the poems, everything from vegetable pie to stir fries to hot dogs, all the meals and treats and banquets that life throws at us. I wanted to honour all of the family fare that makes
up food times in different homes, from Grandma’s Sunday dinner to Dad’s first barbecue to fish and chips on a Friday night to hamburgers at my son’s hockey banquet. All of us struggle to feed our families as best we can, and most of us fall victim to fast food, frozen pizzas and Beefaroni when the big fatigue hits. But then we are back to kale, homemade soups and balanced diets. (Poems know no food limitations.)

What process does an author go through to create, complete and publish a poetry anthology?

How do poems work? Form follows function, for me. First, the idea, then the words, then a form that works, then revision, then editing and so on. I would jot down in my notebook ideas after an event centred around eating, put it away, and then discover my jottings at a later date when I felt like writing something that mattered to me.

Over the years, I filled a few notebooks with thoughts and reflections, pre-computers, and so I gathered the ones about food events together, and with the help of editors and the illustrator Les Drew, this book was born. I had many poems left out of this collection for a variety of reasons, and editors helped clarify what would work best. Poems, like potatoes, come in all shapes and sizes, and I would choose the ingredients and then determine the recipes.

How would you recommend that a poetry anthology be read and enjoyed? Chronologically? Table of Contents? Flipping through the book?

Readers can view this anthology as a buffet (actually all anthologies should be seen this way), and select those items that fit their lives, their needs, their values. I welcome all families and their food choices and I hope you can find yourselves somewhere in this book, munching on a poem. I didn’t want to judge or advocate for special dietary needs; instead, I chose to create an album of the food images I have observed and served over the years, unfiltered, digested memories. This is not a treatise on healthy eating habits; it is a collection of poems.

I often flip through a poetry anthology, stopping at the poem that grabs me, and then reading the collection from the beginning again. That is the joy of non-narrative writing, and poetry offers us this freedom to read any way we choose.

You have written two excellent resources for teachers who wish to expand their repertoire of teaching poetry: Poems Please! with Bill Moore and Poetry Goes to School with Bob Barton. With the inclusion of hundreds of poems, with a framework for teaching poetry, these books are useful guides for teachers who wish to bring poetry to children. What is David Booth’s definition of poetry?

Words that haunt; words that shout; words that remain; words that whisper again and again; words that tickle, words that tremble; words that stay in our own cloud of memory; words I never would have known; words that startle feelings hidden in our subconscious; words that turn and twist the rules of language like pretzels. Poems.

Do you think the publishing industry in Canada has given enough attention to offering poetry collections for young readers? Why do you think it has been more challenging to produce poetry books in the 21st century?

We need to remember that the huge picture book market is filled with poetry — stories written in rhyme, books of word play, rhythmic patterns, refrains for joining in and poems that live alongside the art. As well, many YA novels are now formed in free verse, with the words arranged beautifully in crafted and powerful stanzas that tell the story. The nature of contemporary technology-driven life leaves little space for Elizabeth Coatsworth’s elegant phrases, but taste is acquired, so schools can offer the power of reflective and word-focused forms of text that children will come to appreciate in a true sense.

What is your 2016 response to a poem you wrote almost 20 years ago about teaching poetry?

What Will I Teach?
I live in fear
that I
will teach the poem
and they
will lose the poet
and the song
and the self
within the poem
I live in fear
that I
who love the poem
and the children
will lose the poem
and the children
when I teach the poem
But I will teach the poem
Live with the fear
Love the children
Sing the song
Find the self
And know the poet
Is beside me
Just as afraid
But full of hope.

In a sense, young people are surrounded by poetic language today, not necessarily in school, but interwoven in their daily lives. Popular music, from Bob Dylan to rock to rap, captures the emotional power of words and rhythms and sounds, and children join in, move, sing and feel the internal magic of felt/thought language. It is a unifying force, a way of being collectively among and alongside others. My friends and I, of a certain age, still keep our wide-ranging collections of poetry on our bookshelves, anthologies from England, the United States, Canada, and some in translation from other places and cultures. They are treasures. I now just share poems with children; others can teach them. I listen for the responses of the children, and the conversation flows. Like poetry.

Larry Swartz is a literacy instructor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and Brock University. He is the co-author of This Is a Great Book! (with Shelley Stagg Peterson) and The Poetry Experience (with Sheree Fitch).
“BOOKMARK!” HIGHLIGHTS BOOKS FOR A VARIETY OF GRADE LEVELS AROUND A PARTICULAR THEME. TO FOLLOW UP ON LARRY SWARTZ’S ARTICLE ABOUT POETRY, CCBC’S LIBRARY COORDINATOR, MEGHAN HOWE, HAS COMPILED A LIST OF POETRY BOOKS AND BOOKS WRITTEN IN RHYME OR FREE VERSE PUBLISHED OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS.

Poetry, Rhyme and Free Verse Books

PICTURE BOOKS FOR PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 8

The Cat and the Wizard
written by Dennis Lee
illustrated by Gillian Johnson

No one needs a wizard and his old bag of tricks — until a black cat comes along with a spiffy hat and a lonely heart. Together they share a magical night in Toronto’s Casa Loma castle, enjoying a candlelight feast of tuna and wine and the company of new friends.

Crocs at Work
(Crocodiles Say, Crocodiles Play, Book 3)
written by Robert Heidbreder
illustrated by Rae Maté
(Tradewind Books, 2015)

The Crocs are tackling all sorts of occupations — from bus driver to florist — with laughs and poetry. Children and adults alike will laugh out loud as the Crocs add silliness, surprise and pandemonium to everything they do.

The Duck Says
written by Troy Wilson
illustrated by Mike Boldt
(North Winds Press/Scholastic Canada, 2015)

Follow the duck in this madcap romp around the farmyard, which will have kids delighting in his clueless antics and witty wordplay. Bouncing rhymes are perfectly paired with colourful, exuberant illustrations full of visual gags that will have readers laughing along and anticipating what will happen next.

Missing Nimâmâ
written by Melanie Florence
illustrated by François Thisdale
(Clockwise Press, 2015)

A young mother, one of the many missing Indigenous women, watches over her small daughter as she grows up, raised by her nohkom. Together, but separated, they experience important milestones. A freeverse story of love, loss and acceptance told in alternating voices, this picture book conveys the human side of a national tragedy.

POETRY COLLECTIONS FOR PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 7

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

With over 40 bouncy poems and energetic, humorous illustrations, this book captures the joys, thrills and challenges of basketball. The poems run the gamut, from silly, just-for-fun ones to others that provide useful tips on training, tactics and teamwork.

Echo Echo: Reverso Poems About Greek Myths
written by Marilyn Singer
illustrated by Josée Masse
(Dial Books for Young Readers, 2016)

A collection of ingenious poems, this time holding up a mirror to classical Greek myths. Each tale is told in a single poem that, when read in reverse, reveals another meaning. Thoughtful explanatory notes about the original myths accompany each poem.

Hungry for Math: Poems to Munch On
written by Kari-Lynn Winters and Lori Sherritt-Fleming
illustrated by Peggy Collins
(Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2015)

Add some fun to your math with this entertaining poetry collection for young readers. Focusing on math skills, such as measuring time, patterning, estimating, symmetry and more, the hilarious cast of characters bring math concepts to life.
Lasso the Wind: Aurélia’s Verses and Other Poems
written by George Elliott Clarke
illustrated by Susan Tooke
(Nimbus Publishing, 2013)

This is the first collection of children’s poetry by renowned poet and playwright George Elliott Clarke. By turns absurd, witty, playful and profound, Clarke’s poems speak to the vivid wonder, the bright joys and the secret pains of growing up in this world.

Melvis and Elvis
written by Dennis Lee
illustrated by Jeremy Tankard

This splendid collection of poems from Dennis Lee, Canada’s Father Goose, is an irresistible blend of narrative, wordplay and pure nonsense. Enhanced by Jeremy Tankard’s whimsical and energetic illustrations, this book will appeal to very young and developing readers.

Mingan My Village
written by Innu schoolchildren
illustrated by Rogé
translated by Solange Messier
(Fifth House Publishers, 2014)

This is a collection of 15 faces, and 15 poems written by young Innu schoolchildren. Given a platform for speaking out, the children chose to transport readers far away from the difficulties and problems related to their realities to see the beauty that surrounds them in nature.

Noisy Poems for a Busy Day
written by Robert Heidbreder
illustrated by Lori Joy Smith
(Kids Can Press, 2012)

Join this delightfully illustrated cast of characters as they watch the clouds, wade through mud puddles, swing sky-high and then snuggle into bed for story time. This collection begs to be read aloud from sun-up to sundown.

Toes in My Nose and Other Poems: 25th Anniversary Edition
written by Sheree Fitch
illustrated by Sydney Smith
(Nimbus Publishing, 2012)

This is the book that launched Sheree Fitch’s career. In this 25th-anniversary edition, the award-winning Sydney Smith’s new illustrations hilariously portray a neighbourhood of kids flying to the moon, playing the banjo with orangutans and bathing with submarines.

When Green Becomes Tomatoes: Poems for All Seasons
written by Julie Fogliano
illustrated by Julie Morstad
(Roaring Brook Press, 2016)

Flowers blooming in sheets of snow make way for happy frogs dancing in the rain. Summer swims move over for autumn sweaters until the snow comes back again. The seasons come to life in this gorgeous and comprehensive book of poetry.

POETRY AND NOVELS IN VERSE FOR GRADES 6–12

Audacious
written by Gabrielle Prendergast
(Orca Book Publishers, 2013)

This novel written in verse is about 16-year-old Raphaëlle, who says the wrong things, antagonizes people and has a bad attitude. After moving to a new city, Raphaëlle (Ella) falls for Samir, a Muslim boy, and expresses her confused feelings in explicit art.

To This Day: For the Bullied and Beautiful
written by Shane Koyczan
illustrated by various artists
(Annick Press, 2014)

Spoken-word artist Shane Koyczan electrified the world with his passionate anti-bullying poem. Adapted into a powerful and visually arresting book with illustrations by 30 international artists, each page is a vibrant collage of images, colours and words that will resonate with anyone who has experienced bullying.
Any glimpse into the life of an animal quickens our own and makes it so much the larger and better in every way. – John Muir

Children have an inherent curiosity about the natural world around them. They love to dig in the dirt, pick up worms and bugs, stomp in rain puddles and examine the weeds that push through the cracks in the sidewalk. That natural curiosity is nurtured and encouraged by teachers and parents who foster a child’s love of, and respect for, the natural world and all living things.

Central elements of the K-6 science curriculum include characteristics and needs of living things, growth and change in animals and plants, habitats and communities, biodiversity, ecosystems and adaptation. Learning about animals opens up a world of opportunities for young students. Beyond the science curriculum, teaching children about animals and the natural world nurtures curiosity and opens windows onto far deeper understanding. As children learn about the natural world around them, they learn about the complex relationships between living things, and to make connections between themselves and other species. They also learn about conservation and environmentalism as responsibilities of the human species.

Raising a chick in kindergarten teaches children about the fragility of life and about caring for another creature as much as it teaches about the life cycle. Including children in the care of a classroom pet, be it fish, a gecko or a hamster, teaches them about responsibility as well as empathy and is an opportunity to experience the beauty and diversity of the planet’s animal life.

There are limitless ways to include animals in a child’s learning, and there is a wide variety of remarkable, informative books that can pique curiosity, encourage investigation and otherwise engage students in their learning.

In *Worms for Breakfast*, Helaine Becker, author of *Zoobots, A Porcupine in a Pine Tree* and *Ode to Underwear*, offers a novel look into the world of animal care. This fascinating and entertaining “cookbook” explores how zookeepers find the right menus to feed animals in order to keep them healthy and happy. Along with actual recipes for feeding everything from chimps and snails to platypuses and parrots, readers also learn about the job of zoo nutritionist and about the central role of conservation at many zoos. Illustrated with humorous computer-generated images and written in a disarming fun style, this book explores a variety of topics, including feeding the babies of endangered species such as the clouded leopard, food for sick animals and special treats for the pickiest of eaters like the koala and the giant panda. Readers also learn that food delivery can be just as important as the nutrition a meal provides. For predators such as tigers or cheetahs, zookeepers must vary the feeding routine, and some meals must be wrestled from hard-to-open containers to help keep boredom at bay. Lots of facts are delightfully gross — rabbits need to eat their own poop; baby flamingos drink fish slushies; and at the Seneca Park Zoo in Rochester, New York, Siberian tigers celebrate their birthday with cupcakes made of frozen blood, catnip and a piece of oxtail or horse tail with the bone in!

There are many ways this book could be incorporated into classroom learning. It is a perfect book to read with a class before a trip to a local zoo, aquarium or animal sanctuary. The Toronto Zoo, for example, has public feeding times for various animals with menu info sheets on their website. Students could be tasked with learning about the food required by a particular animal and explaining why it needs that diet. Students could also examine the diets of domestic pets. For instance, some dog owners use a “raw food diet” because it more closely matches what their relatives eat in the wild. What about the diets of animals in sanctuaries? On the farm? Why do eggs from a small local farm taste so different from eggs found at the grocery store?

As a jumping-off point for a discussion about nutrition, students can compare and contrast human and animal diets. What similarities and differences are there between our diet and the diet of a
“... teaching children about animals and the natural world nurtures curiosity and opens windows onto far deeper understanding.”

My Book of Birds
written and illustrated by Geraldo Valério
Groundwood Books, 2016
978-1-55498-800-6 (hc) $24.95
978-1-55498-801-3 (eBook) $19.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 5
Non-fiction | Birds | Bird Habitats | Bird Behaviour

gorilla? What would be some examples of the best best foods for a human? Why?

While zoo animals are fascinating, an equally alluring part of nature is the world under the sea with all its amazing creatures. In the whimsical picture book, Going for a Sea Bath, Andrée Poulin takes young readers on a trip to the ocean... right in the bathtub! Leanne does not want to take a bath because baths are boring, and there is nothing to play with in the tub. Her father, undaunted by his daughter’s reluctance, has an idea to make bath time more fun. He runs all the way to the sea and returns with one turtle. When the turtle doesn’t do much, Leanne’s father returns to the sea, bringing a succession of expressive sea life for her to enjoy in the tub. From two eels and three clownfish up to nine starfish and 10 octopi, Leanne’s bathtub gets so full there is no more room for Leanne! Munsch-esque prose paired with Anne-Claire Delisle’s delightfully playful illustrations will have kids hooked.

What better way to introduce young children to a unit on sea life than to read this book aloud and have students talk about all the animals that live in the sea. Leanne’s father brings 10 different creatures home; can students think of other animals that live in the sea? Have any of the students visited an ocean? What sea life did they see? This book would make a perfect segue for a class trip to an aquarium (or the ocean, if you are lucky enough to live on one of Canada’s coasts). There are wonderful opportunities to incorporate math (counting, adding, etc.) and art into a unit on sea life and the oceans — create a classroom mural, with each child drawing or crafting his or her favourite creature from under the sea.

Possibilities for art projects abound with Geraldo Valério’s gorgeous oversized title, My Book of Birds. Using old magazine paper, Valério creates vibrant collages of birds that capture a breathtaking sense of aliveness. Each page or spread features a North American bird, from the golden eagle and snowy owl, to more common backyard visitors, including the black-capped chickadee and northern cardinal. Each illustration is accompanied by a brief description of that bird and interesting details such as how hummingbirds use spider webs to build their nests and western tanagers first strip off the wings of the dragonflies they eat.

Labelled illustrations of bird eggs and feathers adorn the back and front endpapers — keen readers will find themselves flipping back and forth, matching birds to their eggs and feathers. The book is rounded out with a short glossary and references to websites and other bird books for interested readers.

With its beautiful large illustrations, My Book of Birds would make a wonderful read-aloud in the early grades to introduce a unit on birds, but it is versatile enough to work equally well with older students as a place to start their own research or as an example of collage as an art form. This book can be used easily as a springboard for class discussions on habitats, food chains, camouflage or ecosystems. Children could spend a period of time counting how often they see any of the birds in the book and put their findings on a class chart. A class walk or hike could include a bird count, identifying the birds spotted. While many of Valério’s collages are quite intricate, others, including those of chicks and eggs, are much simpler. Students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 (or beyond) could create their own bird collages, inspired by the book’s artwork. Class displays of collages celebrating birds would brighten any classroom or hallway.

The curriculum connections and the ideas that can be generated from a single book are nothing short of amazing. These are but three Canadian books for young people that can make a positive contribution to any classroom. They enrich the curriculum by offering fresh perspectives, fascinating insights and engaging information.

Tracey Schindler is a book reviewer and former teacher living in Bethany, Ontario.
Enticing summer reads and the exploration of family

BY AMY MATHERS

With Canada’s long-lasting winter months and mild spring, summer feels like the shortest season as we wish for the sun and warmth to last just a little longer. In a child’s world, however, summer vacation travels at the speed of light. It is a brief period of time packed with exponential physical and mental growth, and the setting of many a children’s novel. Authors who write about this particular time of year know the affecting experiences of fleeting summer months have the power to stay with kids for a lifetime.

Combined with trips to unfamiliar places and/or seemingly impossible quests, the following four stories capture this enchanting and magical time in a child’s life in varied and enticing ways.

In *Root Beer Candy and Other Miracles* by Shari Green, 11-year-old Bailey knows spending her first summer with Nana Marie is just one sign of many that her parents’ marriage is in trouble. While they go on a retreat to try and salvage their relationship, Bailey and her younger brother, Kevin, are left to deal with the tension and fear of a possibly imminent divorce. Life in Felicity Bay challenges Bailey to look outside herself, however; when the local ice cream man, Jasper, makes a series of startling prophecies. Finding herself drawn into the heart of a town steeped in misery, Bailey keeps her faith in the goodness of others and looks for miracles to help heal the wounds of the past.

Writing in verse, Green aptly captures the journey of a girl faced with her first real heartbreak — the likely dissolution of her family. Bailey’s openness to confronting her reality while still believing in the extraordinary adds to her charm, as does her growing realization that heartache affects many others in her life as well. The colourful and mysterious small town of Felicity Bay and the ocean it borders offer the perfect backdrop for Bailey’s awakening to the larger world around her. With a renewed sense of connectedness and a greater understanding of family, Bailey emerges from her summer of change hopeful for the future.

Look Out for the *Fitzgerald-Trouts* by Esta Spalding, on the other hand, begins with a firm sense of family. With several potential parents in the mix, Kim, Kimo, Pippa and Toby’s biological connections are so complex they have to be drawn in the sand to make sense. Yet none of these potential parents is up to the task of being reliable or responsible, leaving the four children to fend for them-

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*Root Beer Candy and Other Miracles* written by Shari Green
Pajama Press, 2016
978-1-77278-007-9 (pb) $11.95
for Grades 4 to 6
Fiction | Family | Divorce

*Look Out for the Fitzgerald-Trouts* written by Esta Spalding
illustrated by Sydney Smith
Tundra Books, 2016
978-1-77049-876-1 (hc) $19.99
978-1-77049-877-8 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 4 to 6
Fiction | Family | Overcoming Challenges

*Mission Mumbai: A Novel of Sacred Cows, Snakes, and Stolen Toilets* written by Mahtab Narsimhan
Scholastic Press, 2016
978-0-545-74651-9 (hc) $19.99
978-0-545-74652-6 (eBook) $16.99
for Grades 5 to 8
Fiction | Family | Friendship | Divorce | India

*Sea Change* written and illustrated by Frank Viva
Tundra Books, 2016
for Grades 7 to 8
Fiction | Family | Friendship | Community | Nova Scotia
selves in much the same way as Gertrude C. Werner’s The Boxcar Children. Living in a car on a southern, tropical island and scraping by on a monthly handout from one of their mothers, the self-proclaimed Fitzgerald-Trout siblings are a family unto themselves. But 11-year-old Kim knows the day is coming when the car will no longer be big enough to contain them all, and thus makes it a top priority to find a house for them.

Playfully and poignantly illustrated by Sydney Smith, the search for permanence in the lives of the Fitzgerald-Trouts is an ongoing struggle met by four very determined children. Despite one of their mothers ending up in jail, the other leaving a baby for them to take into their brood, an emotionally and mentally absent father in addition to a physically absent one, the Fitzgerald-Trouts come to realize permanence can always be found in each other, no matter how many of them there are. Finding a house introduces new complications and an unsettled ending, yet Spalding makes the strength of her characters clear. They will be able to handle whatever comes their way.

In Mission Mumbai by Mahtab Narsimhan, best friends Dylan Moore and Rohit Lal embark on a cross-continental trip to India for a family wedding. In a complete clash of cultures, Dylan’s well-intentioned actions often end up landing him in serious trouble, and Rohit gets the blame for not keeping a closer eye on him, creating tension between the two. When Rohit’s Aunt Boa takes Rohit’s affinity for American culture as a sign of disrespect and demands he live with her in India to learn some manners, Dylan is determined not to let it happen, even if they’re on the outs. If they work together, they might be able to find a way to outsmart Aunt Boa, but that will involve listening to each other first.

On the surface, Dylan and Rohit’s vacation is a fun adventure story. Dylan’s gaffes are humorous and understandable, as is Rohit’s annoyed reaction to being blamed for them. Convinced he knows best, Dylan repeatedly ignores useful advice from Rohit that would have kept him out of trouble. Below the surface, Narsimhan reveals Dylan’s true intentions for going on a trip with Rohit’s family — he’s trying to avoid his parents’ announcement that they’re getting a divorce. Isolated at home with a father who has unrealistic expectations and a mother who has other things on her mind, Dylan sees his friendship with Rohit as his lifeline, and the prospect of Rohit’s staying behind in India is terrifying.

The boys are brought back together after getting separated from Rohit’s parents during a fire at a cinema, and the night they spend on the streets is enough to wake up Dylan’s parents to the son they’ve been neglecting. Deep down, though, Dylan has learned families come in all shapes and sizes, and his family includes Rohit and his parents.

Transitioning from junior to intermediate audiences, Sea Change by Frank Viva tells the story of Eliot Dionisi, a 12-year-old dumped by his parents. With pesky relatives, weird food and the fact that he is separated from his friends, Eliot is sure he’s in for a rotten summer, but then he meets Mary Beth, a local girl who puts him right at ease, and finds friends in Jack, Eddie and Timmy. Before long, the summer Eliot was convinced would be horrible has turned into the ease, and finds friends in Jack, Eddie and Timmy. Before long, the summer Eliot was convinced would be horrible has turned into the ease, and finds friends in Jack, Eddie and Timmy. Before long, the summer Eliot was convinced would be horrible has turned into the ease, and finds friends in Jack, Eddie and Timmy. Before long, the summer Eliot was convinced would be horrible has turned into the ease, and finds friends in Jack, Eddie and Timmy. 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We Recommend

NEW AND NOTED BOOKS FOR TODDLERS TO TEENS

**Buddy and Earl**
*(Buddy and Earl, Book 1)*
written by Maureen Fergus
illustrated by Carey Sookocheff
Groundwood Books, 2015
978-1-55498-712-2 (hc) $16.95
978-1-55498-713-9 (eBook) $14.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

**Buddy and Earl Go Exploring**
*(Buddy and Earl, Book 2)*
written by Maureen Fergus
illustrated by Carey Sookocheff
Groundwood Books, 2016
978-1-55498-714-6 (hc) $16.95
978-1-55498-715-3 (eBook) $14.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Fergus and Sookocheff’s heartwarming new series, Buddy and Earl, is a celebration of friendship between a trusting, literal-minded family dog and the household’s new addition — an impulsive, imaginative hedgehog named Earl. The humour derives from contrasts like Earl’s insistence that a mundane couch is a pirate ship, while Buddy patiently points out the obvious, mistaking Earl’s fantasies for a newbie’s ignorance. Buddy’s large stature encompasses a meek and gentle personality, while Earl’s adorable ball of prickles houses a Napoleonic urge for conquest.

*Buddy and Earl*, the first book in the series, chronicles the pair’s initial meeting, an antidote to Buddy’s rainy-day boredom and loneliness. The identity-guessing game that Earl plays with Buddy — Earl’s being a hedgehog is never mentioned — finally ends with a mutually agreeable identification: “[Y]ou are a friend.” The pattern of the successive books is established: Earl’s emotional calls to action overcome Buddy’s hesitation, and the dog dives into the hedgehog’s imaginary world. Because adult humans are poor interpreters of animal speech and tend to misunderstand, Buddy takes the fall for the resulting hijinks, in spite of Earl’s protests. In *Buddy and Earl Go Exploring*, Buddy is once again immersed in Earl’s flights of fancy, during which the friends enjoy themselves and prove their bravery.

Sookocheff’s illustrations have a simple, child-like quality with a pared-down palette that bleeds out of the line drawings. The expressions of the adorable protagonists endear the pets to the reader with their joy, contriteness, concern and passion. Sookocheff’s decision to make the imaginary world reflect the colour and shapes of the workaday objects that inspired it adds to the humour but also shows how Buddy and the rest of us literalists can be transported under the spell of a compelling storyteller.

The Buddy and Earl series, likely to add to the author’s and illustrator’s award-winning works, is a cross between a picture book and an easy reader, reflected in the size of the attractive hard-covers. Everyone from parents reading with their four-year-olds to seven-year-old independent readers will enjoy this unlikely duo’s household heroics. Watch for the release of *Buddy and Earl and the Great Big Baby* in August 2016.

Aliki Tryphonopoulos is a former children’s librarian working at Pickering Public Library.

**If I Had a Gryphon**
written by Vikki VanSickle
illustrated by Cale Atkinson
Tundra Books, 2016
978-1-77049-809-9 (hc) $19.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Magical Creatures | Pets*

In *If I Had a Gryphon*, a little girl named Sam finds herself bored with her pet hamster, who does nothing but eat, sleep and get his shavings wet. She decides to imagine how her life would be if she had more exciting pets of the magical variety — perhaps a unicorn, a hippogriff or a sasquatch, to name a few. While she considers the benefits of each creature, she soon starts to focus on their shortcomings, as well as the special gear she would need to take care of them. A pet hippogriff, for example, might terrify everyone at the dog park, and anyone with a pet dragon definitely needs a fire extinguisher on hand. In the end, Sam decides that maybe her boring little hamster is not so bad after all.

The story, written by Vikki VanSickle, is told in rhyme and picks up in speed as it moves along, making it supremely fun to read aloud. Its many comic aspects are skilfully elevated by Cale Atkinson’s playful illustrations, down to the smallest detail — his wild-eyed chupacabra, for instance, is hilarious. Fans of mythology and fantasy might particularly enjoy this book, but it also provides a good introduction to younger children who might not yet be familiar with such magical creatures. Teachers will find inspiration for a number of classroom activities. Beyond that, *If I Had a Gryphon* is an absolute joy to read.

Camilia Kahrizi is the CCBC’s Marketing and Website Coordinator.
When the electricity goes out yet again, Maya feels as though the dark from Papa’s passing will never end. Mumma tells Maya the legend of the first monsoon, which filled the earth with needed rivers and yet threatened to destroy everything. But the first banyan tree sapling, drinking deeply of the monsoon rains and swelling in size, saved everyone. While pondering the story, Maya enters the darkness caused by the height and width of the banyan tree, frightened by the animals from the legend. Yet as she climbs through the banyan tree’s branches and roots, her eyes are opened. And at the centre of the tree, full of diffused light and shadows, Maya finds her father inside herself, and her fear floats away.

The text and illustrations weave seamlessly through the real world, the legendary world and the dream world. The writing is concise and richly poetic, Maya’s character layered, textured and engaging. MacKay’s images are photos of paper-theatre or light-box dioramas, a mixture of painted cut-outs and hand-crafted props and settings. The illustrations are gorgeous, playing with shadows and light, and deepening our experience of the darkness of her grief and the brightness of her understanding, acceptance and love.

Papa once told Maya that “a story was like a bird,” flying us to somewhere unknown and always changing us. And so it is with this book.

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.

The Night Gardener
written and illustrated by Terry Fan and Eric Fan
Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016
978-1-4814-3978-7 (hc) $21.99
978-1-4814-3979-4 (eBook) $14.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

Lush, elegant illustrations and sparse text tell a magical story of art and community in the Fan Brothers’ The Night Gardener. The plot is simple but poignant: in a dreary small town, life goes ever on, the same as always, until something unexpected begins to happen. It starts with a single tree moulded into a magnificent owl that overlooks the orphanage where our little protagonist, William, lives. William is entranced, and the community on Grimloch Lane is brought together as one tree at a time is transformed, and their entire neighbourhood becomes a topiary garden full of marvellous creatures. Curious about the secret behind these wondrous creations, William sneaks out after dark to discover the Night Gardener at work and soon begins working as a night gardener himself, helping to bring a little creativity to the monotony of Grimloch Lane.

From the majestically oversized owl on the cover to the final moonlit page, the illustrations in The Night Gardener are truly captivating. Full-page spreads slowly shift from soft, washed-out greys and browns in the beginning, to sharp, vivid greens as each new topiary is revealed, until the book ends in full colour. The subtle message of the whimsical story combines with the luxurious illustrations to create a picture book that is sure to enthral readers of all ages.

Stephanie Dror holds an MA in Children’s Literature from the University of British Columbia and is a book blogger and reviewer on The Book Wars.
Imagine Oscar Peterson as a child — does he practise music all night long? Does he mimic the sounds? Does he turn city sounds into music? In Oscar Lives Next Door: A Story Inspired by Oscar Peterson’s Childhood, written by Bonnie Farmer, the Canadian jazz legend is memorialized through the eyes of his very observant young neighbour and friend, Mildred. The story moves through a chapter of Peterson’s life — a childhood bout with tuberculosis — that would change the course of his life and help make him what he is known and celebrated for to this day.

The background of Little Burgundy (La Petite-Bourgogne) in 1930s Montreal comes alive in Marie Lafrance’s illustrations. Cartoonish and reminiscent of vintage-style illustrations from that era, their vibrant colour, slightly unfinished looks and definite lines are like the improvised jazz standards for which Peterson became famous. They display a retrospective/classic style of illustration from that era — a simple but impactful palette composed of blues, oranges, greens and greens interspersed with mixed-media pencil, acrylic and fabric prints. The vantage points vary and are like the steep hills in parts of Montreal.

Oscar Lives Next Door works well as a read-aloud with its bold-faced words that young listeners can repeat. With playful onomatopoeia in the language, pianos “Bing bang bop,” rain “pitter-patters” and trumpets “root-a-toot-toot.” This book encourages resilience in children and the pursuit of their dreams in spite of the obstacles they may encounter.

Oscar Lives Next Door: A Story Inspired by Oscar Peterson’s Childhood
written by Bonnie Farmer
illustrated by Marie Lafrance
Owlkids Books, 2015
978-1-77147-104-6 (hc) $17.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3
Picture Book | Oscar Peterson | Music | Jazz | Montreal

Senta Ross

Playing from the Heart
written and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds
Candlewick Press, 2016
978-0-7636-7892-0 (hc) $20.00
for Kindergarten to Grade 3
Picture Book | Music | Creativity | Family

“The piano stood quietly in the living room for years. Until the day Raj first plunked and pushed the keys, delighted by every sound.”

So begins young Raj’s introduction to the piano. As he grows older and begins to experiment with pedal and note combinations, he creates beautiful music without ever having taken a lesson. These explorations in improvisation come to an abrupt halt when his father arranges for a piano teacher to educate the boy on how to read music and perform familiar classical repertoire. Unfortunately, as the young pianist’s proficiency increases, his love of playing decreases until he stops all together, and once again the piano becomes silent. Years later, it is only when Raj’s critically ill father requests him to perform one of his compositions — “the song without a name” — that the piano is played again. “The notes emerged whispery and sweet... Raj kept playing... from the heart.”

This lovely story of how a father and son bond over music also highlights the importance of creativity. Author-illustrator Peter H. Reynolds writes, “I wanted to celebrate the natural energy and fearlessness that children are born with and encourage all of us, as we learn rules and techniques, not to forget that original joy... Creativity thrives on bravery and originality. Let that flow and see where you go.”

Reynolds’ hand-lettered text adds greatly to the unique appearance of this publication. His deceptively simple illustrations, rendered in pen, ink, watercolour, gouache and tea, are mostly muted, with bits of colour applied only to the musical notes of Raj’s own compositions, which have come from deep inside him.

Ken Kilback

The Riddlemaster
written by Kevin Crossley-Holland
illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch
Tradewind Books, 2016
978-1-926890-11-1 (hc) $19.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 4
Picture Book | Riddles | Wordplay

Fascinated by the little island that “looks like a gold coin,” Anouk, Ben and Cara are convinced treasure awaits them there. But they have no way of crossing the sea, until the Riddlemaster offers them a boat. They must correctly answer seven riddles, from both the Riddlemaster and an assortment of beastly islanders, before they can step onto shore. Although Anouk’s question as to what happens if the children can’t answer one of the riddles goes pointedly unanswered, the children discover that whenever they falter, some of the animals crowd around them, licking their lips and baring their teeth. When the last riddle is asked of the children, they realize the answer is something of which they themselves are a part.

The story is well written, the language rich and layered, hinting at and slowly revealing the true nature of the treasure that awaits the children on the island. The text also makes use of the repetition of key phrases, with elements being added to those phrases as the tension rises. Jorisch’s illustrations — watercolour, gouache, pen and ink — are beautiful, their whimsical quality drawing the reader deep into the journey. While I personally would have enjoyed more clues in the illustrations concerning the importance of “the soaring word tree,” Jorisch’s artwork is wonderfully engaging, his final spread proclaiming there is no reason for real treasure to remain hidden.

28 CANADIAN CHILDREN’S BOOK NEWS SUMMER 2016
First Nation Communities Read &
Periodical Marketers of Canada
CONGRATULATE

Michael Arnott
Illustrator of
Spirit Bear
First Nation Communities Read
2016 – 2017 title selection
AND
winner of the
Aboriginal Literature Award
sponsored by Periodical Marketers of Canada

First Nation Communities Read
Your Go-to Resource for First Nations, Métis and Inuit
Reading Recommended by First Nation Librarians

Vine imagery used with permission from Lisa Bovin, Deninu K’ue of the Northwest Territories
Numerous spirited interactions between the two burst forth. Camilia Kahrizi

Skunk on a String is a wordless picture book by first-time author and illustrator Thao Lam. It follows the adventure of the eponymous skunk, whose leg is tied to a helium balloon and who gets carried across various locations, mostly through a detailed urban setting, with brief jaunts through the sea and desert. It is unclear how the skunk came to be tied to the balloon, but he is visibly distraught as he struggles to get back down on solid ground. A refreshingly diverse cast of background characters try to help the animal as he floats past and reaches out to various people, objects and even an elephant. The skunk encounters a setback each time, however. The elephant, for example, sneezes just as the skunk grabs its trunk. When the skunk finally gets himself back down and lets the balloon fly away, he realizes how much fun he had in the sky and quickly finds a way to get himself back up.

Being wordless, the story is accessible to a wide range of young readers. The book also features clever collage illustrations in bright colours and patterns that expertly move the tale along, which might encourage young readers to try their hand at creating collage narratives of their own. With its light and funny story, Skunk on a String is certain to get laughs out of kids of all ages.

Camilia Kahrizi

Tiger and Badger is best friends... most of the time. When they aren’t, they argue a lot over a variety of issues, be it possessions, snacks or even which one of the two is the greater companion. Somehow the bickering and physical altercations largest to smallest, mostly through a detailed urban setting, with brief jaunts through the sea and desert. It is unclear how the skunk came to be tied to the balloon, but he is visibly distraught as he struggles to get back down on solid ground. A refreshingly diverse cast of background characters try to help the animal as he floats past and reaches out to various people, objects and even an elephant. The skunk encounters a setback each time, however. The elephant, for example, sneezes just as the skunk grabs its trunk. When the skunk finally gets himself back down and lets the balloon fly away, he realizes how much fun he had in the sky and quickly finds a way to get himself back up.

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Tiger and Badger are best friends... most of the time. When they aren’t, they argue a lot over a variety of issues, be it possessions, snacks or even which one of the two is the greater companion. Somehow the bickering and physical altercations eventually resolve themselves and all is well with the world — until their next quarrel.

Numerous spirited interactions between the two burst forth in Emily Jenkins’ text: “You’re not my best friend anymore!” says Badger. “No, you’re not my best friend anymore!” says Tiger. “No, you’re not my best friend anymore!” says Badger. “Fine.” Stormy outbursts as well as congenial exchanges are the hallmark of this alliance. Fun to read aloud, this picture book depicts childhood friendship in its many guises.

Marie-Louise Gay’s illustrations, completed in watercolour, acrylic ink, acrylic paint and pencil, depict Tiger and Badger with panache, humour and charm. Her attention to detail, right down to a scribbled black cloud that hovers over the protagonists’ heads when they are feeling frustrated, will delight young readers as they further explore the ups and downs of friendship as well as the art of compromise.

Senta Ross

Tiger and Badger

written by Emily Jenkins
illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay
Candlewick Press, 2016
978-0-7636-6604-0 (hc) $21.00
for Preschool to Grade 1

Picture Book | Friendship | Compromise

Skunk on a String

written and illustrated by Thao Lam
Owlkids Books, 2016
978-1-77147-131-2 (hc) $18.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Picture Book | Animals | Collage

Toshi’s Little Treasures begins with Toshi’s grandmother giving him a new backpack to fill with all the treasures he collects on their walks. The story follows them as they go on an exploratory adventure through six different places: the riverbank, the town, the forest, the country, the park and the beach. Along the way, they observe and collect all sorts of treasures, such as a dragonfly wing, a guitar pick and a crocus bulb.

Toshi’s Little Treasures is reminiscent of Richard Scarry’s Best Word Book Ever, but with a scientific bent. Each location has a full spread, with objects and livings things identified within that setting, but there is also an interactive element. Each spread is followed by a page where Toshi’s collected treasures are laid out, with the opposing page displaying a corresponding match for each piece (e.g., a guitar for the guitar pick). It’s up to the reader to match them together. The final pages of the book contain all the answers, and offer short facts about the treasures.

Aki’s minimalist illustrations make for beautiful spreads that will be appealing to children, and Nadine Robert’s simple text and narrative provide an engaging context. The book provides younger readers with a great introduction to scientific exploration and curiosity, and will likely inspire them to go on a treasure hunt in their own environment — an easy but rewarding activity to plan after reading the book.

Also available in the original French as Le grand livre des petits trésors (Comme des géants, 2015).

Camilia Kahrizi

Toshi’s Little Treasures

written by Nadine Robert
illustrated by Aki
translated by Yvette Ghione
Kids Can Press, 2016
978-1-77138-573-2 (hc) $18.95
978-1-77138-713-2 (eBook) $9.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Scientific Exploration |

Collections | Natural Environments

Zoomberry

written by Dennis Lee
illustrated by Dušan Petričić
978-1-44345-567-2 (eBook) $9.99
978-1-44341-166-0 (board book) $12.99
for Preschool to Grade 1

Board Book | Poetry | Bedtime

At bedtime, a young boy calls upon a wizard in the night sky to teach him the secret of how to fly. This wizard, a cantankerous character, reluctantly agrees to share his secret spell: “ZOOMBERRY, ZOOMBERRY, ZOOMBERRY PIE: / ZOOMBERRY, ZOOMBERRY, / NOW I CAN FLY.” The lad shouts out the chant numerous times without success, only to be scolded by the wizard: “You have to say it softly, / You have to say it slow, / You have to whisper it at night / As off to sleep you go...” What happens next will surprise and amuse readers.

This rollicking board book is loads of fun! Celebrated poet Dennis Lee’s catchy verses, accompanied by Dušan Petričić’s
Feathered
written by Deborah Kerbel
Kids Can Press, 2016
978-1-77138-341-7 (hc) $16.95
978-1-77138-681-4 (eBook) $5.99
for Grades 4 to 8
Fiction | Loss | Bullying | Racism |
Learning Difficulties | Mental Health

Eleven-year-old Finch is struggling. Her father died of cancer last year, and her mother’s depression has removed her emotionally from the family. Her brother and his unsettling new friend, Matt, bully her constantly; she’s back in class with the meanest teacher in school; and her best friend has dropped Finch for the popular kids, leaving her alone and lonely. One day, Finch writes a message on the wall of the girls’ bathroom: I want to disappear (sic). Surprisingly, the next day there is a response waiting for her: Don’t.

Things start to look up with the arrival of the Nandas, a new family who move in next door. Finch is especially intrigued by their eldest daughter and, over time, the two become friends. Pinky Nanda has a restrictive and controlling father; that and the family’s Hindu faith mark her as an outsider, just like Finch. The two girls have differing family situations, but find common ground in Laura Ingalls and hopscotch, and eventually their friendship gives both of them the confidence to stand up for themselves. This is crucial at the end of the book when Pinky’s father makes a decision that affects everyone in some way.

In this her sixth book, Kerbel gives us the story of a young girl who struggles to find her path when those who are supposed to guide her aren’t there. While the book touches on issues of grief, bullying, child carers and custody abductions, it doesn’t feel overwhelming. Kerbel’s deft hand allows the story to unfold gradually, and for Finch to respond as a normal 11-year-old. In this setting of the early 1980s, there is no Internet to consult, no school anti-bullying policy in place and no helpline to call. Finch must find her own solutions to her mounting problems.

Feathered is engaging and moving in equal measures, and many readers will empathize with the character’s feelings of loneliness and awkwardness. Finch is a realistically portrayed protagonist who senses when things are not all right, but lacks the experience to figure out why. An unsettling series of encounters with her brother’s best friend is resolved rather easily in the big picture, but the encounter allows Finch to demonstrate her loyalty toward her friend and her own bravery. While Finch’s fear and anxiety cause her to want to fly away, it is her connection with Pinky that teaches her that she can fly just as high with her feet planted firmly on the ground.

Jenn Hubbs is a reviewer, bookseller and librarian.
The Girl in the Well Is Me
written by Karen Rivers
Dancing Cat Books, 2016
978-1-77086-464-1 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 4 to 8

Fiction | Family | Friendship | Betrayal | Confidence

Kammie Summers has fallen into a well during an “initiation” into a club whose members have no intention of letting her join. Trapped in the dark, unable to move and running out of oxygen, Kammie waits, wondering whether or not she will be rescued. As the hours pass, the reality of her situation mixes with the highlights and the lowlights of her life, including the reason that her family moved to the town in the first place. Gradually, a picture emerges of a girl struggling to make sense of her misfortunes and tragedies, while coming to some eventual conclusions about family, friendship and the importance of being true to herself.

Told in a stream-of-consciousness monologue while trapped in the well, Kammie’s stories are funny, moving and, at times, heart-breakingly sad. They are stories of her friendship with an elderly neighbour, missing her father, watching her mother struggle and her desperation to fit in with the popular girls, whose names all end in “andy.” As Kammie unknowingly begins to lose consciousness from lack of oxygen, she begins to hallucinate, and is visited by zombie goats and a French-speaking coyote.

Kammie is sympathetic, realistic and likeable, and readers will be kept on the edge of their seats wondering whether or not the girls actually went for help, and if she’ll be found and rescued in time. The pacing is perfect, and the author deftly uses the passing of time to build suspense. She also tackles some tough issues such as betrayal, guilt, shame and finding the strength to overcome and move on without being judgmental or preachy. Overall, this is a highly unique and entertaining novel that will stick with readers and give them lots of food for thought.

Rachel Seigel is Sales and Selection Strategist at EduCan Media.

Half-Truths and Brazen Lies: An Honest Look at Lying
written by Kira Vermond
illustrated by Clayton Hanmer
Owlkids Books, 2016
978-1-77147-146-6 (hc) $17.95
for Grades 4 to 6

Non-fiction | Lying | Morals | Truthfulness | Falsehood | Honesty | Trust

Kira Vermond’s Half-Truths and Brazen Lies isn’t just a clever, entertaining and engaging book that playfully explores the question, why do we lie? It’s all those things (really), but it’s also a book that asks readers to think about the way that, weird as it sounds, telling lies is actually an important aspect of how society functions. And there’s a lot more to telling lies (or telling the truth) than we think. By taking a chatty conversational tone, offering an array of fascinatingly wacky facts and cool scientific data, she’s able to tackle this deeply profound philosophical question and some of the reasons why we love to lie.

Part of what makes this book work is that Vermond asks the right kinds of questions, and it’s clear that she wants her readers to seriously consider some very complex social issues that range from the different kinds of lies we tell to whether or not our lies hurt other people and whether there might even be times when it is better to tell a lie than the truth. Vermond isn’t suggesting that cheating, forgery, fabrication or plagiarism aren’t morally wrong, but asks her readers to consider when it might be okay to stretch the truth or tell a little white lie. She offers us portraits of some of the great liars in history; talks about the kinds of lies adults tell; looks at the way that different cultures view lies and lying — did you know that Canadian kids have a very different way of looking at lying than Chinese children do? — and whether or not it’s possible to spot a lie. Hoaxes, cons, urban legends, advertisements and a whole bunch of lie-detecting gadgets are just some of the topics she discusses.

Clayton Hanmer’s comic illustrations not only add to the fun but nicely extend Vermond’s text; his pictures will make young readers laugh but also get them to think about some of the serious issues that Vermond raises.

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

The Inn Between
written by Marina Cohen
illustrated by Sarah Watts
Roaring Brook Press, 2016
978-1-62672-202-6 (hc) $19.50
for Grades 4 to 7

Fiction | Horror | Mystery | Grief | Friendship

Eleven-year-old Quinn and Kara have been best friends forever. With Kara’s family relocating a thousand miles away, Quinn is accompanying them as they move. Checking into an isolated desert hotel, Quinn feels uneasy, noting strange guests and vacuous staff with names like Aides and Persephone. Rooms are tailor-made for each guest, but there is no means of outside communication. When Kara’s parents and brother disappear, the girls uncover numerous horrors, putting themselves in grave danger as they search for them. Adding to Quinn’s tension is her sense that Emma, her missing sister, is here. In a dramatic finale, they come to understand the reality of the ‘Inn Between.’

With its readable text and terrifying components, this macabre spine-chiller makes for a tense read. A fast-paced plot unerringly moves the reader from one frightening episode to another. Only the authenticity of the girls’ friendship is an island of normalcy that is well characterized, as is their dialogue. The desert atmosphere and apparently safe, but ultimately hair-raising, Victorian hotel, with its quirks and mysteries, are eerily portrayed. More subtle is the emotional component of Quinn’s guilt regarding her missing sister, skillfully interwoven into the story through various grief-stricken flashbacks.

It is tempting to rush through this book in one’s eagerness to know what happens. However, to do so runs the risk of one’s missing out on many metaphorical aspects that ultimately give the book and the ending significance and clarity. Lovers of mystery and horror should add this to their must-read list.

Aileen Wortley is a retired librarian living in Toronto.
**Lucky Jonah**

Written by Richard Scrimger

HarperTrophy Canada, 2016

978-1-44341-071-7 (pb) $14.99

978-1-44341-073-1 (eBook) $11.99

For Grades 4 to 6

Fiction | Bullying | Self-Esteem | Friendships |

Family Relationships | Siblings | Coming Out | LGBTQ Issues | Identity

Thirteen-year-old Jonah is the ultimate outsider at school and at home, the target for his older brother’s merciless bullying and his father’s constant criticism. He’s geeky, awkward and desperately lonely. He has one friend, the school’s star athlete, Magnus, who tolerates his bad jokes and obvious hero worship because Jonah rescued him from being bullied when they were little kids, but he doesn’t imagine for a moment that Jonah might secretly have a crush on him. But everything changes when Jonah’s given a disposable camera that, with a click, transports him into the body of the person he’s just photographed. Jonah gets to try out being his buddy Magnus, Magnus’s girlfriend, a toddler and a kid who lives in a group home, who he thinks might like him as more than just a friend, before he discovers that maybe being Jonah isn’t so bad.

Richard Scrimger shows once again what a deft hand he has as he poignantly explores the serious emotional trauma that Jonah faces, bullied and isolated at home and school, with the delicious humour that has become his stylistic trademark so that readers will both understand the complexity of Jonah’s world but not be overwhelmed by its roller-coaster emotional ups and downs. His portrait of Jonah is drawn with great empathy and understanding, but the camera is also a fabulous device that allows Jonah to have a sense of the difficulties other people have in making their way through the world, including his bullying older brother. Scrimger also handles the question of Jonah’s sexuality and Magnus’s homophobia very sensitively.

*Lucky Jonah* is both smart and funny and a very satisfying middle grade read.

Jeffrey Canton

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**OCDaniel**

Written by Wesley King

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016

978-1-4814-5531-2 (hc) $22.99

978-1-4814-5533-6 (eBook) $11.99

For Grades 4 to 8

Fiction | Mental Illness | Mystery | Fitting In

Daniel is the back-up punter (a.k.a. water boy) for the Eerie Hills Elephants. He spends most of his time hoping that no one notices his strange habits, which he calls Zaps, and which he’s convinced make him crazy. His life gets even weirder when an odd girl at school nicknamed “Psycho Sara” notices him for the first time. Then Daniel gets a note: “I need your help,” it says, signed, Fellow Star child. And suddenly, Daniel, a total no one at school, is swept up in a mystery that might change everything for him.

In a departure from his previous fantasy/sci-fi novels, author Wesley King has created a moving and powerful story about a
13-year-old boy’s struggle to be normal. For the most part, Daniel does a good job of hiding his compulsions from his parents and his friends, but the effort and the rituals are exhausting, often keeping him without sleep for hours each night. In every other way he is like other boys his age. He wants to make his father proud, attract the attention of a pretty, popular girl in school and fit in.

Drawing from his own experiences with anxiety disorder, King does an excellent job of creating a relatable and sympathetic character in Daniel while gently educating readers about the severity of the disorder. With humour and sensitivity, King sheds light on the stigmas that surround people who suffer from mental illness while never letting the story feel too bogged down with issues. The murder-mystery subplot, while seemingly a diversion, also reminds readers that there is always more to the story than what might immediately present itself.

Entertaining, intriguing and completely absorbing, the book gives kids a hero in Daniel, and will hopefully start them thinking differently about what normal actually means.

Rachel Seigel

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Passover: Festival of Freedom
(Orca Origins)
written by Monique Polak
Orca Book Publishers, 2016
978-1-4598-0992-5 (eBook) $24.95
for Grades 4 to 7

With freedom an all-encompassing theme, this title, first in the Orca Origins series, covers a bounty of information on Passover. It describes the festival’s origin, when Moses led his people from slavery to freedom. It includes practical aspects of the celebrations, including rituals of the Seder meal. Holocaust survivors eloquently share memories of Passover before, during and after their concentration camp experiences. There is an emphasis on the social, sharing responsibilities associated with Passover and, equally, fascinating, the manner in which different countries celebrate the festival. A glossary of words relating to the holiday and a bibliography, including websites, are included.

As a non-observant Jew, the author was herself on a journey of discovery as she researched this material. With her convivial, chatty writing style, the material is easily absorbed, and the richness of the culture and festival shine through. Facts are augmented and enriched by the narratives of many participants, the most touching being those of elderly Ben Younger and Liselotte Ivery, who bear testimony as “witnesses of history.” Many sidebars, drawings, recipes and photos (stock and personal), enable speedy assimilation of information by casual readers, despite the rather too small captions.

The author, a Montreal resident, gives the book a very Canadian ambience while at the same time reflecting the customs and rituals of Passover in other countries, even those not known for their Jewish populations. Undoubtedly, the book will encourage much discussion and sharing of religious traditions and will be a welcome and highly readable addition to various library collections.

Aileen Wortley

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Flannery
written by Lisa Moore
Groundwood Books, 2016
978-1-55498-076-5 (hc) $18.95
978-1-55498-873-0 (eBook) $16.95
for Grades 8 to 10

Flannery’s problems are ones that teens can relate to: a best friend who loses her personality to keep a boyfriend, a mom on welfare who can’t focus on bills and a crush on a cool boy who doesn’t care for her. The story begins with a class assignment, but she’s paired with the frequently truant Tyrone O’Rourke, the boy of her dreams.

The synopsis states the book is about love, but Flannery is not
specifically about teen love. It’s about parental love, friendship and the sort of love that comes from having a sense of self-worth.

The class assignment to create a love potion falls far into the background and doesn’t have any use as a plot device to move the story in any given direction. The real story is found in Flannery’s strength in how she deals with increasing isolation from her boyfriend-obsessed best friend, and life choices made by her mom and herself.

Teen girls can relate to the heroine’s grief at watching a best friend choose someone unworthy but popular, and realize her mad crush is just using her for his own needs. The language is real, and the scenarios are all too familiar to anyone who remembers adolescence. Written for mid-to-late high school girls who may want to ask themselves what love really means: does having a boyfriend mean losing one’s own personality traits?

Teachers may use the book to talk about recognizing the difference between flattery and respect.

Naomi Szeben is a Toronto-based writer and blogger.
nosis session, Mr. Cecil’s forbidden personal residence, the looming tongueless servant, Mongo, and, finally, the terrifyingly sentient scorpion-hornets.

Slade masterfully builds suspense, playing on the sense of unnatural malevolence that he weaves through the story. The closer Beatrice gets to the truth, the more chilling the implications. Who is the fatherly yet shadowy and menacing Mr. Cecil? What does he really want with Isabelle and Beatrice? And what about the world of movies in which we lose ourselves? Are they a reflection of our world or a window onto other realities?

This is a read-under-the-sheets-with-a-flashlight kind of book, and many young readers will stay up well past lights out, eager to follow Beatrice down the rabbit hole as she discovers the terrifying truth about her life.

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

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**The Dark Missions of Edgar Brim**
written by Shane Peacock
Tundra Books, 2016
978-1-77049-698-9 (hc) $21.99
978-1-77049-700-9 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 7 and up

Fiction | Horror | Bullying | Fear | Monsters

Nine-year-old Edgar Brim has been tormented by night terrors his whole life. When his horror novelist father passes away, in a most bizarre fashion, he is sent to London to live with his mother’s best friend, Annabel Thorne, and her husband. Mr. Thorne, a very stern and eccentric gentlemen, decides it is best to send Edgar away to The College on the Moors in Scotland, where the headmaster assures him they will “make a man” of the child as the rod and the whip are not spared.

At school, Edgar tries to keep to himself and avoid confrontation, but he is still bullied and ridiculed by the other boys. He eventually makes a friend in Tiger, a classmate whose mysterious past has Edgar puzzled but who becomes Edgar’s most important ally. A few years later, when Edgar is back at the ‘Thorres’ for the holidays, he finds his father’s journal and discovers that Professor Lear, from the college, may have known his father. Intrigued and determined to confront both the demons in his nightmares and his bullies, Edgar becomes involved in a strange society that believes monsters from literature, like Grendel from Beowulf and the child-eating witch, Baba Yaga, are real. Together with Professor Lear, his grandchildren and Tiger, Edgar embarks on a dark mission to discover the truth.

In this first book of his new Gothic trilogy, Shane Peacock captivates us with a story so chilling you won’t want to enter the world of dreams after reading it. Set in the late 19th century on the bleak Scottish moors and in eerie old London, this tale will keep you intrigued and horrified at the same time, with an ending that will have you anxiously checking the library or bookstore shelves for the second instalment.

Sandra O’Brien is a former teacher with an M.Ed. in Children’s Literature.

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**Don’t Tell, Don’t Tell, Don’t Tell**
written by Liane Shaw
Second Story Press, 2016
978-1-92758-395-1 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 7 and up

Fiction | Asperger’s Syndrome | Sexual Assault | Friendship | Bullying | Self-Esteem

Frederick is used to being considered strange by the other kids at school. He only wears shirts with buttons, he prefers math to social occasions and he values quiet and routine above all else. He hides his intelligence from most until the day Angel Martinez enters his life. Over time, Angel declares that they are friends, and friends don’t share secrets. This isn’t a problem, until the day Angel goes missing, and Frederick is the only one who might know where she’s gone.

The story is told as a dual narrative — first by Frederick and later by Angel — and each point of view is an authentic representation of each character. Frederick’s anxiety and confusion regarding his promise to Angel lead him to make some unusual decisions, and he eventually strikes out on his own to find her. Angel’s voice is less assured than Frederick’s and reveals the real reason for her disappearance: a disturbing attempted sexual assault at a party that Angel worries will ruin her reputation. At times, they seem to be two sides of the same coin, providing much-needed insight for the other. Shaw does an excellent job of giving us two lost and somewhat lonely individuals who benefit from their unusual companionship.

While it may initially appear that Angel is the more outgoing of the two characters, it quickly becomes apparent that Frederick is more comfortable within himself. He accepts what others might see as eccentricities related to his Asperger’s diagnosis as logical extensions of his own thoughts. Frederick is able to view his bullies dispassionately and handles social encounters in his own indomitable way. He likes his life, and the reader soon begins to question what ‘normal’ might mean. Angel also questions social conventions, noting that some of the most confident girls in school are also the meanest. “Maybe it’s better to have lower self-esteem and a nicer personality,” she observes.

Angel and Frederick may be brought together by their outsider status, but their friendship develops into something much more than either could have anticipated. They provide much-needed balance for each other and, in doing so, rewrite some of the rules around friendship, normality and acceptance.

Jenn Hubbs
**The Hill**

written by Karen Bass  
Pajama Press, 2016  
978-1-77278-002-4 (pb) $14.95  
for Grades 7 and up

Fiction | Horror | Supernatural | Wilderness Survival |  
Friendships | Family Relationships | First Nations | Cree Mythology | Adventure

When the private jet that Jared is aboard crashes in Northern Alberta, Jared is “rescued” by a Cree teenager who’s spending the summer with his grandparents and younger brother at their summer camp. The plane’s pilot is badly injured and there seems to be no way for Jared to make contact with the outside world, his computer smashed beyond repair and his cellphone without reception. There’s a big hill nearby, and Jared is sure that if they can just get to the top, he’ll get a signal, but Kyle warns Jared that climbing that hill is dangerous. His Kookum, his grandmother, has warned Kyle to stay away from the hill; it is haunted by evil spirits. But Jared won’t listen and, having mounted the summit, the boys suddenly find themselves in an alternative reality faced with a Windigo, a cannibalistic evil spirit that begins to pursue them through the wilderness. And this is not just any Windigo, but the Wîhtiko.

Karen Bass has created a riveting novel that beautifully blends a fast-paced adventure with a wonderfully creepy horror story, using First Nations’ mythology to tie the two stories together. What is particularly striking is not only the way that Bass weaves the cannibal-hunting Wîhtiko into the story but also the one mythological figure who has defeated this creature, Wesakechak, the Cree trickster, who helps the teens out. Bass not only makes readers see the limitations of settler society’s understanding of First Nations’ cultures and traditions but she also allows her First Nations teenager to learn something from his interaction with Jared. *The Hill* is a novel about making connections, finding ways to work together and be mutually respectful in terms of interpersonal relationships and different cultures. That the novel is also deliciously creepy is even better. Bass provides readers with a glimpse into how she approached using Cree mythology in an excellent author’s note.

Jeffrey Canton

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**Hunting for the Mississippi**

written by Camille Bouchard  
translated by Peter McCambridge  
Baraka Books, 2016  
978-1-77186-072-7 (pb) $19.95  
for Grades 7 and up

Historical Fiction | Explorers |  
Cavelier de la Salle | Family Relationships | First Nations | Settlers | Expeditions

Twelve-year-old Eustache Bréman and his mother are very excited to join the Cavelier de la Salle’s expedition to the French territory of Louisiana in the summer of 1684, though anxious as well, leaving behind everything that’s familiar for the utterly unknown. De la Salle plans to set up a colony at the foot of the Mississippi River, which he “discovered” during an earlier voyage, and it is certainly a great adventure. But for Eustache and his mother, it’s also a chance to escape from the filth and poverty that was their life in France, a life also marred by the tragic deaths of Eustache’s father and little brother. But almost from the beginning things go wrong — there are tensions between de la Salle and his officers and between the officers, sailors and passengers. And once they arrive in the New World, it’s clear that de la Salle isn’t quite as sure about where the Mississippi is as he’d thought. Relations between the French and the First Nations people aren’t easy either. Everyday life is harder than they ever expected, and Eustache wonders if joining de la Salle might have been a terrible mistake.

Camille Bouchard brings alive this ultimately tragic expedition led by de la Salle to the bayous of the Gulf Coast in his powerful recreation of the world of the French explorers and their followers. It’s a novel that undercuts ideas of the “grand adventure” that is too often taught in history books and focuses on the back-breaking hard work, the sense of constant uncertainty and the overwhelming physical and emotional difficulties faced by these early settlers. He does a particularly good job of making his readers feel how isolated the settlers were in this wilderness and doesn’t shy away from the very real traumas that were a part of the settler experience. He’s also very frank about the difficulties of relations between the explorers and the range of First Nations people that they encounter. This is not an easy novel — there’s a menacing violence that is made manifest in the murder of de la Salle and some of his officers as well as the ongoing brutal treatment of women and girls by the sailors — but it’s a novel that is extremely satisfying because it tells the truth.

Jeffrey Canton

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**Exit, Pursued by a Bear**

written by E.K. Johnston  
Dutton Books for Young Readers, 2016  
978-1-101-99458-0 (hc) $23.99  
978-1-101-99461-0 (eBook) $12.99  
for Grades 9 and up

Fiction | Sexual Violence | Social Issues

Cheerleading captain Hermione Winters is sure she’s ready for her last, big year of high school and for the challenges of moving forward with her life. When she’s drugged and raped at cheer camp, however, her life is irrevocably changed and she is faced with an unexpected new title: victim. Over the course of her senior year, Hermione struggles to take back control of her life and to move forward. With the support of her best friend, Polly, her parents, her coach and other adults around her, Hermione begins to make her own decisions about something that wasn’t her fault. The assault wasn’t the beginning of her story and she refuses to let it define her.

There are many YA books that deal with issues of consent, of sexual violence against young women, our current rape culture and the repercussions of rape within a community. Like many of these books, Johnston’s latest novel gives us a young woman who is faced with the aftermath of a rape that changes her life. Where it may differ is that *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* is an authentic portrayal of sexual violence against a young woman who refuses to let said violence dictate her life, and who finds the support she needs to move forward.
Johnston has referred to this book as her “fantasy novel.” The teen victim of rape is believed and supported, and she is able to access the resources she needs in order to make decisions about her future. This is a powerful and moving “what if” story: what if something terrible happened, but then everything went right? The tragedy is that Johnston’s world should be the norm for every Hermione instead of the fantasy. This won’t be an easy read for everyone, but it’s a book that deserves to be read, discussed and debated by adults and teens alike.

Jenn Hubbs

**Fifteen Lanes**
written by S.J. Laidlaw
Tundra Books, 2016
978-1-101-91780-0 (hc) $21.99
978-1-101-91782-4 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 9 and up

**Fiction | Prostitution | Self Harm | AIDS | Poverty | India | Family | Friendship**

In Mumbai’s red-light district, women sold into prostitution ply their trade four to a room, while children like Noor hide below the beds. Through Noor’s eyes, we live her daily struggle in rat-infested squalor and her eagerness for education as a means to avoid her mother’s fate. Across town, Grace, an affluent, vulnerable teen and misfit at school, struggles with loneliness. A mistaken trust, born of desperation, results in her topless photo going viral. Alternating her voice with Noor’s, Grace reveals her hopelessness and self-harming attempts. The girls meet at a volunteer centre where, despite disparate backgrounds, they become friends.

Both major and minor characters in this original, beautifully crafted book inevitably take residence in the reader’s head. Noor’s resilience, her fierce, loving determination for her family, especially for her AIDS-infected brother and mother, are sterling. So is her dedication to learning — her path to freedom. The author, a volunteer in Mumbai, knows this world first-hand. Her skill reveals it to others, albeit with glimpses of hope and humanity probably rare for actual residents.

Grace is initially seen as weak and vacillating, her problems trivial compared to Noor’s life-and-death issues. But her story is developed compassionately. Grace matures before our eyes as her friendships with Vijay and Noor expand her world and give her purpose. Despite their contrasting lives, both situations resonate and interweave effortlessly.

Revealing lives hard to imagine, this book is not for the timid but nor are the lives it is based on. This is a compelling read, simultaneously tragic and inspiring.

Aileen Wortley

**Shooter**
written by Caroline Pignat
Razorbill Canada, 2016
978-0-14-318757-8 (hc) $22.99
978-0-14-319694-5 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 8 to 12

**Fiction | Social Situations | Violence | Friendship | Peer Pressure**

Five teens end up trapped in a boys’ washroom when a lockdown is called at their high school. An unlikely combination of personalities, their initial uneasiness with each other gives way to increasing panic when they discover that it is not a drill; someone with a gun is in the building. As they wait, they each contemplate (internally and sometimes aloud) the events in their own lives that have brought them to this point, and they surprise themselves with the things they reveal to one another as well as the things that they begin to perceive about each other. Then they learn the truth about the shooter’s intentions, and they realize with shocking clarity that they must somehow prevent him from bringing to fruition the plans he has set in motion.

The tension is high in this riveting psychological drama, but the gradual unfolding of each teen’s individual story helps keep the pace measured and deliberate. Each chapter is told from the viewpoint of one of the five characters. Through texts and journal entries as well as their verbal exchanges, their respective stories emerge against the backdrop of this mounting drama. Pignat masterfully allows the characters to emerge as complex, multi-faceted individuals whose lives intersect in this most intense and unexpected way.

As we get to know them and become invested in their stories, the reality of the situation that is playing out becomes even more tragic. As they desperately race against the clock to prevent a gruesome climax, the author creates a certain sense of tragic inevitability as it all unfolds, and yet provides a stunning conclusion. She also gives the reader much to reflect on in terms of how quickly everyone (including the media) leaps to conclusions and seeks people to blame in the face of tragedy. While Caroline Pignat is known for her award-winning historical fiction, her latest work is an enthralling contemporary drama that allows much room for contemplation.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager of Woozles in Halifax.
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Esta Spalding, Sydney Smith

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Mahtab Narsimhan

Root Beer Candy and Other Miracles
Shari Green

Sea Change
Frank Viva

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Buddy and Earl (Buddy and Earl, Book 1)
Maureen Fergus, Carey Sookocheff

Buddy and Earl Go Exploring (Buddy and Earl, Book 2)
Maureen Fergus, Carey Sookocheff

The Dark Missions of Edgar Brim
Shane Peacock

Don’t Tell, Don’t Tell, Don’t Tell
Liane Shaw

Exit, Pursued by a Bear
E.K. Johnson

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S.J. Laidlaw

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