LGBTQ2+ Literature for Canadian Kids

ROBIN STEVENSON
Writing her Way to a Better World

BOOKMARK!
A Gift Giving Guide

REVIEWS OF 40 BOOKS
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We acknowledge the support of Ontario Creates.
Welcome to our final issue of 2019. It’s hard to believe another year has flown by, but here I sit on a cold and blustery fall day thinking that winter might just be around the corner. I hope you’ve enjoyed our articles and reviews over the course of the year and hope you’ll find this issue, in which we’ve focused on LGBTQ2+ literature, an interesting read too.

Kirsti Granholm, an intern at the CCBC this past summer, chats with Robin Stevenson about her career and the reason she writes books that focus on inclusion and diversity, LGBTQ2+ and women’s rights. Having written and published over 25 books for children of all ages, Robin’s work has been highly regarded, winning her many nominations and awards. Kirsti asks Robin why she tackles tough subjects in her work, who she’s been inspired by and what the future holds.

Emma Hunter, the CCBC’s Marketing and Communications Coordinator, tells us about growing up with a lack of LGBTQ2+ titles in her life and how that made it hard to find herself and others like her in the literature she was reading. Today she’s happy to report that there are many more titles available to kids and teens who are looking to find representation of the LGBTQ2+ community in Canadian kids’ lit. Emma recommends some of her favourite LGBTQ2+ titles from picture books to YA literature in her article.

From bookstore managers to librarians and professors, Marylynn Miller Oke had an enlightening conversation with six experts in the field of LGBTQ2+ literature to see how things have changed over the last few years. Thankfully literature that includes more diverse characters is on the rise, but we still have a way to go say our experts. Be sure to have a read and see what they have to say.

We’d also like to introduce you to Abdi Nazemian in our “Keep Your Eye On…” column; help you discover great books for gift giving in our “Bookmark!” list chosen by booksellers across Canada; and hope you’ll enjoy our reviews in our “We Recommend” section.

Here’s to a more peaceful world in 2020!

Sandra O’Brien
If there is one Canadian children’s author we can all learn from, it is Robin Stevenson. Throughout her career, she has written and published over 25 books for children of all ages. Robin’s work has been highly regarded, winning the Silver Birch Award for her novel *Record Breaker*. She is also a four-time BC Book Prize finalist, as well as a finalist for the Governor General’s Literary Award for her book *A Thousand Shades of Blue*. Robin has worked tirelessly, dedicating her career to inclusion and diversity, while exploring LGBTQ2+ and women’s rights in her work. I had the opportunity to talk with Robin about who inspires her, her love of literature and what she is working on next.

You have written a number of impressive award-winning books throughout your career. How did you begin writing with the intention of publishing?

Actually, I didn’t really begin with the intention of publishing at all! When my kid (who is now 15) was a baby, I started writing just for fun. I kept a notebook under the stroller and would just walk around until he fell asleep and then I’d sit down and write. I wrote some short stories, and what I thought might be a draft of a children’s book, and then one short story about two teenagers grew until it was the length of a young adult novel. Someone suggested I send it to Orca Book Publishers, so I did. Luckily, it landed on the desk of an editor who liked my writing and before I knew it I had two contracts — one for the children’s book, which became *Impossible Things*, and one for the YA novel, which became *Out of Order*. Those two came out in 2007 and 2008. I was in love with fiction and I didn’t want to leave my kid to return to social work full-time so I just kept on writing instead.

You write LGBTQ2+ books, do school visits and have a resource page on your website for those who identify within the LGBTQ2+ community. Why is it important for you to have these open, educational conversations with children, parents and teachers?

Well, I’m queer, and I went to school during a time when we didn’t have these conversations at all. There wasn’t great literature for LGBTQ2+ kids and teens. Most of us didn’t even have the language that would have made it so much easier to talk about these subjects, to understand our own identities, to find community. And of course, it isn’t just important for LGBTQ2+ kids and teens; I think all children, parents and teachers need to be aware of LGBTQ2+ issues. Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are still common and they hurt people. So, it is up to all of us to challenge that and to change that. I think we should all be committed to being supportive and inclusive and to continue to fight for equality — and it is easier to do that work if you have access to resources.

*Pride Colors* is the first board book dedicated to Pride that I have noticed on the shelves. What inspired you to create it?

In 2016, I published a non-fiction book about pride (*PRIDE: Celebrating Diversity & Community*), and as a result, I have spent a lot of time over past three years talking to young people about LGBTQ2+ issues. I talk to a lot of kids who are afraid that if they come out as gay, or bi or lesbian or trans that their parents won’t support them or will be angry or disappointed.

“So, I think kids need to hear from the people that love them that it is okay for them to be themselves and to love who they love.”
So, I think kids need to hear from the people that love them that it’s okay for them to be themselves and to love who they love. Our teens and our older kids need to hear that, of course — but there is no age that is too young to begin giving your kids that message. So, I wrote this board book, *Pride Colors*, for the very youngest kids.

I also wanted to write a book that included photos of families with same-sex parents. My kid has two moms, and when he was a baby, there were no books like this at all. One of my favourite reader reviews online is from a mom whose toddler calls it the “Mommy Cuddles Book” because it has a photo of a baby being hugged by two women.

I hope people who are allies to the LGBTQ2+ community will find that this book gives them an easy way to be inclusive in how they talk about families with their kids. And I hope that parents reading it to their kids will think about the message as they say the words. We don’t know who our babies will grow up to be, but we can all commit to loving and supporting them as they grow older and find their own paths in the world.

**Who is one author, illustrator or creative individual you can think of that inspired you while growing up?**

I have two that come to mind — L.M. Montgomery, for *Emily of New Moon*, and Louise Fitzhugh, for *Harriet the Spy*. Both Emily and Harriet were characters I related to very strongly, for different reasons — and both were girls who loved to write.

**Where do you see your career heading in the future? Would you consider writing books for older audiences or are you planning on sticking to children’s literature?**

I very much enjoy writing for all ages. I started out writing short fiction for adults, fell into teen fiction when one of my short stories about teen girls turned into a novel, and then branched out into middle grade novels, early chapter books, non-fiction and, most recently, picture books and board books.

I’ll probably keep writing for young readers of various ages but I don’t plan far ahead — I just write what I feel like writing. I find both fiction and non-fiction very rewarding, but in completely different ways. With fiction, I love the feeling of immersing myself in a world I created, of getting to know the characters and seeing them come to life, of being surprised by the twists and turns the story takes. And with non-fiction, I love researching topics I’m passionate about and I love meeting people who share those passions. I’ve learned so much and made connections with people all around the world — it has changed and enriched my life in a lot of ways.

As far as older audiences… I have actually been working on an adult mystery novel on and off over the past couple of years. I am having a lot of fun with it, but it keeps getting put on the back burner as I focus on various projects for young readers. I would like to finish it and do some more writing for adults eventually — but I don’t think I’ll ever stop writing for kids.

**What inspires you to tackle tough subjects in your books?**

I write about subjects that are important to me and that I think are important to kids and teens — and I write about subjects that I think we don’t talk enough about. Kids and teens are smart, and curious and interested in the world around them and they need access to clear, accurate information about all kinds of things. I often write about LGBTQ2+ issues but I don’t think kids are nearly as likely to see this as a ‘tough subject’ as adults are — young readers don’t even remember a time before marriage equality! Yet when it comes to children’s literature, books about LGBTQ2+ characters and themes are the most likely to be challenged.

Over the past three years, since my book *PRIDE* was released, I have spoken about LGBTQ2+ issues with thousands of kids in schools across Canada and I have had so many conversations that have made me realize, over and over, how important it is for young people to see LGBTQ2+ people in the books they read. It has also underscored how important it is for kids to hear from the people who love them that it is okay for them to be who they are and to love who they love. And there’s no age that’s too young for them to start hearing that — which is why I wrote my board book *Pride Colors* as a message of unconditional love, acceptance and support for the very youngest readers.

For me, writing is a form of activism. It’s one thing I can do to contribute to the work of making our world better, kinder, fairer and more equal.

**Your book *My Body My Choice: The Fight for Abortion Rights* was released at a convenient time considering all the political discussion on abortion, not only in North America but around the world. What is one of the most important points you hope readers take from *My Body My Choice?***

Yes, the release was definitely timely. I started writing this book in early 2017, right after Trump became president, because I was very concerned about what this would mean for the future of reproductive rights in the US and around the world. The pace of change while I was writing was intense — I was rewriting, revising and updating right up until the day the book went off to the printers! I think there are three points that are equally important to me.

First, abortion is a safe, normal and extremely common procedure that has been an essential part of our health care system for decades. I hope the book will start conversations that will help raise awareness about reproductive rights and reduce the silence and stigma still associated with abortion.

Secondly, abortion is part of a much larger conversation about social justice. We can’t address reproductive rights without also talking about how poverty, racism and other factors can affect access.

And finally, I want readers to be aware of the long fight for abortion rights in North America and around the world. This is a fight which is still going on and one that will continue into the foreseeable future — and this generation of young people is going to be a part of that.
How did your studies in philosophy and social work, and your career in counselling, influence your interest in social justice?

I started studying philosophy and then social work because I was already interested in issues of social justice. As a student in the late 80s and early 90s, I was involved with various social justice groups. I was living with a friend who had AIDS, and my experiences related to that — so much fear and ignorance and such intense homophobia — were a major influence. I chose courses that related to my interests, but even in social work I was often frustrated that what I was studying did not adequately address issues of social justice. In fact, my master’s thesis focused on how LGBTQ2+ issues were addressed in social work education (short version, they weren’t).

As a counsellor, I mostly worked with survivors of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse. I saw how poverty limited people’s choices and put them at risk of further violence, how the police responded differently to survivors in ways that were often based on class and race, how the courts re-traumatized people, and how rarely anyone felt that any kind of justice was achieved. But I also saw how resilient people are and learned a lot about how people overcome terrible violence and trauma.

You grew up surrounded by a variety of books. How did this impact your life as a young reader and a future writer?

My parents were, and still are, avid readers. They read to me and my siblings from the time we were babies and they fully supported my love of reading as a child. My mother took me to the library regularly and she went to used book sales and brought home huge cardboard boxes full of books. By the time I was 12 or so, I was still devouring kids’ books (boarding school stories, mysteries and anything about horses) but also reading the books on my parents’ bookshelves — everything from classic sci-fi to non-fiction. Young adult fiction was a much smaller category back then. I read some books aimed at teens (Judy Blume, Paul Zindel, Lois Duncan, etc.) but I don’t remember very many. I think I mostly read a mix of kids’ books and adult books. Despite having access to plenty of books, I loved to read my favourites over and over again. My L.M. Montgomery books fell apart from frequent readings, as did my Madeleine L’Engle books and of course Harriet the Spy. One of L.M. Montgomery’s books, Emily of New Moon, was very important to me. Emily vows that she will someday be an author, and I vividly remember reading that book, at age 10 or so, and making the same vow.

In grade eight, my school had a Hobbit Club and I spent that year writing numerous essays on The Lord of the Rings! I must have read those books at least a dozen times. My parents never judged what I was reading, never criticized my book choices and never censored or limited my reading in any way — and they definitely were great role models for loving reading and making books be a big part of one’s life.

Can you tell us about a project you are working on currently?

I am always working on too many projects at once — but I have two that I am excited to share a bit about here.

I’m currently writing the final photo captions and last-minute updates for a book that will come out in the spring of 2020, PRIDE: The Celebration and the Struggle. It is a second edition, updated and expanded, of my 2016 book PRIDE: Celebrating & Community. It has a lot of new content — including a whole new chapter on activism — and features many wonderful stories that I am really excited to share. The new stories and profiles include a trans girl from Vancouver fighting for support and inclusion at school, a group of teens organizing the first Pride parade in Inuvik and a non-binary teen who started a website to promote LGBTQ2+ books.

Over the last few years, I have been very involved in refugee sponsorship and advocacy — and I wanted to include the challenges faced by LGBTQ2+ refugees in this new book about Pride. So I also wrote about a group of refugees organizing a Pride event in a refugee camp in Kenya and about two gay men who fled danger in Indonesia to start a new life in Canada. That last story also led to another book. It is a picture book called Ghost’s Journey: A Refugee Story and it was published by Rebel Mountain Press. The two gay men who fled Indonesia are called Rainer and Eka and they now live in Vancouver with their cat, Ghost, who travelled to Canada with them.

The story is told from Ghost’s point of view and the illustrations were created from Rainer’s photos of the real Ghost. It is a very gentle story about an issue that is very close to my heart, and I hope it will help raise awareness about LGBTQ2+ human rights and the danger LGBTQ2+ people face in so many countries around the world. I also hope it will raise funds: all my royalties and partial publisher proceeds will support LGBTQ2+ refugees.

As for what’s next... I have a YA novel coming out next spring. It’s called When You Get the Chance and I co-wrote it with Tom Ryan, which was a huge amount of fun. And I am working on a picture book, a middle grade novel and another middle grade non-fiction book — so hopefully I will have a few more books for young readers hitting the shelves over the next couple of years!

If you would like to learn more about Robin and her work, visit her website at robinstevenson.com.

Kirsti Granholm is a writer who currently resides in Thunder Bay, Ontario.
News Roundup

AWARDS, BOOK LAUNCHES, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND THE LATEST NEWS

IN MEMORIAM
Judith (Judy) Tye, 1954–2019

Judy Tye, former Resources Coordinator at the CCBC, passed away on August 9, 2019 after a short battle with lung cancer. Judy is survived by her husband of 45 years, Allan, her daughter Emily Rivers (Wyatt), her grandchildren Delilah and Felix and her son Tristan Tye (Michelle).

Judy was a proud teacher-librarian in the former Lincoln County Board of Education, the East York Board of Education and the Toronto District School Board. She also worked as the Resources Coordinator for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre from 1981-1988, a position that she particularly enjoyed. In 2010, Judy and Allan retired to their favourite city, Stratford, Ontario. During her teaching career, Judy was always active in volunteer work, especially serving on boards of directors for non-profit organizations. She continued her volunteer work during her retirement, most recently serving on the board of the Stratford Symphony Orchestra. During her retirement, Judy also had a business, Judy Tye Arts Management.

There will be no funeral, however, there will be a celebration in the near future. Judy would be extremely pleased to know that any donations made in her name would be to the Stratford Symphony Orchestra on www.canadahelps.org. She was passionate about helping this fine orchestra until the end.

Peter Carver remembers that Judy was already on staff when he arrived at the CCBC in 1981. He recalls, “She was an exuberant, well-informed, dynamic supporter of Canadian children’s books and in a way, she mentored me in the field. We were a pretty energetic team at that time, led by Virginia Davis as the executive director. It was a close-knit team, and it was a privilege to be there at a time in our cultural history when Canadian children’s books were beginning to have an effect on the lives of Canadians, after so many years of our being told that this country had no stories worth passing on to our young people.”

Peter was hired as the publications editor and after being hired on, he discovered that his job also included being the national coordinator of Children’s Book Week — which was a bit of a shock since he’d never done anything like that in his years as a high school teacher of English in the Ottawa area. “Judy was a great encourager, though, as was Virginia, and it was always exciting and fulfilling to plan and see the results of the annual touring of children’s authors and illustrators across the country,” says Peter.

Housed on the fifth floor of a building on College street at the time, just across from what was then Boys and Girls House, a branch of Toronto Public Library, there was constant liaising between the CCBC and that great institution. “Since our large room was lined with all the books published since the Centre had been established, it was easy for me, as a recently hired employee, to make sure I read all the books on the shelves. And, as more books arrived annually, Judy and I and other staff members made a point of keeping up that practice,” Peter recalls. Visitors to the Centre included publishers, authors, illustrators, teachers — as well as would-be authors and illustrators.

Eventually, after Kathy Lowinger took on the position of executive director, the Centre began offering a course that would describe ways in which people could find publishers who would consider their work. They offered a four-week course which was essentially ‘How to Get Published.’ The instructors were Judy Tye, Peter Carver and Fred Boer, who had first been hired to stand in for Judy when she went on maternity leave and who stayed on after she returned.

After maybe a year of running this course, they realized that rather than simply making it easier to approach publishers, what would help aspiring writers even more would be to set up a more extensive course that would concentrate on teaching writing skills for those who wanted to develop manuscripts for young readers.

Starting in 1985, the CCBC partnered with George Brown College in running workshops in writing for children — and again Judy, Fred and Peter were the ones who designed and taught the courses. Peter remembers that Judy set up some of the key elements of the 10-week workshop through her understanding of what would best illuminate strong stories for children. Eventually, the workshop program was so successful that they started offering an advanced version for people who had completed the first series. One could argue that this is one of the longest standing contributions of the Canadian Children’s Book Centre to the children’s book community in Canada, in that the workshop program still continues through the George Brown Writing for Children courses held at Mabel’s Fables bookstore in Toronto and currently taught by author, Ted Staunton.

According to Peter, “Judy Tye was a vital part of these early years of the Centre’s history. Her knowledge of, and her enthusiasm for, children’s books were vital elements in the success of the Centre in fulfilling its mandate to provide information about and support for the development of a distinctive Canadian children’s literature. Now Canadian children’s books are known across Canada — and around the world. And Judy’s work at the Centre has to be seen as a major contribution to that success.”
Tell us about your latest book or a project you are working on.

I’ve been working on adapting Like a Love Story into a movie. It’s been a fascinating process taking a story that’s so close to my heart and reimagining it in a new medium. I’m lucky to have two magical partners in the process, Marti Noxon and Jessica Rhoades, the team behind Sharp Objects. I’m also currently working in the writers’ room of an upcoming Fox show, Almost Family, which is so much fun. And I very much hope to work on my next novel after that.

What do you like about writing for young people?

So many things! Around the time my first adult novel came out, I was reading a lot of YA and was so inspired by the diversity of the genre, which is a testament to the young people demanding that diversity. The primary reason I started writing books (other than my deep love for books) is that I was frustrated by how hard it was to get diverse stories greenlit in film and television, so the diversity in YA really excited me. Also, as someone who struggled with both my cultural identity and sexuality growing up as an immigrant in multiple countries, I’m holding onto a lot of stories about my emotional experiences as a teen that I want to tell.

Tell us about your writing process.

Writing novels while also writing movies and television, and raising two young children, is a major challenge, especially when you’re a writer who needs to deep dive into your characters to find their voice. So, my solution has been to check myself into hotels when I’m writing something new. I find that the creative juices are much easier to access with solitude, lots of coffee and the right playlist. Once I’ve found the voices, I can write from home, typically very early in the morning before anyone is awake. I’m also a big fan of the tools provided by Julia Cameron’s book, The Artist’s Way, and recommend it to everyone, whether you’re a writer or not.

Tell us about writers who inspire you?

This question reminds me of another reason I like writing for young people, which is that the books I read as a teen helped me as I was finding my sense of identity. For me, there were a few queer authors I discovered in my teen years who made me see a world that I recognized I could belong to. James Baldwin and Armistead Maupin are the ones who really made me feel seen and helped me form and accept my sense of self. I’m also deeply inspired by the incredible Iranian writers in the YA genre at the moment, including, but not limited, to Sara Saedi, Alexandra Monir, Adib Khorram, Arvin Ahmadi, Sara Farizan, and Tahereh Mafi. It’s incredible to see so many Iranian stories being told.

How did you first get published?

I was a working screenwriter long before I had my first book published, but I still found the path to getting published very bumpy. My first published book, The Walk-In Closet, didn’t sell to a major publisher and I had pretty much decided to self-publish. In a fortuitous twist of fate, my agency had just started their own imprint and put the book out. That book ended up finding its audience and winning a Lambda Literary Award for Debut Fiction, which inspired me to keep writing books and telling personal stories. I wrote my first young adult novel, The Authentics, after that, and it was published by HarperCollins, who I’ve been working with ever since.
Congratulations to the Winners of the 2019 CCBC Book Awards!

Ebb & Flow
Written by Heather Smith
Kids Can Press
Winner of the TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award

Sadie
Written by Courtney Summers
St. Martin’s Press
Winner of the John Spray Mystery Award

Turtle Pond
Written by James Gladstone
Illustrated by Karen Reczuch
Groundwood Books
Winner of the Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children’s Non-Fiction

The Journey of Little Charlie
Written by Christopher Paul Curtis
Scholastic Canada
Winner of the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People

The House of One Thousand Eyes
Written by Michelle Barker
Annick Press
Winner of the Amy Mathers Teen Book Award

Mémé à la plage
Written by Rhéa Dufresne
Illustrated by Aurélie Grand
Éditions Les 400 coups
Winner of the Prix Harry Black de l’album jeunesse

For more information, visit www.bookcentre.ca
When I was in my mid 20s in 2014, I watched an animated show on Nickelodeon that was aimed at tweens and teens. In the series finale’s last few minutes, the main character ends up almost literally walking off into the sunset with another girl. In 2019 this hopefully doesn’t sound shocking to anyone, but at the time I was in literal disbelief, unable to believe what I saw on my TV (okay, on my MacBook at 2:00 AM in the morning as soon as the episode was released). There were not many cases of a main character on a children’s show being LGBTQ2+, something that has changed (thankfully) in the past years. Looking back, I am in disbelief for another reason: How could I, an adult, be shocked at seeing a character that was like me on TV? How had I gotten to this point?

Growing up in the late ‘90s and early 2000s, I wasn’t able to read books about anyone like me. At least, anyone like me in one respect — girls who liked other girls, or even boys who liked others boys. Homophobia was everywhere in the language people used around me and censorship was prevalent in the Catholic school I attended from the ages of four to 14. In 1999, a parent complained about my class reading Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets and we had to stop mid book. In 2008, my eighth-grade teacher banned the Gossip Girl books. Books that did have LGBTQ2+ characters in them would never have been kept in my school’s library, which was very ‘80s centric even in the 2000s. Were there LGBTQ2+ books available at this time? Of course, but none were available or even known to me.

In my teenage years, things changed. I started using the internet more and spent more time at the public library, ignoring my school’s small collection. Although I was now able to find books featuring LGBTQ2+ characters, the emphasis was definitely on the L and the G. Bisexual and transgender characters were rarely seen in the books I read up until the 2010s. These books were also lacking people of colour, something that is still a problem in 2019. Still, I found great books that I finally related to. Rainbow Boys was released in 2001 and came into my hands around 2004. The book told the story of three teenage boys coming of age and coming out, and at the time it was ground-breaking in its depiction of queer teens. Around the same time, I read A Great and Terrible Beauty by Libba Bray, which featured a secondary character who was a lesbian. Phyllis Reynolds Naylor’s Alice series featured a minor gay character named Leslie, but in retrospect there was a very-special-episode feel to the plotline. I loved Annie on My Mind, which, unfortunately, was not available in my school’s library despite its 1980s origins. But, as much as I loved this teenage romance which ultimately ends happily, the fact that the two lesbian teachers lost their jobs was an obvious downer in a time when I needed not only representation in general, but representation that made me feel good about myself.

A popular trope that still lives on today and was even more prevalent 15 years ago was “Bury Your Gays”, which has origins from the 1950s Hays Code, when censorship boards would only allow a gay character to appear on screen if there was a moral lesson in the end. This meant that they would often die, be declared insane or something of the like. One of the first LGBTQ2+ movies I ever saw fit this trope: it was called The Children’s Hour and starred Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine. Unfortunately, I was being handed “Bury
Your Gays” when I could have used “Marry Your Gays” or even “Vary Your Gays.” This is probably why, when I ask friends what the first LGBTQ2+ story they read was, the common answer is fanfiction. To be more specific, Harry Potter fanfiction. Most of what we were reading was written by kids and teens our age, telling the sort of stories that the original works didn’t include; stories that brought teenage wizards and their magical worlds a little closer to us.

If I wanted to only ever read LGBTQ2+ books for young people today, I could do so indefinitely. Every year the Canadian Children’s Book Centre does a reading list for Pride month and it’s getting more and more difficult to pick which books to include. While my old school library didn’t have a single book that even hinted that gay people existed, my current workplace is home to every single LGBTQ2+ book for young people written in Canada. The contrast couldn’t be greater.

Where are we now?

Many of the old problems, such as a lack of transgender characters and a lack of people of colour, are still problems today. At the same time, these books have come a long way since the time of minor background characters and tragic endings.

So, what am I reading now? Here are some recent favourite Canadian books for young people that are LGBTQ2+.

**Family Affair**

All children should be able to read books about families that resemble their own. The idea that books about LGBTQ2+ families are inappropriate for children deems some children’s own lives and families inappropriate. Luckily, there are so many great places to start with even young children. *My Mommy, My Mama, My Brother, and Me* by Natalie Meisner and illustrated by Mathilde Cinq-Mars is a sweet and simple story of two boys who spend the day at the sea with their mothers, looking for treasures left in the sand. I love the watercolour illustrations and the refrain that frames the story: “And these are the things we find by the sea / My mommy, my mama, my brother, and me.”

*The Adventures of Esther the Wonder Pig* by Steve Jenkins, Derek Walter, Caprice Crane and illustrated by Cori Doerrfeld is based on the real adventures of Esther and her two dads, who have their whole life turned upside down when the mini-pig they adopted turns out to not be so mini after all. *A Plan for Pops* by Heather Smith, illustrated by Brooke Kerrigan, is a heartwarming story of a boy and his two grandfathers and the plan Grandad and Lou come up with to cheer up Pops. *The Boy & the Bindi* by Vivek Shraya, illustrated by Rajni Perera, is a story about a boy who is given his own bindi when he shows interest in the one his mother wears. The beautiful illustrations are paired with a story about a child who finds happiness through being able to truly express his gender and connect with his culture at the same time.

For older readers, Emma Donoghue’s *The Lottery Plus One* is a middle-grade novel about two married men and two married women who win the lottery and join together to make one big happy family that call themselves the Lottery. With four parents, seven siblings and five pets in one house, the Lottery have their life shaken up when a grandfather they hardly see comes to visit. This fun series continues in *The Lottery More or Less*.

*We Are All Made of Molecules* by Susin Nielsen tells the story of a blended family and two young people who suddenly find themselves living in the same house despite having nothing in common. This YA book deals with heavy subjects like homophobia with care and manages to be simultaneously humorous and poignant.

**Gender is a Drag**

Young children who are gender variant, transgender or gender-queer can find comfort in stories about children like them. *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* by Christine Baldacchino, illustrated by Isabelle Malenfant, is the dreamy story of a little boy who loves the tangerine dress in his school’s dress-up centre even though the other students tease him. Despite everything, Morris finds comfort in his imagination and stays true to himself.

For middle-grade readers, *My Life as a Diamond* by Jenny Manzer, tells the story of Caz, a boy who loves baseball. When Caz leaves Toronto for Seattle, he is able to start over again somewhere where no one knows that the sex that he was assigned at birth doesn’t match his gender identity. When someone on a rival team starts digging into Caz’s past, Caz decides to stay true to himself and trust in his new friends.

For teens, I love *Girl Mans Up* by M-E Girard. Pen just wants to be herself and it’s everyone else who seems to have problems with what that means. Her parents have a very rigid idea of what being a girl means and her best friend Colby sees her as his wing man, even when Pen starts to doubt whether he is good for the girls she sets him up with. When Pen meets a cool girl who seems to like her just the way she is, Colby’s disapproval complicates things. I love how realistically this book portrays teens, but more than anything I love that Pen is completely comfortable with who she is.
It’s Not Just About Coming Out…

The coming-out story is a staple in LGBTQ2+ books, but sometimes I want to read a book that isn’t all about leaving the closet. Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me is a YA graphic novel by Mariko Tamaki, illustrated by Rosemary Valero-O’Connell, about love, friendship and breaking up. And breaking up. And breaking up. Freddy loves Laura Dean, the coolest girl in school and maybe the worst girlfriend. But Laura Dean keeps coming back to her and Freddy keeps letting her. Freddy reaches out to a psychic and an advice columnist, but she’ll have to break up with Laura Dean once and for all if she wants to be the best friend and best version of herself she can be.

Keep This to Yourself by Tom Ryan is a murder-mystery featuring the hunt for a serial killer in a East Coast town. After Mac’s friend Connor was murdered, the deaths stopped, but even a year later Mac isn’t over what happened. With the help of Quill, who is also connected to one of the victims, Mac sets out to find the truth about what happened. Suspenseful and unpredictable, the mystery takes the forefront over LGBTQ2+ issues and even Mac and Quill’s relationship, and I think that it is so important to have all kinds of stories with LGBTQ2+ characters and that books where being a gay teen isn’t the main focus of the book are important. If straight teens can read books about characters like themselves solving mysteries, getting lost in space or taking down a dystopian government, why shouldn’t queer teens?

Except When It Is

On the other hand, coming out is still a big part about being LGBTQ2+ and something that you don’t do once, but over and over again. So, of course books about coming out are still vital. Like a Love Story by Abdi Nazemian is set in 1989 in New York City and I hope that teens reading it today see it as a reflection of how much things have changed in the last 30 years. Reza is an Iranian teen who has just moved to New York City from Toronto. Surrounded by images of the AIDS crisis, Reza is terrified of his attraction to men. Judy is a fashion designer to-be who falls for Reza’s uncle Stephen, an activist with AIDS. The three teens find themselves in a complicated love triangle that puts their friendship to the test. While this book is heartbreakingly, it also shows how important the families we become a part of are. The Madonna and Judy Garland references are an added plus.

The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali by Sabina Khan tells the story of a Muslim lesbian who keeps her relationship with her girlfriend, Ariana, a secret from her strict parents. Rukhsana is only a few months away from her scholarship to Caltech and the freedom she deserves, but when her mother sees her with Ariana, she reacts as badly as Rukhsana predicted and the family quickly head to Bangladesh, her parents believing that the freedom of America has corrupted their daughter. While the trip at first seems innocent, Rukhsana soon discovers that her parents’ plans are darker than she first thought. While some aspects of this book were hard to stomach, in the end it is about the importance of family, choosing our own path and shows that in the end, love is the most important thing.

Other Favourites

Firesong by Adam Garnet Jones was one of my favourites of 2018 and is based on the film of the same name. After his younger sister commits suicide, Shane’s life begins to fall apart around him. What he wants most is to leave the rez for university with David by his side, finally allowing them to be together openly. But money gets in the way of Shane’s dreams and David is hesitant to leave their home. When tragedy strikes again, Shane has a difficult choice to make about his future.

Pride Colors by Robin Stevenson is the perfect board book for every baby and every family. The premise is simple, but this book is like no other I have ever seen. I love everything Robin does, so it’s no surprise I love this sweet book about accepting all children for who they are.

Is there anyone out there who thinks that their school sex-ed class taught them everything they need to know? Sex is a Funny Word: A Book About Bodies, Feelings, and You by Cory Silverberg, illustrated by Fiona Smyth, fills in the gaps and is inclusive of all sexualities and genders. This book is a straightforward and judgment-free guide to sex for pre-teens and is a big step away from the ‘birds and the bees’ approach of days past.

You Are What You Read

Books give us so much, and while they can be a great escape from the world around us, they also can give us the tools to make sense of that world and of ourselves. Seeing queer characters like themselves can help children and teens with self-acceptance and even help them understand their own identity in a way they might not have before. Everyone should be able to see themselves as someone deserving of being the main character in their world and the books on this list help bring us closer to that.

When I was younger, the common argument when debating gay marriage was that people couldn’t choose whether they were gay or not, which is obviously true. But I think that everything changed for me when I realized that that was irrelevant and that I had a life worth choosing, if there was a choice. I hope that, thanks to the stories they read and the world we have built, today’s youth know that from the start. 🌈

Emma Hunter is the CCBC’s Marketing and Communications Coordinator.
freedom to read week

FEBRUARY 23–29, 2020

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Book and Periodical Council

Canada Council for the Arts
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Rise in Canadian Children’s LGBTQ2+ Literature Offers More Reflection and Understanding

BY MARYLYNN MILLER OKE

It seems that a character’s sexuality, gender identity or same-sex parents may no longer be the whole story. And that’s a good thing. According to those in the know, Canadian LGBTQ2+ literature is evolving. However, just like the kids who read it, there is still some growing left to do before everyone feels properly represented in the literature.

Experts from the connected worlds of academia, libraries and bookstores share their frontline insights.

LGBTQ2+ Voices are Pumping up the Volume

Thanks to greater awareness on many fronts, Canadian LGBTQ2+ literature for children is entrenching its rightful place in Canadian bookstores, libraries and family homes.

Dr. Rob Bittner is a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Postdoctoral Research and Teaching Fellow at the University of British Columbia iSchool.

“Within my own work, I have seen a definite increase in the number of Canadian LGBTQ2+ books for children and teens,” observes Dr. Bittner. “The overall landscape seems to have become more open and prominent, with many children’s publishers having at least one or two offerings of LGBTQ2+ books available in their catalogues each year, if not each season.”

Although he feels that it is easy to list LGBTQ2+ YA from the last 20 years, it can be more challenging to identify Canadian books.

“That being said, there are many authors who cross the border in terms of the work that they produce. Authors like Mariko Tamaki (Skim; (You) Set Me on Fire), Robin Stevenson (Pride), Tom Ryan (Way to Go; Keep This to Yourself), M-E Girard (Girl Mans Up), and E.K. Johnston (That Inevitable Victorian Thing).”

However, he credits a larger presence of Canadian publishers at conferences in the US and around the world for ensuring more mainstream presence.

“This allows the work of queer authors to cross borders and become a part of not only Canadian educational institutions and awards, but also a more regular part of reading experiences of young people outside of Canada.”

Scott Robins, Children’s Services Specialist with the Don Mills Branch of Toronto Public Library (TPL) is one of the selectors for the library. He purchases children’s books for 16 branches in the city and curates the library’s Pride Collection, which has expanded its materials for adults, children and teens since its original inception in 1992.

“I would say there is definitely more,” answers Scott. He adds, “LGBTQ2+ books for teens have really exploded in the past five years.”

Hope in the Form of Diversity

It appears that publishers are stepping up to keep up with modern society. Stories are focusing on diverse LGBTQ2+ families and moving beyond tales of victimization to stories of hope and inclusion.

Ken Setterington was the first Children and Youth Advocate for Library Services for TPL and is the author of Mom and Mum are Getting Married and Branded by the Pink Triangle. As the rights of the LGBTQ2+ community have been championed and recognized across Canada, he feels that the dramatic change in society over the past 25 years is undeniable.

“It isn’t surprising that literature for children reflects that change,” reveals Ken. “Diversity has always been a hallmark of Canadian children’s literature with publishers pushing the boundaries of what is accepted.”

MJ Lyons manages Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto. He is a Toronto-based writer, journalist and game maker and recently published his debut novel, Murder at the World’s Fair.

According to MJ, the publishing industry is finally coming to terms with the fact that the LGBTQ2+ community has always been diverse in terms of racial and gender identities. He is encouraged that more and more LGBTQ2+ titles now exist to reflect diversity.

“We’re finally seeing two black dads, or non-binary kids, or inter-racial couples and their blended families.”

“I also think of recent updates to the Heather Has Two Mommies type of story, like Natalie Meisner’s, My Mommy, My Mama, My Brother, and Me with illustrations by Mathilde Cinq-Mars. Again, white couples still exist, but so do racially diverse families.”

He consistently hears from families, both within and outside of the LGBTQ2+ community, that they want to show their kids that diverse families exist. “Not just families that look like their own, but with different skin colours, hair textures, body shapes, gender identities, families with multiple parental units or co-child rearing. LGBTQ2+ people broke the mould of what families ‘have to’ look like. Now we’re defining our own versions of families and there are a lot of them!”
Tired Tales Give Way to a New Awakening

MJ also believes that victimization stories, such as children who are bullied at school for being gay or parents coming to terms with their child’s sexuality, are making room for more inspiring reading. “Any queer or trans person of any age could tell you stories of bigotry and oppression, but that’s only one facet of our stories. Especially in terms of children’s literature, the LGBTQ2+ community is trying to tell our own resilient, diverse stories. We’re trying to impart to children that there’s plenty to be hopeful about and celebrate about our identities.”

Voicing Acceptance

Scott from TPL reflects, “In terms of a changing society’s acceptance of the existence of LGBTQ2+ people and also the fact that LGBTQ2+ youth are coming out earlier or identifying as trans earlier, there is definitely a need for this kind of material for parents to understand or for kids to see themselves in the books that they are reading.”

“I see that publishers are publishing more of these books and that tells me there is demand for it,” he states. “There is pressure from readers, librarians and from children’s and youth authors as well. They want these books to get out there. When a book is successful, that helps too.”

Crediting initiatives such as the OwnVoices Movement and the We Need Diverse Books organization from the US for an increase in LGBTQ2+ literature for kids, Scott feels publishers are motivated to seek out people who identify as LGBTQ2+ to write those books. “When someone in that community is writing from their own personal knowledge and experiences, it tends to be more authentic and have a stronger voice,” says Scott.

Dr. Bittner also sees the increase in LGBTQ2+ representation derived from the work and activism of more vocal readers, educators and authors.

He states, “With more authors openly discussing their gender and sexuality, publishers are making it more evident through their publishing lists that gender and sexuality are an important part of the lives of young people and should therefore be a larger part of the literary landscape of children’s and YA literature in Canada.”

With Progress Comes Resistance

As with any steps forward, the growth of LGBTQ2+ literature is also subjected to obstacles.

According to Dr. Bittner, “Canadian authors of queer literature for children and teens have been getting greater recognition from awards committees, which is exciting, but has also led to backlash at times, as in the case of Raziel Reid’s When Everything Feels Like the Movies.”

Scott points to the current political and societal climate. “There has definitely been a bit of a pendulum swing and a bit of a backlash against gender- and sexuality-type related books for kids and teens. The political climate is giving people the allowance to speak their mind about things and in a lot of cases they are speaking negatively against gender- and sexuality-related topics. A little tricky, but this is how progress is made.”

Subtle Themes and New Genres Allude to Changed Mindset

Elizabeth Ferguson, the general manager of Mabel’s Fables Bookstore, is a buyer and reads many of the store’s middle grade and YA novels. She feels LGBTQ2+ content has become less niched and more mainstream.

“There are more LGBTQ2+ authors which means the work has become more nuanced and authentic,” notes Elizabeth. “It’s not just suffering through a non-supportive family or coming out story but there are also cute romances.”

She cites Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me by Mariko Tamaki as an example of a book where the main character’s sexuality is not the main story. “It’s also nice to not always read sob stories about people not being accepted by their families. It’s just part of who they are. There is a shifting towards being more of an aspect of the story as opposed to the entire challenge that the protagonist has to overcome.”

Elizabeth indicates that LGBTQ2+ secondary characters are also very prominent. She feels that it is a scenario more indicative of real life.

Ken says, “The main difference that I see now is that there are a great many titles that feature LGBTQ2+ characters. Not always in the main character positions, but in supporting roles such as uncles, aunts and neighbours. They aren’t the token ‘gay’ character, but just part of the society in which the main character lives. LGBTQ2+ isn’t the big deal it used to be.”
Scott loves that within teen books now, many LGBTQ2+ characters are appearing in many genres such as science fiction and fantasy. "There is real exploration of how these characters exist in these different worlds which I think is really very interesting. Especially, with teen books, because of the age group you can deal more with romance and relationships. In middle grade books it can only hit a certain point. I think that we’re living in a really interesting time for this kind of literature right now.”

MJ reveals, “Queer and trans kids still want to read stories where kids like them are having adventures.”

### Spectrum of Books

LGBTQ2+ characters are becoming increasingly visible in many different types of books from board and picture books, to middle grade and teen fiction, including graphic novels.

“I think that you’re definitely seeing the spectrum of the LGBTQ2+ experience that is being illustrated in the various kinds of books that are coming out,” observes Scott, referring to kids who identify as trans, are questioning, live with same sex parents or are gender non-conforming or gender fluid.

It seems trans and non-binary narratives are starting to feature more prominently in picture books such as *Angus All Aglow*, *From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea* and *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*.

### Spectrum of Lived Experiences

Dr. Bittner observed that more picture books are appearing every year, with more nuanced explorations of non-heteronormative families (*My Mommy, My Mama, My Brother and Me; A Plan for Pops; Pride Colors*), and others exploring gender play in childhood (*From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea; Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*). In YA, he notes a slight increase in intersectional queer voices (*Money Boy; Fire Song; Skim; God Loves Hair*).

“Through more intersection approaches to queer and trans experiences, and an emphasis on Indigenous and non-white representations in more contemporary children’s and YA literature, Canadian authors are beginning to more successfully build a Canadian queer and trans canon that is distinct from the US publishing industry.”

Regarding Canadian YA LGBTQ2+ fiction, he feels there has been an emphasis on sports and masculinity (*Bad Boy; Another Kind of Cowboy; A Boy at the Edge of the World*). He also notes a significant amount of rural queer representation, including island living in areas such as Vancouver Island and the Maritimes.

### Windows and Mirrors

Dr. Tara Goldstein is a professor in the area of gender, sexuality and schooling at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto; the Principal Investigator of a research study called *The Experiences of LGBTQ2+ Families in Ontario Schools* (www.LGBTQ2+famielsspeakout.ca), and has just published a book called *Teaching Gender and Sexuality at School: Letters to Teachers*.

Dr. Goldstein states, “The increased number and types of LGBTQ2+ books that are now available have provided LGBTQ2+ children, youth and parents with far more opportunities to see themselves and their families represented in the books they see in bookstores and in public libraries.”

Elizabeth also recognizes the importance of the widening scope of LGBTQ2+ literature for children. “I absolutely love when someone comes in and says, ‘I know a teen and I think they are really struggling and they haven’t said anything. Do you have any narratives that have a gay character in it so they can see themselves represented?’ Or maybe they are questioning and having a hard time fitting in. It’s a pivotal moment.”

Elizabeth describes Robin Stevenson’s books as an accessible and affirming reference and resource. She also expresses how important it is that everyone feels represented and can connect with the book’s characters. As LGBTQ2+ content becomes increasingly mainstream, she feels more people are discovering a greater common ground. “It is beneficial to read about characters and to see that the other side is not really that different at all.”

“There is that whole windows and mirrors metaphor that’s used for children’s books a lot,” says Scott. “Where kids who identify as something, see themselves in books, they get a sense that they exist, they matter, they are important and their stories are being told. They are not alone out there and there are other people out there who are like them.”

Scott feels that more kids are identifying as part of that spectrum of gender and sexuality. He thinks authors are doing a great job of presenting children as queer. In contrast, he feels the books provide a better understanding for kids and families who don’t identify as queer in any way.

### Busting through the roadblocks

Although progress is afoot and the future looks promising, the experts explain that more needs to be done to expand the scope of Canadian LGBTQ2+ literature for children.

Continued on page 18
**I PROMISE**
Catherine Hernandez & Syrus Marcus Ware

*I Promise* showcases the many shapes, sizes, and colours that families come in, emphasizing that every queer family starts with the sacred promise to love a child. Ages 3-8.

ISBN 978-1-55152-779-6 / $18.95 list

**THE BLUE ROAD**
Wayde Compton & April dela Noche Milne

In this beautiful YA graphic novel about the migrant experience, a young girl named Lacuna looks for a place to belong after waking up without a past or a proper home. Ages 12 and up.

There is still a need for more Indigenous representation, as well as more books written in French. Additional effort is needed to include queer sexualities beyond gay and lesbian, including asexuality. However, much more work needs to be done to include trans and intersex characters. Availability of sex education books for non-binary and transgender students has also been identified as an area that is lacking.

Although it’s starting to change, there is an apparent lack of lesbian representation. And while there are some great gender diversity titles available, they are not keeping up with the community, especially assigned-female-at-birth kids who want to explore more masculine identity.

In terms of reading at the library, a general wariness exists in terms of discussion and identifying oneself as reading gender- and sexuality-related books. It’s observed that kids tend to read them in the library rather than sign them out.

As Canada is a smaller market, it’s difficult for publishers to find Canadian authors and titles that are written by authentic voices. Finally, authors may be fearful to write LGBTQ2+-themed books if they do not identify with the community, while publishers fear backlash if the books are not created by authentic voices.

En Route to the Mainstream

Our experts also share their reasons for optimism. No longer confined to the sideroads, LGBTQ2+ stories are becoming less niche and more mainstream. While hoping for more, increased numbers of gender and sexuality literature titles are available in Canada. Efforts are being made to create a balloon effect so books are available everywhere.

As the books featured during Pride celebrations indicate, publishers are actively looking for authentic voices to push the boundaries further with LGBTQ2+ literature. Additionally, it seems that plenty of Canadian authors are rising to the challenge to write diverse stories.

More, more, more

The path to ensuring the LGBTQ2+ community finds a place to call home in Canadian children’s literature is far from straight and narrow. It’s broadening with more stories, more voices, and encouragingly, with more acceptance. Ultimately, kids can find themselves in the books they read, giving them even more power and freedom to be themselves.

One last thought

“I was a nerdy kid who grew into a nerdy adult,” recalls MJ. “When I was younger, I always craved the sort of epic adventure books that have always existed for straight people. Exploring identity and having those resources is very important for kids, but I want to see more diverse kids going on adventures in space, or as super-heroes, or fighting dragons. Queer and trans kids have expansive imaginations just like any other, and I want to show them they can be heroes in their own stories.”

Marylynn Miller Oke is a freelance writer. With experience in broadcast and public relations, she writes frequently for the academic and non-profit sectors.
I Read Canadian Day: February 19, 2020

A new nationwide initiative that celebrates the richness, diversity, and breadth of Canadian literature is here.

The I Read Canadian Day, which will happen for the first time ever on February 19, 2020, will empower families, schools, libraries, bookstores, and organizations to host activities and events by reading Canadian books for just fifteen minutes.

**TIMELINE:** Key activities will take place February 14 to February 21 with February 19 as the official I Read Canadian Day.

**GOAL:** The purpose of this event is to raise awareness of Canadian books and celebrate the richness, diversity and breadth of Canadian literature.

**ACTION:** Let’s get the nation excited about reading Canadian books!

**SIGN UP READERS FOR FREE:** ireadcanadian.com/day

I Read Canadian Day is Supported by: [The Canadian Children's Book Centre] [Ontario Library Association] [Canadian Authors' Association]
Bookseller Recommendations

Bookmark! usually highlights books for a variety of grade levels around a particular theme. In this issue, however, we asked booksellers from across Canada to recommend books they thought were exceptional choices for holiday gift giving. Thanks go to Nicole Abi-Najem, Lisa Doucet, Kelly Dyer, Kirsten Larmon and Sabrina Simmonds for taking the time to recommend the following fabulous titles.

**NICOLE ABI-NAJEM**
*of Mabel’s Fables, Toronto, Ontario*

**Trudy’s Healing Stone**  
written by Trudy Spiller  
illustrated by Jessika von Innerebner  
Medicine Wheel Education, 2019

Everyone gets sad, angry, frustrated and disappointed. Difficult emotions are a natural part of life. In this book, author Trudy Spiller shares a special teaching about a practice that anyone can use to help them process their feelings with the help of Mother Earth.

**The Mystery of Black Hollow Lane**  
(The Black Hollow Lane, Book 1)  
written by Julia Nobel  
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, 2019

With a dad who disappeared years ago, and a mother who’s too busy to parent, Emmy is shipped off to Wellsworth, a prestigious boarding school in England. At Wellsworth, Emmy discovers a secret society — the Order of Black Hollow Lane. Is the Society connected with her father’s disappearance? What other dark secrets is Wellsworth hiding?

**Crown of Feathers**  
(Crown of Feathers, Book 1)  
written by Nicki Pau Preto  
Simon Pulse, 2019

It’s been 16 years since the fall of the legendary Phoenix Riders in a war between royal sisters that left the Empire splintered and dangerous. Two war-orphaned sisters, Val and Veronyka, dream of hatching their own phoenixes until one sister betrays the other.

**LISA DOUCET**  
of Woozles, Halifax, Nova Scotia

**Small in the City**  
written and illustrated by Sydney Smith  
Groundwood Books, 2019

On a snowy day in a big city, a little boy hops off a streetcar and walks through downtown, between office buildings, through parks and down busy streets. Along the way, he provides helpful tips about which alleys make good shortcuts, which trees to climb and where to find a friendly face. All the while, the boy searches for what he has lost...

**Operatic**  
written by Kyo Maclear  
illustrated by Byron Eggenschwiler  
Groundwood Books, 2019

Charlie is trying to find her perfect song for a music class assignment. But she’s having difficulty concentrating — she can’t stop noticing Emile, or wondering about Luka. Then, her music teacher plays a recording of opera diva Maria Callas. Charlie is entranced and learns about Maria’s musical life. Can Charlie follow the opera diva’s example when it comes to her own life?

**Love from A to Z**  
written by S.K. Ali  
Salaam Reads, 2019

Outspoken Zayneb travels to her aunt’s house in Doha, Qatar. Quiet, introspective Adam is hiding a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis from his grieving father and little sister. Alone, Adam and Zayneb are playing roles for others, keeping their real thoughts locked away in journals. Until their paths cross and a love story unfolds.
KELLY DYER
of Audreys Books, Edmonton, Alberta

Bad Dog
written and illustrated by Mike Boldt
Doubleday Books for Young Readers, 2019

‘Look what I got for my birthday! A pet dog!’ says a little girl holding a… cat? Rocky doesn’t listen or obey like all the other dogs. And Rocky hates her leash and doesn’t seem to like other dogs. And rather than play fetch, Rocky prefers to… lick between her toes? Cat lovers and dog lovers alike will howl with laughter at this little girl’s willful insistence that her cat is a dog.

Sweep: The Story of a Girl and Her Monster
written by Jonathan Auxier
Puffin Canada, 2018

Nan Sparrow, 11, is possibly the best ‘climbing boy’ ever — and she’s a girl. Chimney sweeping is brutally dangerous work, and when Nan gets stuck in a chimney fire, she fears it’s the end. Instead, she awakes unharmed to find a mysterious creature — a golem — made from ash and coal. The girl and her monster carve out a new life, saving one another in the process.

KIRSTEN LARMON
of Munro Books, Victoria, British Columbia

The Scarecrow
written by Beth Ferry
illustrated by Terry Fan and Eric Fan
HarperCollins Publishers, 2019

All the animals know not to mess with old Scarecrow. But when a small, scared crow falls from midair, Scarecrow does the strangest thing… Presented is a tender and affectionate tale that reminds us of the comforting power of friendship and the joy of helping others.

The Ghost Collector
written by Alison Mills
Annick Press, 2019

Ghosts are everywhere in Shelly’s life. In the tradition of their Cree ancestors, Shelly and her grandmother help these lost souls transition to the next world by catching them in their hair. But when Shelly’s mom dies, her relationship to ghosts — and death — changes.

KINGS, QUEENS AND IN-BETWEENS
written by Tanya Boteju
Simon Pulse, 2019

Wounded by a crush’s rejection and her mother’s unexpected departure, nerdy and awkward Nima discovers the drag scene at her town’s summer festival. Macho kings, magical queens, new love interests, and surprising allies propel Nima closer to a self she never knew — one that can confidently express and accept love. But she’ll have to accept lost love to get there.

SABRINA SIMMONDS
of McNally Robinson, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Birdsong
written and illustrated by Julie Flett
Greystone Kids, 2019

When a young girl moves from the country to a small town, she feels lonely and out of place. But soon she meets an elderly woman next door, who shares her love of art and nature. Can the girl navigate the changing seasons and failing health of her new friend?

The Spinner of Dreams
written by K.A. Reynolds
HarperCollins Publishers, 2019

Annalise Meriwether — though kind, smart, and curious — is terribly lonely. She does her best to ignore the cruel townsfolk of her desolate town — but the black mark on her hand won’t be ignored. There’s only one way for Annalise to rid herself of her curse: to enter the Labyrinth of Fate and Dreams and defeat the Fate Spinner.

Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me
written by Mariko Tamaki
illustrated by Rosemary Valero-O’Connell
Groundwood Books, 2019

Freddy wants Laura Dean to stop breaking up with her. Laura Dean is popular, funny and SO CUTE… but she is also thoughtless and mean. Freddy’s heart is breaking and she’s losing her best friend and her last shred of self-respect. Fortunately, new friends and the insight of an advice columnist help Freddy through being a teenager in love.
We Recommend
NEW AND NOTED BOOKS FOR TODDLERS TO TEENS

In this issue we have combined our Red Leaf Literature and We Recommend columns. Red Leaf Literature titles have been indicated with a red title and maple leaf. (棵)

📚 Before You Were Born
written by Deborah Kerbel
illustrated by Suzanne Del Rizzo
Pajama Press, 2019
978-1-77278-082-6 (hc) $21.95
for Infants to Grade 1

Picture Book | Poetry | Newborns | New Parents | Animals | Nature | Seasons

In early autumn, a young couple stands outside their ocean-front home at night, with “a song in our hearts” as they contemplate the “tiniest murmur of tender delight” growing inside the woman, their shared excitement a secret known only to them. As the season passes into winter and then spring, animals in the surrounding woods and whales in the nearby sea reflect the couple’s joy in, hope for, and anticipation of, the pending birth of their own child. At the story’s close, the couple once again stands outside facing the ocean, this time as dawn softly glows, their child held between them, now the light of their world.

Kerbel’s poetic text is lyrical and rhythmic, at times lifting us up and carrying us along with its joy and grace, and then settling us down in quiet reflection and love. Del Rizzo’s gorgeous illustrations, rendered in polymer clay and acrylic wash, perfectly embody the tone of the text and the double-page spreads embrace us with beauty, texture and depth. An evening scene in winter shows a simple road curving through the woods towards a soft light at the edge that highlights the “whispered secret” the couple holds in their hearts. And at the beginning, the young couple sees a meteor in the night sky, portending something new and good in their lives that comes at the end, the dawning of a new family “in the glow of your birth.”

Ken Kilback is a writer and primary teacher in Vancouver.

📚 The Case of the Growing Bird Feeder
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
written by Eric Hogan and Tara Hungerford
illustrated by Kate Jeong
Firefly Books, 2019
978-0-2281-0189-5 (hc) $19.95
978-0-2281-0190-1 (pb) $6.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

📚 The Case of the Story Rock
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
written by Eric Hogan and Tara Hungerford
illustrated by Kate Jeong
Firefly Books, 2019
978-0-2281-0191-8 (hc) $19.95
978-0-2281-0192-5 (pb) $6.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

📚 The Case of the Vanishing Caterpillar
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
written by Eric Hogan and Tara Hungerford
illustrated by Kate Jeong
Firefly Books, 2019
978-0-2281-0193-2 (hc) $19.95
978-0-2281-0194-9 (pb) $6.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

📚 The Case of the Wooden Timekeeper
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
written by Eric Hogan and Tara Hungerford
illustrated by Kate Jeong
Firefly Books, 2019
978-0-2281-0195-6 (hc) $19.95
978-0-2281-0196-3 (pb) $6.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Nature | Science | Mystery | Exploration | Mindfulness | Field Notes | Nature Crafts

Adapted from the award-winning Canadian television series The Gumboot Kids, The Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery series is a most charming and instructive collection of nature mystery books which encourages children to head outside and discover their natural world. Each book features two engaging mice, Scout and Daisy, who, when pondering a nature question, sort through an assortment of clues in order to solve the puzzle. After a visit to the library where they substantiate the information they have collected, Scout and Daisy purposefully experience what they term a ‘mindful moment,’ contemplating their newly found knowledge. As a bonus, field notes, complete with definitions, information and illustrations, as well as
a nature craft inspired by the mystery for children to undertake at home, are all included. Extensive educational curriculum guides have also been assembled to accompany each of the titles, which deal with butterflies, fossils, trees and sunflowers.

Written by Eric Hogan and Tara Hungerford, the familiarity of the main characters, environment and the event sequence will all be reassuring to readers. Created from felt, Scout and Daisy act as motivating nature guides as they introduce readers to memorable learning encounters via conversations, questions and research. A meticulously created miniature community consisting of a village, forests, gardens, hills and valleys serves as a rich environment in which they explore.

“I love solving nature mysteries,” exclaims Daisy. This sentiment, no doubt, will be echoed by the many young readers who are introduced to this outstanding new series.

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

Dancing with Daisy
written by Jan L. Coates
illustrated by Josée Bisaillon
Running the Goat Books & Broadsides, 2019
978-1-927917-20-6 (pb) $14.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 4

Picture Book | Tall Tales | Aging | Hurricane | Intergenerational Relationships | Atlantic Canada | Humour

When his grandson, looking at a photo, expresses the perennial childhood disbelief that anyone old was ever young, Grampy spins a delightful tale to explain his aging. The photo becomes a record of the fateful seafaring day that Grampy met “a nasty, wild girl in search of a dance partner.” Grampy, as a young fisherman, engages in a hilarious battle of wits against wild Daisy, a personified hurricane. Wrinkled cheeks, bent back and “poppy and blue” veins become proud war wounds inflicted over two days on the young Grampy who finds torture, as many young male readers will agree, preferable to having to dance with a rude, pushy girl.

Bisaillon’s illustrations work synergistically with Coates’ prose, adding dimension to the Atlantic Canadian setting and extending the story’s end where a picture of Grampy and his grandson on a boat suggest a springboard for the grandson to spin a tale for his own future descendants. Bisaillon’s mixed-media illustrations deftly lace the whimsical lightness of the tale with the surreal menace of Daisy. One image sees a dark, colossal hand gliding over the water like a sinuous waterspout, dwarfing Grampy’s island refuge. Bisaillon’s depictions of Daisy are an artistic coup, suggesting both wind and seascape, are witnesses to this burgeoning friendship.

Michaela Goade’s artwork is stunning, as she uses a variety of mediums such as watercolour, gouache, pen and ink, and digital technology to beautifully capture and celebrate the meeting of the two men, as well as their surrounding environment.

At the back of the book is an author’s reflection and a historical note, which provides valuable context to the story. Juby explains why she chose to create an ‘alternative view’ of the first contact between one of Jacques Cartier’s crewmembers and a Stadaconan fisher. She reminds us that violence is a choice and we have an opportunity to learn from the past to look forward to a better future.

Highly recommended for school and public libraries.

Colette Poitras is a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, holds a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science and is the Manager of Indigenous Public Outreach for Public Library Services Branch, Alberta.

Finding Lucy
written and illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes
Pajama Press, 2019
978-1-77278-088-8 (hc) $22.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Picture Book | Visual Arts | Creativity | Confidence | Self-Expression

In this playful new picture book from the powerhouse talent of Eugenie Fernandes, Lucy happily paints the colour of laughter in her garden with her faithful cat as a companion — until a rabbit reporter criticizes her art. As a series of other animal critics assess her painting, Lucy tries to please them by following their advice until she is “dis-com-bob-u-lated.” With encouragement from her cat, Lucy redisCOVERs her creative spark and finds the courage to paint “the flutter of birds and the whimsy of the wind.”

Finding Lucy is a character-rich story of confidence and self-expression paired with colourful and vibrant illustrations. With poetic turns of phrase, lively language and a cartoon style, both the text and art evoke light-hearted fun, even when the critics do their worst to Lucy. The story also upends fairy-tale tropes in delightful ways — with a chicken who jumps over the moon and a frog who sings beautifully when kissed, ending up on Broadway. The strategic use of sophisticated yet engaging language, such as “scrumptious” and “fan-tab-u-lous,” will prompt young readers to play with the sound of the words and provoke discussion about the meanings.

A whimsical, heartfelt story about what happens when we try to satisfy others instead of our own creative muse.

Karen Krossing is a Toronto author and MFA student.
The Girl and the Wolf
written by Katherena Vermette
illustrated by Julie Flett
Theytus Books, 2019
978-1-926886-54-1 (hc) $19.95
for Preschool to Grade 2
Picture Book | Girls | Wolves | Self-Sufficiency | Indigenous

While picking berries with her mother, the girl wanders too far away. In the silence of the woods, she realizes she is lost. Suddenly, a wolf appears. By quietly questioning her, he helps her to find the strength and the answers she needs from within herself to find her way back.

The girl lays a tobacco tie in the bush to thank the wolf for his help. Katherena Vermette has created a tender and empowering tale that turns a traditional story, such as Little Red Riding Hood, on its head. Instead of a damsel in distress and a menacing wolf, she demonstrates that the girl can be resourceful and find the answers within, with guidance by a kind and thoughtful wolf.

Julie Flett’s warm illustrations match the strength and beauty of the prose. The wolf is grey and the girl is wearing a red dress, as you would expect in most fairy tales. However, just as with the words, the illustrations show a tenderness between the wolf and the girl.

Included at the end is an author note, which explains why Vermette chose to write the story in this way and why the girl leaves tobacco for the wolf.

This wonderful title, written and illustrated from an Indigenous perspective, has universal appeal. Highly recommended for home, school and public libraries.

Colette Poitras

It Began With a Page:
How Gyo Fujikawa Drew the Way
written by Kyo Maclear
illustrated by Julie Morstad
Tundra Books, 2019
978-1-101-91861-6 (eBook) $10.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 4
Picture Book | Biography | Art | Artists | Diversity | Family | Social Justice

When we bought Oh, What a Busy Day! in 1976 to celebrate the birth of our daughter, there was little opportunity to learn about the people who were writing the books we loved. At the time, we did not know if the author was male or female; I suspect we assumed male. To learn Gyo Fujikawa’s story through the pages of this book, created by such an incomparable and inspired team, brings joy.

It was not an easy life for a single, Asian-American female artist in the early- to mid-20th century. Born in 1908, and eventually wanting to earn a living doing her art, Gyo faced many obstacles as a child and, later as an adult. Her persistence, her passion for social justice, her incomparable talent and her need to show the book world what she saw finally won acclaim.

Kyo Maclear’s thoughtful text offers readers an authentic look at the isolation of Gyo’s childhood, the artistic path taken, the turmoil of World War II for her Japanese family and the career that led to designing books at Disney, decorating store windows, creating stamps and eventually writing and illustrating books for children that showed the multiculturalism she saw everywhere she looked. At a time when few books showed any diversity, she refused to compromise, and eventually her books helped children see a ‘bigger, better world’. Julie Morstad’s liquid watercolour, gouache and pencil crayon illustrations could not be more perfect when presenting her story. The convincing settings, the times of desolation, the joy found in the children she so lovingly creates with respect for Gyo’s art, are stunning.

Archival photos, a detailed timeline, notes from both author and illustrator, a selected bibliography and a list of sources are welcome and valuable.

Sally Bender is a retired teacher-librarian and avid blogger about children’s literature.

The House at the End of the Road
written and illustrated by Kari Rust
Owlkids Books, 2019
978-1-77447-335-4 (hc) $18.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 3
Picture Book | Prejudice | Intergenerational Friendship | Aging | Loss | Coping | Kindness

Tricky, with a more somber and emotionally nuanced story of three cousins who form an unlikely friendship with an elderly gentleman whom they originally fear is a ghost haunting a dilapidated house. The story is told from the perspective of the female cousin who directs the reader’s attention to the growing bond between the impulsive and misbehaving cousin Robert and Old Mr. Peterson, a former teacher with a true nurturing spirit. When something tragic happens to Mr. Peterson, the children respond by using the ‘old tech’ skills he has fostered in each of them to give back some of what he has lost.

Rust’s story includes generous two-page illustrations with colourful kids against subdued, three dimensional backgrounds and appealing comic book conventions like panels and dialogue bubbles. Image, text, dialogue and placement of prose have been carefully crafted to tell this touching, ultimately positive story.

‘Appearances are deceiving’ says the teaser on the back of the book. A good classroom discussion could be made around the ways this adage applies throughout the story or even around creativity as a form of coping. Regardless, children will be drawn to a pleasure read by the mysterious promise of the cover.

Aliki Tryphonopoulos

King Mouse
written by Cary Fagan
illustrated by Dena Seiferling
Tundra Books, 2019
978-0-775-26404-5 (hc) $21.99
978-0-775-26405-2 (eBook) $10.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 1
Picture Book | Fable | Status | Friendship | Animals | Imaginative Play

Although a hungry mouse cannot find any food, he does find a crown. A passing bear asks whether he’s a king and the mouse affirms that he is indeed royalty. Soon a crow and tortoise acknowledge the mouse as their king and all begin carrying out King Mouse’s wishes. When a snake also discovers a crown, she becomes their queen, though King Mouse isn’t so pleased. Even more, the fox, crow and tortoise find their own crowns and quickly establish themselves as royalty too. But the bear, unable to find a crown and not wanting to be “the only one who wasn’t a king or a queen,” lumbers away. And the only one who notices the bear’s absence is King Mouse.

Fagan’s text is engaging, well-paced, and is laced with humour and poignancy. His use of voice here is perfect for this wonderful fable.
about status and true contentment. Seiferling’s beautiful illustrations, rendered in graphite with digitally added colour, are expressive, reveal emotional depth and enhance the fable feeling of this book. The bear, while sorrowful at not finding a crown, is also reflective; and so, when the mouse removes his own crown, then places a woven ring of dandelions on the bear’s head, the latter points out he’s not really a king. The mouse acknowledges that but then focuses on what matters most, being oneself and reaching out to another in friendship, one that is hinted at to last “for a long time.”

Ken Kilback

The Little Book of Big What-Ifs
written and illustrated by Renata Liwska
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019
978-1-328-76701-1 (hc) $19.99
for Toddlers to Preschool

Picture Book | Questions | Hope | Kindness | Community

What if you swallowed a seed? What if you get lost? What if someone can help? With charming, cozy animal illustrations and a series of ‘what ifs,’ this book is an invitation to ask questions both during and after reading. The questions stack on top of each other, sometimes in answer and sometimes in a new direction and the style of questioning is reminiscent to chatting with a young, curious child. Some of the questions feel anxious, while some are sweet or silly, but the book ultimately builds to a hopeful conclusion that focuses on kindness and community.

This charmingly illustrated book makes a lovely read aloud and conversation starter, and the ending is gentle and optimistic. Pre-readers will enjoy the narrative that is built from questions and the possibility for creative answers is endless.

Jen McConnel is a teacher and graduate student with an MA in Children’s Literature.

No Help Wanted!
written and illustrated by Ruth Ohi
North Winds Press/Scholastic Canada, 2019
978-1-4431-6360-6 (hc) $16.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Teamwork | School Stories

The kids in Room Two are excited to take care of their new classroom pet, a smiling fish named Bluey. His first caretaker is Posey, who is ‘very keen’ for the responsibility. Although she loves Bluey, she doesn’t want to share caregiving with anyone else. Posey can do it all by herself, but Bluey seems to need more community to thrive. Luckily, Posey asks for help when things start to get concerning and her peers are ready to jump in and support her.

With Ruth Ohi’s signature artwork and narrative style, this charming story is an important book about making mistakes, not holding grudges and being able to ask for help. My daughter wanted to read it over and over and I used the story as an opportunity to talk to her about how it can sometimes feel scary to ask for help, but that just like in the book, people want to help and support us, if we can be brave enough to admit that we don’t know everything.

Jen McConnel
**Sergeant Billy: The True Story of the Goat Who Went to War**
written by Mireille Messier
illustrated by Kass Reich
Tundra Books, 2019
978-0-7735-2642-7 (hc) $21.99
978-0-7735-2643-4 (eBook) $10.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

In 1914, on their way to training camp, soldiers of the Fifth Canadian Battalion stop in Broadview, Saskatchewan to ask a young girl whether they can have her goat as their mascot. They quickly become so fond of their army goat that they call him Private Billy and later smuggle Billy all the way to the front lines in France. Not only does Billy ‘befriend the nervous new recruits’ and ‘comfort those who missed their fallen friends,’ he also becomes an integral figure in battle and is promoted to sergeant. Since Billy continues to show ‘bravery in the face of danger,’ capturing enemy guardsmen and saving the lives of members of the Fighting Fifth, he even becomes a decorated war hero.

Messier’s writing is well-paced, laced with a natural humour and employs a wonderful ‘And that’s how...’ refrain that is appealing to young readers. Reich’s illustrations, hand-painted in gouache with digitally added details, are lovely, rich in emotional expression. Billy himself is an engaging historical figure and the illustrations easily draw us in when he is at his most tender and comforting, funny and eccentric, and loyal and brave. At the back of the book are some author notes, as well as historical photos of Billy and the Fighting Fifth. After the war, the soldiers remember to keep their promise, returning Billy to the girl who still loves him, and with whom he lives out the remainder of his days.

Ken Kilback

**Nutcracker Night**
written by Mireille Messier
illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard
Pajama Press, 2019
978-1-77278-091-8 (hc) $22.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | The Nutcracker Ballet | Dance | Theatre | Onomatopoeia

Mireille Messier, through the clever and playful use of onomatopoeia, introduces young readers to The Nutcracker ballet in this beautiful book about a little girl’s first experience at the theatre. “Beep, beep” goes the taxi, “swish, swish” goes her frilly dress and “Pickle-dee! Zing! Boom! Ding!” goes the orchestra as it tunes up.” The excited audience claps as the performance begins and the parents hush their children as the conductor ticks his baton.” Takka, takka takka goes the Sugar Plum Fairy” and “Shuffle-shuffle! Jingle-jangle! go the polichinelles.” As the lights come up for intermission the children laugh, drinks are slurped and snacks are crunched. At the end of the crowded yells “Bravo! Brava!” and the little girl gives her dad a smooch when he asks if she enjoyed the ballet. An author’s note at the end of the book further enriches the text with a brief summary of the famous ballet.

Created with watercolour, gouache, oil, coloured pencils and digital media, Gabrielle Grimard’s stunning illustrations bring the story of the nutcracker to life as we meet Marie and Fritz, the Mouse King and the Sugar Plum Fairy. From the first double spread of the snow softly falling on the city, to the orchestra, dancers and audience in the theatre, Grimard’s creations exude the warmth and richness of the holiday season and make us wish we were right there with the little girl and her father.

Sure to become a holiday classic, Nutcracker Night is a must-have for those who love this ballet. And, for those who have never had the chance to experience it, this book will serve as a lovely introduction.

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

**She Dreams of Sable Island**
written and illustrated by Briana Corr Scott
Nimbus Publishing, 2019
978-1-77108-626-4 (hc) $24.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Rhyming Picture Book | Sable Island | Nova Scotia | Nature | Wonder | Paper Dolls

With soothing rhymes and lovely illustrations, this book is a love letter to Sable Island. Although I’ve never been to the island, I feel like I’ve journeyed alongside the dreamer in this story, experiencing the surf and sand and beautiful animals that make Sable Island unique. The book also comes with beautiful paper dolls, which gave me an instant sense of nostalgia.

In addition to the charm of the narrative and the artwork, Briana Corr Scott has included a write up on Sable Island, followed by an illustrated double-page spread of the plants and animals of the island, with bite-sized facts and beautiful images. In short, this debut picture book is a lovely combination of artistic beauty and island pride.

Ken Kilback

**Small in the City**
written and illustrated by Sydney Smith
Groundwood Books, 2019
978-1-77306-199-3 (hc) $24.95
978-1-77306-198-6 (hc) $19.95
978-1-77306-199-3 (eBook) $16.95
for Grades 1 to 4

Picture Book | City | Neighbourhood | Loss | Search | Hope

“I know what it’s like to be small in the city. People don’t see you and loud sounds can scare you and knowing what to do is hard sometimes.” A child disembarks from a bus and is immediately enveloped into the hurly-burly of a metropolis. Surrounded by crowds, huge buildings and incessant traffic and noise, the child moves purposefully as a winter storm and night approach. “The streets are always busy. It can make your brain feel like there’s too much stuff in it.” Walking through a neighbourhood, interspersed with fenced yards, parks and homes, the child gives advice to something unseen: “Alleys can be good shortcuts. But don’t go down this alley. It’s too dark.” One only learns whom the child is addressing in the final pages. The poignant conclusion will remain in one’s thoughts long after the book has been closed.

Sydney Smith has created a masterpiece. His text, so uncomplicated yet so profound, is layered in its meaning and emotion. His sublime artwork, created with ink, watercolour and a bit of gouache, depicts an imposing city interspersed with areas which have special meaning to our protagonist. As darkness falls and the rising snowstorm gains fury, the images of that persistent child continuing with a personal quest are unforgettable and deeply moving.

This book is nothing short of remarkable!

Senta Ross
THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS AND FUNDERS:

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THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS AND FUNDERS:
When Nanda is born, her world is as small as the warm circle of her mother’s arms. Yet it expands as she grows to include family and playmates, natural and scientific adventures, and travel by rail, helicopter, plane and finally space shuttle. From the surface of the moon, Nanda experiences the vastness of the “sea of stars, moonless and deep,” and the “softly glowing” Earth — a small circle called home.

Inspired by five female scientists from India who helped to launch a satellite into orbit around Mars, this book is a celebration of how much girls and women can and do accomplish. It’s also an exploration of how Nanda’s world — and her ideas — can be both small and big. Mercurio’s lyrical text repeats and builds beautifully, making for an enjoyable read-aloud. Corace’s emotive illustrations transport readers back to a time when dog teams serving on necessary traplines were instrumental to survival in Northern Saskatchewan. Inspired by Elder Ida Tremblay’s childhood memories, this book transports readers back to a time when dog teams serving on necessary traplines were instrumental to survival in Northern Saskatchewan. Told in English interspersed with Woodland Cree words and phrases, this story traces the cycle of long-established trapline life. Ida told her story to Miriam Körner and together they created this picture book to

When Molly Drew Dogs
written by Deborah Kerbel
illustrated by Lis Xu
Owlkids Books, 2019
978-1-77147-338-5 (hc) $18.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Picture Book | Empathy | Art | Mental Health | Acceptance | Dogs | School

On the eve of the first day of school, a young girl, Molly, suddenly becomes obsessed with dogs and can think of little else. “They scampered through her thoughts. And yapped at the door to her dreams. When they got restless, they scratched at her brain, begging to be let out. So, Molly started drawing them... everywhere.” Molly is happiest when she is drawing dogs. “When Molly drew dogs, her heart sat up and smiled.” Not only does she sketch them at home, but also at school, much to her puzzled teacher’s chagrin. A tutor is hired to help Molly concentrate more on her schoolwork and he, too, becomes impatient when dogs overtake her being. Impulsively running away, she spends the night in a garden shed. Here she creates her dogs wearing coats to keep them warm. Discovered by her worried teacher the next morning, Molly learns that a neighbourhood thief had been frightened off by a pack of dogs the night before and, strangely enough, the dogs were wearing coats.

Inspired by the Japanese folk tale, The Boy Who Drew Cats, Deborah Kerbel has written an intriguing story about the healing strength of art and imagination in abetting anxiety and controlling emotions. Child-like in execution, Lis Xu’s energetic, yet subtle, pencil crayon illustrations depict Molly’s state of mind, ranging from despair to joy and mirroring the manner in which she draws her imaginary canine companions.

The need for empathy and acceptance is the hallmark of this poignant story.

Senta Ross

When We Had Sled Dogs:
A Story from the Trapline — ācimowin ohci wanihikisanāhk
written by Ida Tremblay and Miriam Körner
illustrated by Miriam Körner
Your Nickel’s Worth Publishing, 2019
978-1-988783-39-0 (hc) $19.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Picture Book | Woodland Cree | Trapline Dogs | Survival | Seasons

In summer, Ida’s father would work as a fishing guide for a tourist camp in La Ronge, Saskatchewan while the family camped nearby at McKenzie End, outside of town. Every fall they would load up their canoes with enough food supplies to last over the long winter, collect their trapline dogs from Dog Island and make a five-to-six-day journey north to their cabin on the Churchill River where their family trapline was located. The hunting and collecting of food was crucial and the children were enlisted to help. With the arrival of spring, the family would return to La Ronge via canoe, drop off their trapline dogs on Dog Island, and resume their summer routines once more until the fall beckoned them northwards once again.

Inspired by Elder Ida Tremblay’s childhood memories, this book transports readers back to a time when dog teams serving on necessary traplines were instrumental to survival in Northern Saskatchewan. Told in English interspersed with Woodland Cree words and phrases, this story traces the cycle of long-established trapline life. Ida told her story to Miriam Körner and together they created this picture book to

Karen Krossing
Inspire children “…to go out in the bush with Elders and learn about the traditional way of life, and even live it a little bit.”

Körner’s detailed watercolour illustrations lovingly portray the everyday routines of a traditional Cree family and their connection to the changing seasons, the land and their dogs.

Although Ida Tremblay passed away just before the publication of this book, it was her hope that her story would inspire children to spend more time exploring the natural environment.

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Clear Skies
written by Jessica Scott Kerrin
illustrated by Emma Sakamoto
Groundwood Books, 2019
978-1-77306-240-2 (pb) $16.95
978-1-77306-241-9 (eBook) $14.95
for Grades 1 to 6
Fiction | Astronomy | 1960s Space Race | Claustrophobia | Panic Attacks

Obsessed with all things space-related, aspiring astronomer Arno is over the moon when he wins tickets to the opening of a new observatory. But his excitement is short-lived when he makes a terrible discovery — observatories are dark, enclosed spaces with large, heavy objects hanging overhead. Precisely the kind of place that would cause someone with claustrophobia to have a serious panic attack. Until now, Arno had never thought about how being claustrophobic might affect his dream of becoming an astronomer and he can’t imagine giving up his dream. But hope comes from an unexpected source when he learns that even astronauts experience fear.

Jessica Scott Kerrin delivers another heartwarming middle-grade tale featuring a believable, winsome protagonist who is wrestling with a frightening disorder. Her depiction of his anguish when he realizes that his claustrophobia could end his plans to become an astronomer is touchingly astute and his interactions with his friends are true-to-life. When he, and his oftentimes annoying friend Buddy, confide in each other about their respective life-altering disabilities (Buddy is colour blind), Arno is surprised when Buddy, of all people, gives him reason to believe that he may be able to learn techniques to cope with his panic attacks. This is a gentle, introspective look at dealing with a disorder and recognizing that we are not always as alone as we may think we are. Leisurely-paced and understated, it is also a nostalgic evocation of a bygone era, filled with fascinating facts about the space race and life in the sixties.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager of Woozles in Halifax.

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The Diamond Mistake Mystery
(The Great Mistake Mysteries, Book 4)
written by Sylvia McNicoll
Dundurn, 2019
978-1-45974-493-6 (pb) $8.99
978-1-45974-495-0 (eBook) $7.99
for Grades 4 to 6
Fiction | Mystery | Diamonds | Friendship | Dogs

A rare and expensive pink diamond has disappeared and everyone in Stephen Noble’s tight-knit neighbourhood is a suspect. The diamond was last seen by Pearl, Stephen’s annoying five-year-old reading buddy who he is obliged to walk to and from school. She claims a pirate took it but, due to her vivid imagination, Stephen and his best friend Renée have their doubts. As the Brilliant Diamond Show, where the diamond is scheduled to be featured, quickly approaches, it is a race against time to uncover the real thief in a neighbourhood where people are not always as alone as they seem.

Fans of the previous books in The Great Mistake Mysteries series will be happy to reunite with dog walking detectives, Stephen and Renée, who are back in this fourth instalment (along with their favourite four-legged clients, Ping and Pong). Thanks to McNicoll’s narrative style, middle grade readers will identify with realistic dialogue and Stephen’s tendency to question everything and everyone around him. At first, Stephen’s observations of some of his neighbours are troubling to read as they play into stereotypes based on
ethnic background and income levels, but as the novel went on, Stephen corrects his misconceptions as he gets to know people better. This book could provide a springboard for conversations on misconceptions and biases. Although the mystery itself drags on at times only to be wrapped up in a hurry, the real appeal of this novel is the humour and honesty of its likeable main character.

Amanda Halfpenny is a librarian at Ecole Élémentaire Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau in Toronto.

The Ghost Collector
written by Allison Mills
Annick Press, 2019
978-1-77321-296-8 (hc) $18.95
978-1-77321-295-1 (pb) $11.95
for Grades 5 to 8
Fiction | Indigenous | Family | Paranormal | Grief | Intergenerational Relationships | Community

Shelly is the only person in her sixth-grade class who knows “deep in her bones” that ghosts are real. Seeing spirits is a gift that all women in her family have. Her grandmother is a ghost hunter who helps spirits transition after death, often bringing Shelly along on exciting ghost-finding missions. However, when Shelly’s mom dies tragically, Shelly’s relationship with ghosts changes. She can’t let them go.

The first novel by Allison Mills, an Illiliw/Cree and settler Canadian, The Ghost Collector is a thoughtful exploration of grief and intergenerational matrilineal relationships set against the backdrop of a ghost story. Inspired by Cree worldview, it centres on Shelly’s sorrow and isolation following an unthinkable tragedy that comes at a time when Shelly is already questioning her identity. As the only Indigenous person in her class and growing up in a city, she feels like she doesn’t fully know what it means to be Cree.

Despite its heavy subject matter, young readers will delight in the inventiveness of The Ghost Collector, which features not only human ghosts, but also ghost cats, dogs and even mice. At times, Shelly herself feels like a ghost: “... she can see all the parts of her previous life, but it doesn’t belong to her anymore.” Whether they’ve lost a loved one or deeply miss a friend, readers of The Ghost Collector will identify with Shelly’s complex feelings and her desire to hold onto someone she can no longer touch.

Jessica Rose is a writer, reviewer and editor in Hamilton, Ontario.

Grizzlies of Grouse Mountain: The True Adventures of Coola and Grinder
written by Shelley Hrdlitschka and Rae Schidlo
illustrated by Linda Sharp
Heritage House Publishing, 2019
978-1-77203-277-2 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 3 to 6
Non-fiction | Grizzly Bears | Bear Cubs

An emaciated grizzly cub wanders alone near Invermere, BC. Twelve hundred kilometres North, in Bella Coola, another cub is orphaned. Too young to fend for themselves, they are lovingly cared for but what of their future? Cubs cannot survive in the wild without their mothers’ guidance for several years. Yet raising them in unnatural surroundings is also unsatisfactory. An involved veterinarian and the owner of the Grouse Mountain Resort found a solution. A five-acre wildlife refuge was created simulating the bears’ natural habitat. Here they could live free but be observed and supervised. Coola and Grinder have lived there for 18 years.

This engaging book chronicles the cubs’ lives to the present and provides a myriad of intriguing facts about the habits of bears in general. Coola and Grinder each have their own temperament and appearance but, in the absence of competition for resources, live amicably together. They are happy in their surroundings, naturalists can observe them in summer and winter, learning much about instinctual versus learned behaviours and visitors to the mountain adore watching and learning about the species and conservation. A win-win situation.

The story is clearly and touchingly presented, enhancing knowledge about the lives of these fascinating animals. Large rich illustrations, a mixture of collage, watercolour and gouache are striking and appealing, capturing the distinctive features of each bear, complete with winsome eyes and expressions. Additional charming photos, a series of fascinating facts and information about related foundations add value. This is an excellent introduction to the lives of grizzly bears that will provoke enthusiastic discussion.

Aileen Wortley is a retired children’s librarian from Toronto.
Home Sweet Neighborhood: Transforming Cities One Block at a Time (Orca Footprints)
written by Michelle Mulder
Orca Book Publishers, 2019
978-1-4598-1691-6 (hc) $19.95
978-1-4598-1693-0 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 4 to 8

Non-fiction | Activism | Community

This descriptive book speaks to the importance of bringing back ‘neighbourhood,’ where people know and help each other with things big and small. When I was a child we knew everyone in our neighbourhood. If you didn’t have enough flour for a cookie recipe, you asked a neighbour. Playing outdoors with our friends was the norm. One neighbour even set up their family TV in the front yard for all the kids to watch. Scientists believe that humans are happier when they live in a strong and thriving community.

Michelle Mulder looks carefully at the historical significance of neighbourhoods and community. She explains clearly how changes have been made to archaic laws, how simple acts have changed dangerous traffic patterns without stopping traffic, how knitting grandmothers on their lawn chairs have discouraged drug traffic in problem areas and more. She explains that many small changes can have a huge impact on mental and physical health, on the environment and on a general feeling of happiness.

The colourful, captioned photographs, the pleasing design and information boxes entitled ‘Neighborhood Fact’ and ‘My Happy Place’ are inviting and provide guidance for placemaking on a small scale. Once started, it isn’t difficult to find other ways to improve the way we live in our neighbourhoods. Story-filled and positive, it is an inspiration to any young reader wanting to have an impact in their own community. The writing is well-researched, often personal and very informative. I hope reading this will encourage interested readers to help make home more vibrant, inclusive and satisfying.

Back matter includes acknowledgements, a list of print and online resources, a glossary and a comprehensive index.

Sally Bender

Kiddo
written and illustrated by Cynthia Nugent
Tradewind Books, 2019
978-1-896-58066-1 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 3 to 5

Fiction | 1960s | Family | Journalism | Spelling | Community | Persistence

It is a 1960s summer, and fourth-grader Katherine Wisteria Warble (also known as Kiddo) is spending it collecting points. If she collects enough points participating in community-oriented activities, she will have a chance to be considered for the coveted position of Junior Journalist at the Town Crier. Aside from collecting the requisite points, her only other obstacle is spelling. A journalist who can’t spell? Is it even possible? Her nemesis (and current Junior Journalist) Jeremy Marroon thinks it is highly unlikely. Along the way, Kiddo participates in a talent show, waters a lot of sunflowers, spends time looking for a boyfriend for her teenage sister and even manages to foil a real-life thief. Spare use of black-and-white illustrations accent the story.

Cynthia Nugent presents readers with Kiddo — a little girl who is chock-full of vim, like an engine raring to go. She enters every con-

New From Janet Wilson

Our Future: How Kids are Taking Action
Our Heroes: How Kids are Making a Difference
Our Earth: How Kids are Saving the Planet
Our Rights: How Kids are Changing the World

The Kids Activist Series
Biographies of children from around the world who are making a difference.

“Highly Recommended”
—CM: Canadian Review of Materials

Second Story Press
www.secondstorypress.ca
Doug Underbelly is trying to be normal, but it’s not easy when you live in a house surrounded by gravestones, are lousy at just about everything and are the newly crowned King of the Mole People. Doug didn’t ask for the job, but as he’ll find out, navigating seventh grade is nothing compared to having to prevent a war between the Mole People, Slug People, Mushroom Folk, and Stone Goons and keeping the giant worms from rising up and destroying them all.

When you’re in seventh grade, normal means everything, but poor Doug Underbelly just can’t catch a break. He’s at the bottom of his school’s pecking order, his father makes him eel sandwiches for lunch, and his ‘best friend’ Simon keeps forgetting to wait for him after class.

Below ground, things aren’t any better for Doug as King of the Mole People. A war is brewing between all the below-ground civilisations that threatens to destroy the kingdom and the Mole People are counting on him for a solution he doesn’t have.

Written and illustrated by the creator of the popular cartoon Pooch Café, the story is clever and funny, while subtly addressing several issues that are key to middle-grade readers such as identity, self-awareness and acceptance.

Perfect for fans of Diary of a Wimpy Kid with a side helping of gross!

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

King of the Mole People
(King of the Mole People, Book 1)
written and illustrated by Paul Gilligan
Christy Ottaviano Books, 2019
978-1-250-17134-4 (hc) $18.99
for Grades 3 to 6

Fiction | Humour | Identity | Self-awareness | Acceptance

Mucus Mayhem
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 1)
written by Kevin Sylvester
illustrated by Britt Wilson
Scholastic Canada, 2019
978-1-4431-5779-7 (hc) $14.99
978-1-4431-5780-3 (eBook) $14.99
for Grades 3 to 7

Super Sketchy
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 2)
written by Ted Staunton
illustrated by Britt Wilson
Scholastic Canada, 2019
978-1-4431-5782-7 (hc) $14.99
978-1-4431-5783-4 (eBook) $14.99
for Grades 3 to 7

Irresistible
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 3)
written by Lesley Livingston
illustrated by Britt Wilson
Scholastic Canada, 2019
978-1-4431-5785-8 (hc) $14.99
978-1-4431-5786-5 (eBook) $14.99
for Grades 3 to 7

What Blows Up
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 4)
written by Kevin Sylvester
illustrated by Britt Wilson
Scholastic Canada, 2019
978-1-4431-5788-9 (hc) $14.99
978-1-4431-5789-6 (eBook) $14.99
for Grades 3 to 7

Superpowers | Action | Mishaps | Friendship | Adventure

Dimly, Manitoba, 13 years ago: lightening strikes the hospital and in the maternity ward four babies are showered with glowing dust from shattered light bulbs containing a rare and volatile element called reidium (atomic number 13½). Their doctor, Dr. Fassbinder, predicts the ir-reid-iated babies could change the world. Present day: Dr. Fassbinder’s patience is paying off — as the kids reach puberty, their peculiar superpowers are kicking in! But while Fassbinder and his team of ir-reid-iated mice assistants are facing budget cuts, a supervillian named ‘The Boss’ has recruited a team of nefarious minions to find and capture the almost-epics.

Four books. Four kids. Four weird and nearly extraordinary superpowers. Meet the Almost Epic Squad: Jess Phlem — gamer extraordinaire who’s allergic to everything and is able to transform her snot filled tissues into slimy green magical helpers; Gary Lund-berg — who’s growth spurt is messing up his coordination and who can move objects with his mind… sort of, when he’s paying attention; Daisy Kildare — who just wants to find her talent, can transmogrify into anything she sketches… and only between 3:00 AM and 6:00 AM; and finally, Archie O’Kaye — annoying, rude and self-absorbed but becomes irresistibly charming when he is afraid.

The books, all peppered with Britt Wilson’s entertaining comic panels, are written by four premier Canadian authors, each focusing on the story of one semi-heroic character. Friends help each of the kids learn how to use or control their bizarre new power. All four must use their power to escape the clutches of The Boss’s evil minions. The books are chock-full of crazy critters, talking rodents and vile villains, as well as daring rescues and downright ridiculous exploits.
NUTAUI'S CAP
(a co-publication with Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education)
by Bob Bartel; illustrations by Mary Ann Penashue
ISBN: 978-1-927917244, 68 pages, hardcover, $22.95

THE MYSTERY OF THE PORTUGUESE WALTZES
by Richard Simas; illustrations by Caroline Clarke
ISBN: 978-1-928917251, 36 pages, trade paperback, $11.95

New from Tradewind Books

“Nugent writes with levity and a keen eye for the memorable details of childhood. Young readers may be persuaded to put down their game-controllers and step out into the sunlight.”
—Canadian Children’s Book News
The Boss herself rides around the stories in a patched-up poop-coloured blimp, while Dr. Fassbinder is constantly underfunded and just who is Bernard Cheeper of Department C? The kids don’t all come together until the very end of the final book, leaving the door open for a possible set of sequels.

Full of ‘pun-ny’ wordplay, gross humour, whacky antics and down-right silliness, this series will delight many middle school readers.

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

**The Plastic Problem**
written by Rachel Salt
Firefly Books, 2019
978-0-2281-0223-6 (hc) $24.95
978-0-2281-0231-1 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 4 to 8

Non-fiction | Plastic | Pollution | Environment | Conservation & Protection

This information-packed title capably steers the reader through the complicated steps involved in the manufacture of plastic and its subsequent impact on the environment. The author pulls no punches in revealing damage done as plastic is created, as it sits in landfill, finds its way to oceans and harms a thousand species of wildlife. Ending optimistically, solutions required through the participation of world governments, big business and end-users including children are discussed.

Touching on the benefits of some plastics, the focus is on the detrimental effects of the majority, a subject of ever-increasing concern and a diverse and intricate problem. The complex information is capably broken down into 18 logical, easily absorbed, concise chapters. The book’s attractive appearance is enhanced by user-friendly charts and sidebars with ample photos and drawings. A glossary and index are included, in addition to tangible suggestions to empower children as part of the solution.

Fine details, statistics and nuggets of information that support the overall thesis are compelling: wealthier countries (like Canada) produce 5 pounds of garbage per person per day, poorer countries just 1.5 pounds. Nurdles (plastic components) look like fish eggs to seabirds. Turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish. Rubber ducks dropped in the ocean are carried 5,300 miles away. Plastic is found in the deepest area of the ocean — the Mariana Trench, 36,070 feet below sea level.

This is an excellent resource brimming with facts, containing an upbeat message to encourage readers to become proactive in the protection of our fragile planet.

Aileen Wortley

**Welcome to Camp Fill-in-the-Blank**
written by Hope Dalvay
The Acorn Press, 2019
978-1-77366-026-4 (pb) $12.95
for Grades 3 to 6

Fiction | Prince Edward Island | Family | Camp | Babysitting | Summer | Saudi Arabia

Fourteen-year-old Page is a Canadian living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia where her parents work at the local hospital. This summer, Page has been asked to stay with her relatives on Prince Edward Island in order to care for her high-spirited cousins Danger and Crusoe. However, a babysitter, as we all know, is for babies. What Danger and Crusoe really need is a camp counsellor. Welcome to Camp Fill-in-the-Blank, where activities are organized around a different surprise theme each week — from Outlaws to the Olympics, Page is prepared for anything… or is she? Taking care of two children is no easy task, and when the little girl next door joins in as well, Page is glad for the help provided by the mysterious teenage boy who lives on the other side of the fence. Interesting facts about Prince Edward Island are sprinkled throughout the book.

Hope Dalvay offers readers a chance to experience a summer away from the flickering light of a screen. Danger and Crusoe end up engaging with their summer in a way that they never would have before — they sell homemade dairy-free ice cream, find a buried ‘treasure,’ and even end up on the evening news. Page is a responsible teenager with maturity beyond her years. Despite unanticipated complications, her love and care for her cousins always shines through. This is a heart-warming tale of family and friendship. The book itself is written by Page as a creative writing assignment for an over-enthusiastic English teacher who challenges the children to write a novel — older readers may be inspired.

Ildiko Sumegi
**Darkness Rising**  
(Daughters of Light, Book 3)  
written by Mary Jennifer Payne  
Dundurn, 2019  
978-1-4597-4103-4 (pb) $12.99  
for Grades 9 and up  

Fiction | Environmental Disaster | Fantasy | Terrorism  

In the third and final installment of the Daughters of Light series, the Final Battle is approaching. It’s 2032 and the world is falling apart. Environmental disaster has spread across the world making many regions of the world inhabitable, like the Middle East and parts of Africa and Asia.  

Jasmine Guzman, “the Chosen One,” is tasked with saving all of humanity. Her special powers, along with the other Seers, enable them to fight the forces of evil in the world. They know the Final Battle will not be an easy one, but it is necessary to save the world before it’s too late. To make matters worse, the Seers have been framed for a deadly terrorist attack in Toronto. The Seers must act quickly, but cautiously because if Jasmine goes down, so does the rest of humanity.  

*Darkness Rising* is an appealing book due to the environmental disaster aspect, for young or old. It reflects the real worry people have about climate change in today’s society. With a touch of otherworldly spirits and mythical lands, and corrupt politicians, it is the perfect twist on an environmental disaster story.  

Personally, I have not read the other two books in the series but the prologue was very helpful for understanding exactly what happened. Overall *Darkness Rising* was a satisfying take on environmental crisis and the Final Battle was definitely a surprise. Highly recommended!  

Kirsti Granholm is a writer who currently resides in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

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**Just Lucky**  
written by Melanie Florence  
Second Story Press, 2019  
978-1-77250-104-6 (pb) $13.95  
978-1-77250-105-3 (eBook) $8.99  
for Grades 7 to 12  

Fiction | Family | Friends | Bullying | Racism | Foster Homes  

This is the story of Lucky, a girl whose loving grandparents are raising her and whose best friend lives next door. Her mother is not around, but she is happy and seems to have everything she needs. At the age of 15, it all starts to fall apart. Her grandfather passes away and her grandmother starts to forget things, to the point where she almost burns the house down. She goes from her warm and caring family home (the only place she has ever known) and enters the foster care system. Within a few months, she has been placed in four foster homes.  

The story is at times funny, but also heartbreaking and beautifully haunting. Melanie Florence does not shy away from the realism of Lucky’s story and her struggles within the foster care system. She includes issues such as substance abuse, racism, the threat of sexual assault and bullying. The writing is authentic and the characters are realistic. It encourages the reader to ponder what they might do if they were Lucky and it makes her reactions to certain situations very believable. Lucky is not perfect, but she is genuine and within her story there is not only heartbreak, but also the strength of friendship and family, love and hope. Recommended for school and public libraries.

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**Just My Luck**  
written by Jennifer Honeybourn  
Swoon Reads, 2019  
978-1-250-19465-7 (hc) $24.50  
978-1-250-19466-4 (eBook) $10.99  
for Grades 9 and up  

Fiction | Romance | Humour  

Marty has awful luck, and she’s pretty sure she knows why. While working as a housekeeper at the fancy Grand Palms Hotel in Maui, she starts stealing small items from the rooms as a way of sticking it to the rich, snobby guests. When Marty meets Will, she breaks her own rules and falls for him. He may be a guest, but he’s different, and it seems like her luck is turning around. When a series of accidents and misunderstandings threaten their new relationship, Marty realizes she has to find a way to improve her luck or risk losing Will forever.  

Karma has a way of coming back to bite people in the butt, and for Marty, it seems like that’s exactly what’s happening. She knew that stealing those items was wrong, but they were trinkets and nothing that anyone would miss. She’s convinced that returning all of the items to the guests is the only way that she can turn things around,
but that’s easier said than done. What ensues are a series of mildly comical incidents while Marty attempts to track down the items and their owners.

The romance between Will and Marty is the typical rich guy falls for the poor girl trope found in romantic stories. Will is handsome and charming, and Marty is convinced that their different backgrounds doesn’t matter. Of course, the path to love is never easy and there are forces at work to keep them apart.

While the story would have been stronger had Marty learned to take responsibility and stop blaming luck for her actions, teens looking for a light romance with minor drama will be drawn to this novel.

Rachel Seigel

As Mac Bell and his childhood friends celebrate their high school graduation, they are keenly aware of a notable absence. Connor Williams, the fifth member of their tight-knit group and Mac’s best friend, is not with them. Connor was the fourth and final victim of the Catalog Killer, a vicious and deranged serial killer who terrorized their small town the previous summer. Although the killer was never apprehended, the police assure the townspeople that it’s over and he’s gone. But when Mac finds a note that Connor left for him the day he died, he begins to wonder if the killer really was a random stranger. Still unable to deal with Connor’s death, and now devastated that he may have been able to help Connor if he had found the note sooner, Mac feels compelled to try to solve the mystery. But looking into the murders reopens numerous wounds and brings Mac face to face with some uncomfortable truths about himself and the people he loves.

This briskly paced, carefully crafted mystery/thriller succeeds on so many levels. As a mystery, it is tightly woven, filled with dramatic tension and chock-full of surprises. The resolution is satisfying and the revelations, while shocking, are nonetheless credible. The characters are also well-developed and convincingly portrayed and the story is as much about Mac’s own journey of self-discovery as it is about the murders. Author Tom Ryan does an outstanding job of capturing the essence of a small town and particularly one that has been rocked by tragedy. The book provides an insightful look at issues such as friendship, grief and loss, and the fact that there is almost always more than meets the eye about people — even the people you think you know well.

Lisa Doucet
entrap new readers. In a world inhabited not only by humans but also ‘unnaturals’ — otherwise known as legends — Schaeffer’s universe tackles the conflicting application of human rights to species that aren’t quite human. The legendary figures of vampires, unicorns and kelpies come to life in her text, but with dark twists. Specific species are deemed inherently dangerous and therefore their extermination is encouraged. Nita must confront her own prejudices when her connection to Kovit deepens and she realizes that those who have been raised to believe they are monsters will eventually be forced to become them.

Kayla O’Brien

On the Edge
written by Lesley Strutt
Inanna Publications, 2019
978-1-77133-597-3 (pb) $19.95
978-1-77133-518-0 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 7 and up

Fiction | Intergenerational Relationships | Feminism | Sailing

On the Edge by Lesley Strutt tells the story of a young, curious girl, trapped in patriarchal ways by her abusive Aunt Petra. Emma was orphaned at the age of five, and naturally, she has always wondered about her mother. All her life she has struggled with relationships; whether they were friendships or family ties, Emma never felt like anyone truly understood her. That all changed when she met Jess, a sailor, and ultimately a real inspiration for Emma.

Jess and Emma instantly connect. Jess teaches Emma to sail and they enjoy each precious moment on the water. However their relationship must be concealed as Aunt Petra disapproves of their close knit friendship. Jess lets Emma wear her shorts and t-shirts, while Aunt Petra forces Emma into a boring skirt, because “that’s what girls are supposed to wear.”

As the story progresses, Emma quickly learns that her mother may still be out there. Specifically, in the Bahamas. Emma knows she has nothing to lose and sets sail on her own across the Atlantic Ocean, in search of the one person she’s always wanted to know. It’s a tough journey, and a scary one too. But Emma proves that girls can do anything they put their mind to, with a little hard work and determination.

This book intertwines feminist themes with action and mystery. Strutt makes this novel feel real and relatable by exploring complex emotions such as trauma, forgiveness and hope. On The Edge is a must read for all teens and beyond!

Kirsti Granholm
The Starlight Claim
written by Tim Wynne-Jones
Candlewick Press, 2019
978-1-5362-0264-9 (hc) $19.99
Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Mystery | Adventure

In Cara Martin’s fiction novel Shantallow, Misha Antall, a 17-year-old boy, has a frightening, unexplainable dream. While driving, he witnesses a group of people dressed in ski masks and black clothing, loading a helpless girl into the back of a van. Instantly, he hops out of his vehicle and tackles one of the kidnappers to the ground. His surge of bravery runs short as the groups begins to attack him, and drag his limp body away.

Misha becomes obsessed with learning who the girl from his dream is. One day he finally gets lucky and runs into her around town. The two connect very quickly and eventually end up in a romantic relationship. But Misha is a toxic lover, rocked by anger and impulsivity. After years of abuse from his own father, the influence carries on into his relationship with Tanvi.

As their relationship becomes increasingly strained, the plot takes a turn. Tanvi and Misha are kidnapped because of her families’ financial status. Misha’s terrifying nightmare has become a reality for the two teens. An evil, supernatural force comes to light and the two must try their best to survive despite the odds.

This book is full of twists, turns, heartbreak and mystical forces. The artwork creates even more anguish. The characters are well-crafted; their controversial personalities add another level of depth to the book, amongst the supernatural events that take place.

Kirsten Brassard holds an MA in English with a specialization in children’s literature and currently works at the Word On The Street, Toronto.
Jack Pedersen, a 17-year-old high school student, finds himself at a time in his life where he is struggling to discover who he is — and who wouldn’t! High school is a confusing time for everyone, but Jack has one more thing to add to life’s complications — he’s gay. His mother knows, his best friend Ryan knows, and half the students in his school think they know too. Before he knows it, Jack is embarking on a journey of self-love and acceptance, prompted by the arrival of a new boy at school named Benjamin. With the help of his friends and supporters, Jack brings the rainbow to his small town, teaching its members that normal comes in all shapes, sizes and colours.

Liane Shaw writes a beautiful story that highlights the reality of a young man’s struggle with his sexuality. Her characters are honest and real, each of them having something for the reader to relate to. She honestly depicts the hardships of disability and homosexuality, while still maintaining themes of joy and hope even in the hardest of times. This is a perfect book for all high school students, particularly for those who need a protagonist who is wonderfully human.

This is a great book for anyone who loves ‘slice of life’ narratives that have diverse and relatable characters. Everyone will find something to relate to in this story and its characters. For young people on the hunt for diversity in literature, this is a triumph.

Jada Parada-Hemmings is studying English literature at McGill University in Montreal.
WE RECOMMEND | PAGE 22

Before You Were Born
Deborah Kerbel, Suzanne Del Rizzo

The Case of the Growing Bird Feeder
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
Eric Hogan, Tara Hungerford, Kate Jeong

The Case of the Story Rock
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
Eric Hogan, Tara Hungerford, Kate Jeong

The Case of the Vanishing Caterpillar
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
Eric Hogan, Tara Hungerford, Kate Jeong

The Case of the Wooden Timekeeper
(A Gumboot Kids Nature Mystery)
Eric Hogan, Tara Hungerford, Kate Jeong

Clear Skies
Jessica Scott Kerrin, Emma Sakamoto

Dancing with Daisy
Jan L. Coates, Jodee Bisailon

Darkness Rising
(Daughters of Light, Book 3)
Mary Jennifer Payne

The Diamond Mistake Mystery
(The Great Mistake Mysteries, Book 4)
Sylvia McNicoll

Don’t Say a Word
(Hometown Antihero, Book 2)
Amber Lynn Natusch

Encounter
Brittany Luby, Michaela Goade

Finding Lucy
Eugenie Fernandes

The Ghost Collector
Alison Mills

The Girl and the Wolf
Katherena Vermette, Julie Flett

The Girl Who Rode a Shark:
And Other Stories of Daring Women
Alisa Ross, Amy Blackwell

Grizzlies of Grouse Mountain:
The True Adventures of Coola and Grinder
Shelley Hrditschka, Rae Schidlo, Linda Sharp

Home Sweet Neighborhood:
Transforming Cities One Block at a Time
(Orca Footprints)
Michelle Mulder

The House at the End of the Road
Kari Rust

Irresistible
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 4)
Richard Scrimger, Britt Wilson

It Began With a Page:
How Gyo Fujikawa Drew the Way
Kyo Maclear, Julie Morstad

Just Lucky
Melanie Florence
Just My Luck
Jennifer Honeybourn

Keep This to Yourself
Tom Ryan

Kiddo
Cynthia Nugent

King Mouse
Cary Fagan, Dena Seiferling

King of the Mole People
(King of the Mole People, Book 1)
Paul Gilligan

Last Words
Leanne Baugh

The Little Book of Big What-Ifs
Renata Liwska

Mucus Mayhem
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 1)
Kevin Sylvester, Britt Wilson

No Help Wanted!
Ruth Ohi

Nutcracker Night
Mireille Messier, Gabrielle Grimard

Only Ashes Remain
(Market of Monsters, Book 2)
Rebecca Schaeffer

On the Edge
Lesley Strutt

The Plastic Problem
Rachel Salt

Sergeant Billy:
The True Story of the Goat Who
Went to War
Mireille Messier, Kass Reich

Shanctallow
Cara Martin

She Dreams of Sable Island
Briana Corr Scott

Small in the City
Sydney Smith

Small World
Ishta Mercurio, Jen Corace

The Starlight Claim
Tim Wynne-Jones

The Stone Rainbow
Liane Shaw

Super Sketchy
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 3)
Lesley Livingston, Britt Wilson

The Very, Very Far North
Dan Bar-el, Kelly Pousse

Welcome to Camp Fill-in-the-Blank
Hope Dalvay

What Blows Up
(The Almost Epic Squad, Book 2)
Ted Staunton, Britt Wilson

When Molly Drew Dogs
Deborah Kerbel, Lis Xu

When We Had Sled Dogs: A Story
from the Trapline — ācimowin ohci
wanihikiskanāhk
Ida Tremblay, Miriam Körner

Will’s House
David Booth, Renia Metallinou

Reviews from
Canadian Children’s Book News
are indexed in the Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database, Gale Online Databases, ProQuest and EBSCO Publishing.
Visit www.bookcentre.ca
MIDDLE GRADE GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR RABBLE-ROUSING, SMART-TALKING KIDS —SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

This is just the beginning of two new graphic novel series!

**Shadow Island**

*Book 1*

**Sueño Bay Adventures**

“Memorable characters and clever visuals.”
—Publishers Weekly

“An exciting and magical adventure.”
—Booklist

**The Monster Sisters**

“The Unlocked Cave”

“Memorable characters and clever visuals.”
—Publishers Weekly

“An exciting and magical adventure.”
—Booklist
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