KIRKUS REVIEWS

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THE BEST BOOKS OF 2023

SPECIAL ISSUE

The 200 Best Children’s and 100 Best YA Books of the Year + Our Regular Dec. 1 Issue
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK | Tom Beer

My Favorite Reads of 2022

Every year as Kirkus presents its extensive best books coverage, I reflect on the highs and lows of my personal reading experiences during the previous 12 months. The highs in 2022 were very high—books I’ll be thinking about and recommending for years to come. As for the lows—well, let’s not dwell on those. Here, without further ado, are six of my favorites.

The Invisible Kingdom: Reimagining Chronic Illness by Meghan O’Rourke (Riverhead, March 1): The best nonfiction will completely transform the way you think about a topic. That’s what happened while reading O’Rourke’s exploration of a medical syndrome that affects millions—especially with the advent of long Covid—but is often misdiagnosed or outright dismissed by physicians. The author’s own experience with Lyme disease makes this rigorous study deeply personal and relatable.

Young Mungo by Douglas Stuart (Grove, April 5): The second novel from this Booker Prize–winning author didn’t garner the same level of coverage that Shuggie Bain did. But as a reader who was profoundly moved by the earlier book, I was gratified to find this one its equal. And by giving its young working-class Glaswegian protagonist the fleeting solace of a gay love affair, it’s a more hopeful book than its predecessor.

The Candy House by Jennifer Egan (Scribner, April 5): The author didn’t consider this a sequel to her Pulitzer Prize–winning 2010 novel, A Visit From the Goon Squad, but that’s how it was received by many critics. If only all sequels matched the original with such inventiveness, intelligence, and style! This one left me breathless as it explored themes of memory, privacy, family, and more with pure storytelling brio.

Trust by Hernan Diaz (Riverhead, May 3): Another sophomore novel (do I spot a trend?), this cleverly constructed book—with four separate sections, each offering contradictory views of a 1920s New York financier and his wife—was a pleasure to read while inviting critical reflections on American capitalism, the role of women in society, and the manipulations and distortions of power. Trust went on to win the Kirkus Prize for fiction in late October.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow by Gabrielle Zevin (Knopf, July 5): I knew of Zevin but had never read her before and wasn’t convinced a novel about video game creators was the place to start. Boy, was I wrong—the book delivers a group of friends who are deftly drawn and completely engaging (not unlike the quartet in A Little Life—with less melodrama). It’s a story about the creative life, about the workplace, about friendship, and it left me convinced that video games are a genuine art form. (I’m still not a gamer, though.)

Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands by Kate Beaton (Drawn & Quarterly, Sept. 13): I’ve already rhapsodized about this graphic memoir in a recent column, so I’ll just add that what I love most about it is the way the author’s personal experiences—working as one of very few women at oil extraction companies in Alberta—subtly invites the reader to consider large themes of feminism, capitalism, and environmentalism without ever letting its narrative take a back seat. Just brilliant.
## CONTENTS

### SPECIAL ISSUE: BEST BOOKS OF 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISPATCH FROM THE 2022 KIRKUS PRIZE CEREMONY</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEST PICTURE BOOKS OF 2022</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDITOR'S NOTE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW: IBRAM X. KENDI</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW: YOUNG VO</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEST MIDDLE-GRADE BOOKS OF 2022</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDITORS' NOTE</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW: LINDA SARSOUR</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW: WENDY WAN-LONG SHANG</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEST YA BOOKS OF 2022</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDITOR'S NOTE</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW: ISAAC BLUM</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW: JEN FERGUSON</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### I DECEMBER 2022 ISSUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FICTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDITOR'S NOTE</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYSTERY</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIENCE FICTION &amp; FANTASY</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROMANCE</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NONFICTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDITOR'S NOTE</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHILDREN’S</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUNG ADULT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDIE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEWS</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDITOR'S NOTE</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hernan Diaz, Tanaïs, and Harmony Becker are the winners of this year’s Kirkus Prizes, some of the world’s richest literary awards, given annually to books of exceptional merit in the categories of fiction, nonfiction, and young readers’ literature.

The winners were announced Oct. 27 in a hybrid ceremony at the Austin Central Library in Austin, Texas, hosted by Kirkus Media CEO Meg LaBorde Kuehn and streamed live on YouTube. Each award comes with a $50,000 cash prize and a handmade trophy created by the London design team of Vezzini & Chen.

Diaz won in the fiction category for his novel *Trust*, which follows a wealthy New York couple in the early 20th century whose lives might not be quite what they seem. The judges praised the way Diaz “uses multiple perspectives and forms to push the boundaries of what a novel can do” and called the novel “a true literary delight.”

The judges for this year’s fiction prize were author Deesha Philyaw (*The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*), bookseller Luis Correa, Kirkus critic Wendy Smith, and Kirkus fiction editor Laurie Muchnick.

Tanaïs was named the winner in the nonfiction category for *In Sensorium: Notes for My People*, a memoir that incorporates history, geography, and cultural criticism alongside an exploration of perfumes and scents. The judges cited the book’s “daring, inventiveness, vision, and lyrical eloquence” and said, “seductive, vital, and incomparable, this is a reading experience that endures.”

Judging this year’s nonfiction award were author Hanif Abdurraqib (*A Little Devil in America*), librarian Lillian Dabney, Kirkus critic Sarah Norris, and Kirkus nonfiction editor Eric Liebetrau.

Becker won the young readers’ literature prize for *Himawari House*, a young adult graphic novel about three foreign exchange students who befriend one another while living in Japan. The judges noted the book’s “remarkable mastery of graphic novel conventions
and its perceptive exploration of emotionally resonant, evergreen themes relating to family, friendship, and identity.”

The judging panel for the young readers’ literature prize was made up of author/illustrator Jerry Craft (New Kid), librarian and educator Junko Yokota, Kirkus critic Alec B. Chunn, and Kirkus young readers’ editor Laura Simeon.

This was the first in-person Kirkus Prize ceremony since 2019; due to the pandemic, the event was held virtually in 2020 and 2021. “There’s something truly magical about the energy in a room when it’s full of people who have gathered to celebrate art, to recognize achievement, and, ultimately, to share love—of books, of the craft, and of each other,” Kuehn told the audience in her opening remarks.

Two Kirkus Prize winners from past virtual ceremonies attended the in-person event in Austin: Raven Leilani, who won the fiction prize in 2020 for her novel, Luster, and Christina Soontornvat, who won the young readers’ literature prize in 2021 for All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys’ Soccer Team. Katherine E. Standefer (Lightning Flow­ers: My Journey To Uncover the Cost of Saving a Life), a nonfiction finalist from 2021, was also present.

The evening featured a tribute to children’s book author and illustrator Ashley Bryan, who died in February at the age of 98. Bryan’s book Freedom Over Me was a finalist for the Kirkus Prize in young readers’ literature in 2016.

The ceremony in its entirety can be watched on the Kirkus YouTube channel.

Michael Schaub, a journalist and regular contributor to NPR, lives near Austin, Texas.
**FIRE CHIEF FRAN**

Ashman, Linda

Illus. by Nancy Carpenter

Astra Young Readers (32 pp.)

$17.99  |  Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-63592-426-8

An action-packed day in the life of a fire chief.

Readers are introduced to the myriad responsibilities of a small suburban fire department through the eyes of fire chief Fran, a dark-skinned woman with curly black hair. Over the course of her shift, the firefighters suit up so they can save a dog that accidentally got stuck in a fence while chasing a duck, put out a small brush fire at a campsite, meet a diverse class of students touring the station, perform basic first aid, and more. The story, told in an engaging and varied rhyme scheme and accompanied by bright, appealing acrylic and digital illustrations, doesn't shy away from the amount of work that firefighters need to do, including the physical and practical training that keep the firefighters performing at peak capacity. A final page addressing “A Few Fast Facts About Firefighters” will help answer lingering questions and dispel misconceptions—the book notes, for instance, that two out of three calls are for medical aid and that, for safety reasons, not all stations have fire poles. The backmatter includes an author's note and a brief list of books for further reading. Most characters are Black; a few supporting characters are White. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An engaging profile of an inspiring civil rights hero whom readers will enjoy learning about and cheering for. (Picture book biography. 5-8)

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**THE GREAT ZAPFINO**

Barnett, Mac

Illus. by Marla Frazee

Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)

$17.99  |  April 5, 2022

978-1-5344-1154-8

A diminutive circus high diver loses his nerve.

Behold! Rendered entirely in pencil on transparent film and accompanied by hand-lettered text, this tour de force of visual storytelling features the Great Zapfino, an adorable little man with a pale cue-ball head, huge ears, and a striped bathing outfit. “Prepare to gasp as Zapfino dives ten terrifying stories through the air, landing on a tiny trampoline!” the ringmaster announces as Zapfino enters the circus tent and climbs a ladder to a diving board. Frazee’s grayscale spreads, which simultaneously capture the petrifying perspective and the details of Zapfino’s body language and expressions, leave readers unsurprised when Zapfino bolts from the tent in panic. The remainder of the book is almost wordless and utterly charming; a combination of full-page compositions and vignette panels present Zapfino’s new life as an elevator operator in an art deco high-rise by the beach. It’s a simple life: He rides the elevator (marvelous pages full of rectangles tell the stories of the various residents he encounters), makes toast, and gazes at the night sky. Until one day, the toaster malfunctions and he must evacuate via window. And there, 10 stories down, firefighters are holding a trampoline outstretched, waiting for...
Among the latter are the dazzling tangle of giant selenite crystals in Mexico’s Cueva de los Cristales, ancient cave paintings at Lascaux in France, an immense underwater cave system in Florida, and (for truly courageous adventurers) the “silently squirming ceiling” of glowworms in New Zealand’s Waitomo Caves. The author also pays particular tribute to the group of women who ventured into the constricted reaches (judged too narrow for men) of South Africa’s Rising Star cave system to uncover fossils of a new prehistoric cousin, Homo naledi. All around the world caves are waiting “for/ wonder/ wandering/ explorers/ like you,” she concludes. “Do you dare?” For those who might, the book closes with lists of safety rules and recommended caving gear. Tiny spelunkers in the art are nearly all bundled up and facing away from viewers, but some at least are plainly children, and an observation that the floors of some lava tubes in Australia are flat enough for wheelchairs makes Beckerman’s invitation even more inclusive. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Tantalizing glimpses of hidden natural treasures, with breathtaking art. (cave facts, author’s and illustrator’s notes, photos) (Informational picture book: 7-9)

A young Cuban American girl learns the real meaning of home in this poignant story drawing on the real-life history of Cuba’s Sephardic Jews.

Estrella loves to visit her aunt, Tía Fortuna, in her little pink house at the Seaway in Miami. Tía Fortuna once lived “on the other side of the sea, in Havana,” Cuba. When she “had to leave” her home (a closing author’s note pinpoints the Cuban Revolution as the cause), she took only a suitcase of old photos, her mezuzah (prayer scroll) from her doorpost, and “a key to a home gone forever.” Now, years later, she must move once again, this time to an assisted living facility. While Estrella spends time with her aunt at the seaside and helps her pack, she listens to her life stories, learns about the cultural and religious significance of her most prized possessions, and ultimately learns that, like her ancestors, she can find hope wherever life takes her. This heartfelt intergenerational story illuminates a lesser-known facet of Jewish American immigration. Ladino (i.e., Judeo-Spanish) words are seamlessly integrated into the dialogue between aunt and niece, and Behar weaves Sephardic symbols and traditions into the narrative. For example, Tía Fortuna wears a lucky-eye bracelet (a Sephardic Jewish talisman) and serves borekas (a Sephardic Jewish pastry). Detailed paintings, rendered in gouache, watercolor, and color pencil with digital finishing, skilfully move the visual narrative between the past and the present. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A nostalgic glimpse at a little-known but rich culture within the broader Jewish American community. (glossary) (Picture book: 5-8)
In the decade since I began working in publishing, it feels harder than ever to compile a best-of-the-year list; with so many more titles being published each year, the piles of excellent books to sort through just get bigger and bigger. It’s the best (so to speak!) kind of problem to have, though—one that ensures a list brimming with gems.

Though kids may not understand everything making the news over the last few years, they’re likely picking up on the stress their grown-ups are feeling. Several titles offer comfort—and ways to start dialogues on difficult topics like racism, death, and mental illness. In *Abuelita and Me* (Annick Press, April 12) by Leonarda Carranza, illustrated by Rafael Mayani, a Latine child watches helplessly as their grandmother is treated with derision by others—nevertheless, this forthright exploration of the impact of microaggressions is laced with hope.

Children will also be buoyed by books like *If You’re a Kid Like Gavin: The True Story of a Young Trans Activist* (Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins, July 12) by Gavin Grimm and Kyle Lukoff, illustrated by J Yang. As trans rights continue to be eroded, this account of Grimm’s coming-out journey and path to activism will be a light in the darkness to children worried about what lies ahead.

There are still reasons for joy—and reasons to laugh, as many books on the list remind us. *Creepy Crayon!* (Simon & Schuster, Aug. 23) by Aaron Reynolds, illustrated by Peter Brown, follows the bunny protagonist of the Caldecott Honor book *Creepy Carrots!* (2012) and *Creepy Pair of Underwear!* (2017) as he encounters a crayon that may grant him everything he desires, or so he thinks. This one is guaranteed to give readers both goosebumps and the giggles—no mean feat. And with *Two Dogs* (Michael di Capua/HarperCollins, June 28), Ian Falconer introduces a devilishly funny dachshund duo whose shenanigans manage to rival those of his porcine heroine, Olivia.

Our list also boasts forays into the great outdoors, titles that let readers vicariously climb trees, trek through snowy forests, and, in the case of Kim Jihyun’s wordless South Korean import, *The Depth of the Lake and the Height of the Sky* (Floris, April 19), dive into a sumptuous watery world. *Still This Love Goes On* (Greystone Kids, Sept. 27) is another stunning ode to nature—though with words...and what words! The lyrics of Buffy Sainte-Marie’s song blend with Julie Flett’s textured artwork for “a love letter to family, home, and Indigenous traditions,” to quote our review.

It was a robust year for nonfiction, particularly books spotlighting historical topics that have gone unsung. Pairing his signature, pre-Columbian-style illustrations with contemplative text, Duncan Tonatiuh’s *A Land of Books: Dreams of Young Mexihcan Word Painters* (Abrams, Nov. 15) offers a glimpse into the world of Mesoamerican bookmakers. With *Choosing Brave: How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement* (Roaring Brook Press, Sept. 6), author Angela Joy and illustrator Janelle Washington recount a horrific chapter of U.S. history, displaying respect and empathy both for their subjects and their young audience.

While many of these titles take on lofty topics, others are rooted in the quotidian—the concerns likely to be top of mind for the littlest readers. *How We Eat* (Little Feminist Press, Oct. 18) by Shuli de la Fuente-Lau is filled with crisp, inviting photographs; what sets this board book apart is its inclusivity—feeding tubes, adaptive cutlery, and chopsticks are just a few of the tools used to nourish little ones. And in Nikki Grimes’ *Playtime for Restless Rascals* (Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, Sept. 6), illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon, we see a Black child swept away by a vivid imagination, to joyful effect.

**Mahnaz Dar is a young readers’ editor.**
A large white house situated in farm fields and gardens is home to a large, loving family.

Twelve active, light-skinned children play, do their chores, and occasionally make mischief. Their growth is measured with marks on a wall for all to see. They sleep, read, giggle, and share secrets and dreams in dormitorylike rooms. The children grow up and leave for school and jobs and families of their own. When the youngest child, now quite old, leaves for the last time, the farmhouse is abandoned and sinks into disrepair. But the tale doesn’t end there. Brief rhythmic lines and a bit of playful rhyme list the day-to-day events and describe the children’s imaginings and dreams. The text is set within light beige panels amid double-page spreads of bright, colorful, layered illustrations that add depth, detail, and emotional connection. In a delightful surprise twist, Blackall becomes part of the tale, addressing readers directly, telling how she discovered this derelict farmhouse, collected the bits and pieces left behind, and used them to create the illustrations for the book they are holding in the hope that not only will the family’s story live on, but so might the stories these young readers will tell someday. Information about the actual family, as well as photos of the house and further details regarding Blackall’s process, appears in an author’s note. (This picture book was reviewed digitally.)

A lovely, tender reimagining of people in a long-past time and place. (Picture book 4–9)

BLUE
Brew-Hammond, Nana Ekua
Illus. by Daniel Minter
Knopf (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-984894-36-6

A few good reasons to appreciate the color blue.

Throughout history, humans have captured, cultivated, and coaxed the color blue out of everything from mollusks to rocks to plants. In this fascinating exploration of our relationship to this once-precious color, Brew-Hammond begins by discussing its elusive nature: Seawater is blue, but the color disappears when water is cupped in one’s hand; similarly, crushing iris petals yields blue, but the hue quickly dissipates when soaked in water. Readers learn that the earliest known use of blue dates back to about 4500 B.C.E. in Afghanistan’s Sar-e-Sang Valley and that ancient Egyptians used it, too. But blue has been found worldwide. It was extracted from the bellies of particular shellfish in coastal Japan, Central America, the Mediterranean, and Mexico and harvested from plants in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Americas. Because of its rarity, blue has been considered a royal color reserved for use by the wealthy and privileged. Laced with insights, Brew-Hammond’s meditative verse covers a wide range of cultures, time periods, and geographical locations, while Minter’s mesmerizing images highlight the significance of blue to diverse groups of people through culturally specific visuals such as hairstyles and clothing design. The highly textured backgrounds add life and movement to the focal images in the foreground. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Stunning and informative—and as profoundly rich as the color blue. (author’s note, facts about blue, selected sources) (Informational picture book 4–9)
A woman in the White House? Shirley!

The life of teacher, activist, and congressperson Shirley Chisholm is examined in this poetic biography that packs an exciting and educational punch. Endpages include select quotations, like “Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth,” and images of quippy campaign buttons (“Ms. Chis. for Pres.”). As the book opens, readers meet baby Shirley and learn about her early life in Brooklyn before she and her sisters were sent to live with their grandmother in Barbados. Returning to New York at the age of 9, Shirley set out to become a teacher, but her desire for everyone to be treated equally led her to the world of politics. Advancing from an assemblyperson in New York to Congress wasn’t easy, but Shirley persisted, eventually running for president in the 1970s. The tone of the book is inspiring, but Brown doesn’t shy away from the mistreatment Chisholm encountered: “When Representative Chisholm walked the hallowed halls of Congress, / the thing she felt most / was unwelcome. / No one would sit with her at lunch. / Her colleagues made nasty remarks. / One man even spat when she entered the room. / All to scare her / and keep her in her place.”

Crews’ vividly textured illustrations positively sing, enhancing the text and making for a perfect introduction for young readers everywhere. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

As powerful as the woman it profiles. (author and illustrator notes, timeline, bibliography, additional sources, note about quotations) (Picture-book biography. 8-10)

HONEYBEE RESCUE
A Backyard Drama
Burns, Loree Griffin
Photos by Ellen Harasimowicz
Charlesbridge (40 pp.)
$16.99 | May 10, 2022
978-1-62354-239-9

When Mr. Connery, a beekeeper, hears his garage buzzing and finds a colony of bees setting up housekeeping inside, he knows just what to do. He calls Mr. Nelson, who arrives with his bee-vac, a special vacuum cleaner designed for exactly this situation. Mr. Nelson uses it to gently remove some 35,000 honeybees from the wax comb they’ve built in Mr. Connery’s garage and keep them safe while the two White men reconstitute the bees’ comb in a new hive for Mr. Connery’s garden. Burns, a beekeeper herself, describes the action in vivid, economical prose: “Vacuuming bees requires both patience and stamina.” She interlaces contextual information into her narrative, so readers learn why bees swarm, how they build their hives, and how Mr. Nelson’s bee-vac works even as they follow the riveting story. Harasimowicz’s crisp photos document the process clearly (that it plays out on a gorgeous summer day helps); occasional superimposed arrows with labels orient readers visually. Readers in beekeeping households will note some oversimplification that allows Burns to dive right in to the adventure, but her information is scrupulously accurate after that. They will also observe that Mr. Nelson works without a veil, a fact addressed in a closing Q&A. A glossary, sources, further reading, and acknowledgments round out the backmatter.

Both an excellent nonfiction adventure and a novel addition to honeybee lit. (Nonfiction. 6-10)

NOT DONE YET
Shirley Chisholm’s Fight for Change
Brown, Tameka Fryer
Illus. by Nina Crews
Millbrook/Lerner (32 pp.)
$20.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-72842-008-0

A woman in the White House? Shirley!

The life of teacher, activist, and congressperson Shirley Chisholm is examined in this poetic biography that packs an exciting and educational punch. Endpages include select quotations, like “Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth,” and images of quippy campaign buttons (“Ms. Chis. for Pres.”). As the book opens, readers meet baby Shirley and learn about her early life in Brooklyn before she and her sisters were sent to live with their grandmother in Barbados. Returning to New York at the age of 9, Shirley set out to become a teacher, but her desire for everyone to be treated equally led her to the world of politics. Advancing from an assemblyperson in New York to Congress wasn’t easy, but Shirley persisted, eventually running for president in the 1970s. The tone of the book is inspiring, but Brown doesn’t shy away from the mistreatment Chisholm encountered: “When Representative Chisholm walked the hallowed halls of Congress, / the thing she felt most / was unwelcome. / No one would sit with her at lunch. / Her colleagues made nasty remarks. / One man even spat when she entered the room. / All to scare her / and keep her in her place.”

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DRAWING OUTDOORS
Buitrago, Jairo
Illus. by Rafael Yockteng
Trans. by Elisa Amado
Greystone Kids (36 pp.)
$18.95 | May 3, 2022
978-1-77164-847-9

Between two lush green mountains, beside a pure blue river sits a school alone. Inside the small pastel-colored building, there’s not much: “A blackboard, some chairs.” Who stands at the doorway every morning? A teacher, and today she’s ready to lead the class outdoors. Behind her, a slew of students—of various skin tones and ages—trail. “We are explorers, we have papers, we have crayons.” What will the students observe and draw today?

Buitrago and Yockteng’s idyllic landscape brimming with vast vistas hinting at the magical whimsy, which echoes across the small interactions among students in the background. Precise, sparse text (a translation provided once again by Amado) carries playfully from moment to moment. When class concludes at the end of the day, another inspiring school day seems right around the corner. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Schoolhouse bliss. (Picture book. 4-8)

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Among the trees, a Brontosaurus drinks from the river. Atop a grand rock, a Triceratops stands tall with a hen perched upon one of its horns. Later, a pack of pterodactyls blot out the sun, soaring among white clouds. Even a Tyrannosaurus rex makes an appearance—with a roar. Some students flee. “Only the bravest of us stay on and draw.” Another fanciful collaboration full of wonder, Buitrago and Yockteng’s (Wounded Falcons, 2021) latest boasts a deceptively straightforward premise that begs for rereads. The clean, vibrant artwork brings forth an idyllic landscape brimming with vast vistas hinting at the magical whimsy, which echoes across the small interactions among students in the background. Precise, sparse text (a translation provided once again by Amado) carries playfully from moment to moment. When class concludes at the end of the day, another inspiring school day seems right around the corner. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Schoolhouse bliss. (Picture book. 4-8)
What does being Arab mean?
Camper offers 12 charming glimpses into the experience of being Arab in the diaspora, organized across the months of the year and accompanied by heartwarming, loose-lined digital illustrations. Whether “skateboarding in the sun, / or waiting for the bus with our headphones on” or creating a comic to spread awareness of Ramadan at school, the characters are “Arab, Arab, Arab, / the whole year through!” In an author’s note, Camper explains that these stories—a family observing a New Year’s Eve tradition of spotting stars with Arabic names; children and a grandmother making maamoul; a father playing his dounbek—are drawn from her and her friends’ experiences.

Supplemented with a glossary, the book doesn’t shy away from politics, with references to the Arab Spring and the Palestinian struggle, and avoids universalizing statements about Arab culture. In the glossary, gadda is only “one way to say grandfather in Arabic.” And Camper’s definition of the hijab is nuanced—she notes that “in the Quran, the Islamic sacred book, God advises both male and female Muslims to dress modestly, and this principle is called hijab. There are many stylish and high-fashion designs for Muslim women’s wear.” Illustrations portray Arabs with different skin tones, hair colors, and dress styles. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fun, informative window into the experiences of Arabs in the diaspora. (Picture book. 7-11)
Adapting a Zora Neale Hurston story for children is a tall order, but if there’s anyone up for the challenge, it’s scholar Ibram X. Kendi. With books like *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award–Winning Stamped From the Beginning* (2020), co-written by Jason Reynolds, and *Goodnight Racism* (2022), illustrated by Cbabi Bayoc, he’s proven that he has a gift for making complex messages accessible for a young audience. *Magnolia Flower* (Harper/HarperCollins, Sept. 6), illustrated by Loveis Wise, is both a stirring love story and a tale of resistance in the face of oppression. In it, a formerly enslaved Black man and a Cherokee woman who escaped the Trail of Tears fall in love, marry, and have a daughter, who grows up to fall in love herself—with a man her father disapproves of. Kendi answered our questions via email.

**What made you choose to adapt a work by Zora Neale Hurston—and why this one?**

I’ve long admired the folklore that she collected, the stories that she wrote, the ways that she captured the complex lives of Black people. I wanted children, including my daughter, to be able to read these stories now. They shouldn’t have to wait until high school or college to hear Zora’s stories.

*Magnolia Flower* is a love story that is told by a mighty river to a dancing brook. I thought our children should learn about this love story. It would allow them to see that even in the most difficult moments, humans will find the ability to love.

**You write for a wide variety of ages, from board books for babies to nonfiction for adults. What challenges do you face?**

If it was up to me, I would only write nonfiction for adults. That’s how I was trained. It’s extremely uncomfortable for me to write for children. But at the same time, it is necessary. I wanted to write stories about the beauty of humanity and about racial equality, and I hope that adults can convey those ideas to children. It is a challenge to ensure that the language is developmentally appropriate while holding the complexity.

**In your historical note, you say, “But where there is oppression there is resistance. Where there is resistance there is love.” Why is that so important for children to realize?**

It’s important for children, and adults, to be taught the most harmful moments from our past. From slavery to settler colonization, it’s critical to learn about the violence, the harm, the casualties. It’s important for kids to learn the truth about our past. It’s also important to know that despite that pain, people resisted. People resisted slavery.
sisted settler colonialism. It’s critical for us to realize that people resisted because they loved. They loved themselves, they loved their loved ones, and they loved their people. It’s critical for our kids and for adults to understand the relationship between resistance and love.

Were you able to do live events for the book this year? Any memorable highlights?
I had the opportunity to go on tour. We went to Chicago, Detroit, Miami, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia to talk about Magnolia Flower. It is always a highlight whenever I shared that Magnolia Flower is the first in a whole series of children’s books that I am adapting based on the work of Zora Neale Hurston. It was certainly a highlight to be in conversation with Loveis Wise at their alma mater, the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. They are an incredible illustrator and thinker. To be in community with them and to talk to the Philadelphia community where I went to grad school was indeed a highlight.

Interview by Mabnaz Dar.
A delightfully rendered, touching story of companionship and belonging. (author's note) (Picture book: 3-8)

FOREVER HOME
A Dog and Boy Love Story
Cole, Henry
Scholastic (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-1-338-78404-6

In this wordless tale, a lonely dog and a child yearning for a pet find solace and purpose together.

Alone on a stoop, an abandoned dog sits in front of a locked door and a nearby “for sale” sign. The dog sadly roams the neighborhood, searching for a new home. Meanwhile, a child pesters his parents with pleas for a dog. The child shows them photos and a bright red leash and collar, the only color amid full-bleed black-and-white spreads. The parents visit the child’s room, exasperated with its unkempt state. Undeterred, the child takes the leash for walks around town, even in the pouring rain, the crimson hue of the leash radiating hope amid the gloomy gray. On one such walk, the two main characters meet, and, in hopes of convincing their parents to let the dog come live with them, the child is motivated to help with chores and tidy their room. Cole excels at creating expressive background characters and realistic details with precise ink crosshatches and linework that reward closer inspection. The child is light-skinned with spiky black hair. One parent is light-skinned; the other is dark-skinned.

The author of the cosmic Your Place in the Universe (2020) takes a similarly expansive thought journey in the opposite direction.

Once again Chin goes in scale-changing stages. The 8-centimeter-long Calliope hummingbird that lights on the finger of a delighted brown-skinned child who uses a wheelchair seems tiny. It’s a giant, though, next to the Western Pygmy Blue butterfly (smaller than a penny), which towers over a less than 2-millimeter-long bee...which lands next to a vellus hair, less than 30 microns across, on the child’s skin, and so on down to and into cells, past DNA and its constituent molecules to quarks and gluons—which, Chin writes with some understatement, “aren’t like any objects we are familiar with.” But, he concludes, those same elementary particles make up all the physical matter in the universe, from galaxies to hummingbirds to humans. Particularly in the microbial realms but really throughout, the art’s evocative detailing and dynamic compositions create vivid impressions of realism and movement that will carry viewers down to the point where size and location lose their meanings and then back around to the wide-eyed young observer. Retracing part of his route in the backmatter, the author enriches a summary discussion of life’s building blocks with a chart of elementary particles and the periodic table of elements. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Another fantastic voyage from an accomplished author/illustrator, creatively presented. (note, selected sources) (Informational picture book: 8-10)

I AM GOLDEN
Chen, Eva
Illus. by Sophie Diao
Feiwel & Friends (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-250-84205-3

An immigrant couple’s empowering love letter to their child.

Baby Mei rests in her parents’ embrace, flanked by Chinese architecture on one side and the New York skyline on the other. She will be a bridge across the “oceans and worlds and cultures” that separate her parents from their homeland, China. Mei—a Chinese word which means beautiful—shares a name with her family’s new home: Mèi Guó (America). Her parents acknowledge the hypocrisy of xenophobia: “It’s a strange world we live in—people will call you different with one breath and then say that we all look the same with the next angry breath.” Mei will have the responsibility of being “teacher and translator” to her parents. They might not be able to completely shield her from racism, othering, and the pressures of assimilation, but they can reassure and empower her—and they do. Mei and young readers are encouraged to rely on the “golden flame” of strength, power, and hope they carry within them. The second-person narration adds intimacy to the lyrical text. Diao’s lovely digital artwork works in tandem with Chen’s rich textual imagery to celebrate Chinese culture, family history, and language. The illustrations incorporate touchstones of Chinese mythology and art—a majestic dragon, a phoenix, and lotus flowers—as well as family photographs. One double-page spread depicts a lineup of notable Chinese Americans. In the backmatter, Chen and Diao relay their own family stories of immigration. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A shining affirmation of Chinese American identity. (Picture book: 4-6)

THE UNIVERSE IN YOU
A Microscopic Journey
Chin, Jason
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 29, 2022
978-0-8234-5070-1

The author of the cosmic Your Place in the Universe (2020) takes a similarly expansive thought journey in the opposite direction.

Once again Chin goes in scale-changing stages. The 8-centimeter-long Calliope hummingbird that lights on the finger of
“A poetic collage of emotion and purpose and a vibrant testament to the power of music.”

**MUSIC IS A RAINBOW**
Collier, Bryan
Little, Brown (48 pp.)
$18.99  |  June 7, 2022
978-0-316-33742-1

Sometimes something unexpected can guide us away from the darkest parts of ourselves into a magnificent, glorious light. Collier delivers a visually arresting tale as simple as a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich yet more layered than an opera cake. A young Black boy loves his mama and daddy, and they love him right back. But the boy’s mother becomes ill, and he feels lonely. Trouble beckons in the form of friends encouraging him to accompany them as they make mischief, but each time, music somehow finds him and sets him on the right path—he overhears a young girl playing the piano, is swept up in the swirls of a powerful score at the movies, and finally discovers a piano. Using stunning panels that combine rich watercolors with collage, Collier has created a character whose facial expressions and body language tell the whole story—his joy, anxiety, and promise. The author/illustrator captures that little voice inside us all, the one that calls out when we see something breathtaking. The use of light and color is superb—music is a radiant, swirling rainbow that leads the boy out of the shadows. Collier writes in an author’s note that he was inspired by Maya Angelou, Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken,” and Quincy Jones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A poetic collage of emotion and purpose and a vibrant testament to the power of music. (Picture book. 5-10)

**EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE**
A Story of Books and Belonging
David Sax, Pauline
Illus. by Charnelle Pinkney Barlow
Doubleday (40 pp.)
$17.99  |  $20.99 PLB  |  July 19, 2022
978-0-593-37882-3
978-0-593-37883-0 PLB

A bookish child who doesn’t feel that they belong decides to take a risk.

To Nicky, belonging seems so simple in Ms. Gillam’s library at school. How could recess and its rowdy, closed-off groups ever compare to the quiet delight of resheling books? “Everything has its place in a library. The books. Ms. Gillam. Me.” Then Ms. Gillam announces she will be away at a conference, and Nicky dreads facing a whole week without her haven. Nicky seeks solace in the routine of their mother’s cafe and in their favorite customer, Maggie, who rides a motorcycle and loans Nicky books. But when Maggie comes to the restaurant one day with a whole fleet of motorcyclists—all of them different, all of them together—Nicky is floored by the realization that being different doesn’t have to mean being alone. The poetic text refreshingly resists “correcting” its misfit protagonist and opts instead to validate them. Nicky doesn’t have to shed their introversion or put aside books to make friends but instead invites a peer to dive into books with them. Pinkney Barlow’s illustrations offer a rich, journalesque storytelling counterpart, as the collage and ink-pen styles expertly contrast Nicky’s introspection with the world around them, gifting readers with an almost fantastical visual and emotional landscape. Almost the entire cast is Black and brown, though Barlow opts for unfilled line drawings rather than painted skin tones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

For all those who are never found without a book at recess. (Picture book. 4-7)

**HOW WE EAT**
de la Fuente-Lau, Shuli
Little Feminist Press (22 pp.)
$9.99  |  Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-73418-249-1
Series: We Are Little Feminists, 5

The myriad ways in which infants and children eat. At first glance, this book covers familiar board-book territory: little ones eating. However, it offers more than simple dishes and starter foods. In this installment in the We Are Little Feminists series, readers see feeding tubes, breast pumps, and breastfeeding, and adaptive cutlery along with diverse representations of families and cuisines. Spare text makes use of alliteration and simple rhymes. What really sets this title apart, however, are the beautiful images, taken by various photographers. Some look like a snapshot of a moment in time, a tired new parent with baby, for example. Others capture intentional memories like a celebratory dish and beaming faces. People depicted are diverse in terms of race and ability; included also are a hijabi and a child using a wheelchair. The book ends with “A Note for Grown Ups” about discussing differences (with a URL to a website with more information) along with “Family Discussion Questions” broken down by age level. Sharing a meal, nourishing bodies, and preparing food are essential pieces of human and cultural experiences; this sweet book makes clear that everyone is a part of that. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Meaningful and inclusive. (Board book. 1-4)

**PATCHWORK**
de la Peña, Matt
Illus. by Corinna Luyken
Putnam (48 pp.)
$18.99  |  Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-984813-96-1

Being pigeonholed or restricted limits the multifaceted expressions of humanity. Children blossom with the encouragement to explore and define themselves. But de la Peña and Luyken demonstrate that
With *Gibberish* (Levine Querido, March 1), Young Vo makes an impressive debut—Kirkus called his book “a visually and emotionally immersive immigration story.” Vo, who came to the United States as a child refugee from Vietnam, drew on his own experiences for this deeply personal tale about Dat, a boy who arrives in a surreal, grayscale world where buses fly, where his classmates resemble 1940s-style cartoon characters, and where language is rendered in an incomprehensible, Wingdings-esque font. But as Dat adapts—and makes a friend named Julie—his world slowly fills with color and shifts to one that will be much more familiar to readers. Vo answered our questions via email.

How much of the book came from your own life?
Most of the book was grounded [in] my own personal experience as a refugee kid coming to the United States. I was definitely hearing gibberish before I felt at home.

The people Dat initially meets have the look of cartoon characters—bizarre, a little off-putting, but not truly frightening. Did their design evolve?
The cartoon characters were originally monsters similar to [the characters of] *Monsters, Inc.* or even *Where the Wild Things Are*. The monster design wasn’t really true to who I was. Growing up, I was a Saturday-morning-cartoon kid. I would sit there for hours until there were no more cartoons. I guess that explains why I graduated from CalArts with a degree in character animation.

Many children’s books about immigration frame immigrant characters as different or other; by contrast, your book frames the protagonist’s new community as strange. Why was that important?
I felt it was important to flip that perspective because it helps with empathy. It shows what the immigrant feels in a strange place and how the strangeness can go away. Another key element is that it takes only one person to help transition a strange place into feeling more like home.

Were you able to do live events for the book this year?
Any memorable highlights?
A memorable moment was at the Gaithersburg Book Festival [in Maryland]. After reading *Gibberish*, I asked the kids why Julie changed in the story. A little girl in the front row raised her hand. I asked her, “What do you think?” She said something so soft, I couldn’t hear. I asked if she could say it again, but I still couldn’t hear. I stepped closer. She said it again. I still could not make out what she said. Then the little girl next to her yells, “She said, ‘Friend!’” I laughed. I told the shy girl that’s a good answer, and I looked at the other girl and said, “Thanks for the help.” They laughed and both smiled at each other. It was great seeing those girls work together. It was like a mini *Gibberish* story.

What books published in 2022 were among your favorites?
*Courage Hats* by Kate Hoeffer, illustrated by Jessixa Bagley—a great story about our assumptions versus reality.
*Amar* by B.B. Alston—I’ve been waiting since I read the first book.
Shawn Tan’s *Creature: Paintings, Drawings, and Reflections*—I’m a big fan of Shawn Tan’s work.

Interview by Mahnaz Dar.
He imagines himself defeating dragons and winning favor far and wide through his brave exploits. When a record number of little owls, dreams of being a knight. Owl, an adorably earnest and gallant little owlet, is much smaller than the other knights-in-training, struggles to wield weapons, and has “a habit of nodding off during the day.” Nevertheless, he graduates and is assigned to the Knight Night Watch. While patrolling the castle walls one night, a hungry dragon shows up and Owl must use his wits to avoid meeting a terrible end. The result is both humorous and heartwarming, offering an affirmation of courage and clear thinking no matter one’s size…and demonstrating the power of a midnight snack. The story never directly addresses the question of the missing knights, but it is hinted that they became the dragon’s fodder, leaving readers to question Owl’s decision to befriend the beast. Humor is supplied by the characters’ facial expressions and accented by the fact that Owl is the only animal in his order of big, burly human knights. Denise’s accomplished digital illustrations—many of which are full bleeds—often use a warm sepia palette that evokes a feeling of antiquity; and some spreads feature a pleasing play of chiaroscuro that creates suspense and drama.

A charming blend of whimsy and medieval heroism highlighting the triumph of brains over brawn. (Picture book. 4-8)
“A snug, funny round of hijinks by low dogs.”

**TWO DOGS**

Falconer, Ian
Michael di Capua/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | June 28, 2022
978-0-06-295447-3

Housebound wiener dogs Augie and Perry get up to no good when left on their own.

Posing his poodles on four legs or, anthropomorphically, two (or even, at the beginning, as busts on stands), Falconer takes a break from his long-running Olivia series to proffer as winsome a doggy duo as ever was. Drawn with great and often hilariously expressive precision—and frequently placed on entirely blank backgrounds to call attention to the fact—the two dachshunds appear at first glance as dignified as “little Roman emperors.” Appearances can be deceiving, though: “Most of the time Augie looked more serious. Perry was all over the place.” As their human family, never seen (except once as light-skinned hands), is gone all day at work or school, the dogs look for ways to relieve their boredom…first by tussling over a ball, then by figuring out how to open the back door to an exciting world of flowers to water, a pool to splash in, and, best of all, a lawn to excavate (“Dachshunds love to dig”). The sound of a car pulling in may touch off some momentary panic (“We’re going to get in TROUBLE, Augie!”), but dachshunds are also smart enough to run back inside and exude innocence convincingly enough to earn treats rather than punishment. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A snug, funny round of hijinks by low dogs. (Picture book 5-7)

**MINA**

Forrythe, Matthew
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (68 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-4814-8041-3

Mina, a tiny white mouse, does not know what to think about her father’s unusual houseguests.

Introvert Mina generally isn’t bothered by any of her father’s odd finds, including old tin cans, stamps he displays as fine art, and a troupe of wandering musicians. What finally pulls her nose

**YELLOW DOG BLUES**

Duncan, Alice Faye
Illus. by Chris Raschka
Eerdmans (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-8028-5553-4

A Black child takes readers on a Mississippi blues tour in search of a four-legged friend.

Bo Willie can’t find his dog anywhere. After asking around and consulting a map, he realizes that Yellow Dog, bit by the blues bug, is heading for Beale Street in Memphis, where “he sings all day and night.” Along the way, Bo Willie stops by several sites that figure prominently in blues history, among them the Merigold Blues Club, Hicks’ Tamales, and the intersection of Highway 8 and Highway 1, one of several locations mentioned in the many legends about Robert Johnson, who is said to have sold his soul to the devil in exchange for the gift of blues music. Raschka’s illustrations, created with fabric paint and embroidery on canvas, provide layers of texture and energy that give this book a soulful, country feel. The book is genius in its simplicity; instead of offering a factual account of the blues, it invites readers to feel the music—and readers absolutely will. Duncan playfully weaves in references to the blues; her text exudes the tone of a blues song yet remains cheerfully child-friendly (“Then we drove toward Merigold / to shimmy, shake, and boogie”). The backmatter includes information on the Mississippi Delta and the sites that Bo Willie visits. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Delightful images and carefully selected text combine for a silly, innovative, entirely enjoyable read. (Board book 2-5)

**BUMBLEBEE GRUMBLEBEE**

Elliot, David
Gecko Press (18 pp.)
$9.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-77657-402-5

A series of animal “before and after” scenes told through single-word puns.

What’s a buffalo after it comes out of the tub to dry its fur? Why, a “fluffalo,” of course! How about a rhinoceros after it drops its ice cream cone? A “crynoceros”! Elliot’s simple illustrations show each animal before and after an inciting event, its original and punny new name the only description. The real accomplishment of this astounding board book is that an entire story is conveyed through just two words, one of them being the animal’s name. On one spread, the verso depicts an excited, eager hamster who spots a full jar of jam; on the recto, the jar’s contents now nearly drained, drips of sticky sweetness cover a full and satisfied “jamster.” Elliot’s soft watercolor and pencil illustrations play deftly with light and shadow. Carefully rendered expressions, body language, and movements give each animal its own personality. His original approach to storytelling and wordplay for toddlers makes for a charming story. The book ends with a gleefully chaotic image of a hose-wielding turtle (“squirtle!”) spraying the other animals. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A snug, funny round of hijinks by low dogs.”

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A snug, funny round of hijinks by low dogs. (Picture book 5-7)
THE CURiosITIES

Praillon, Zana
Illus. by Phil Lesnie
Greystone Kids (40 pp.)
$18.95 | June 2, 2022
978-1-77840-008-7

A boy learns to embrace his differences and to shed the darkness.

Miro, brown-skinned with dark hair, is surrounded by Curiosities, hazy creatures who show him “how to swim with the stars and tickle the songs from the earth.” Sometimes he sits down and puts his hands over his ears when the Curiosities get too noisy. Strangers stare or turn away, unable to see what makes him tick. With the guidance of an elder, Miro learns that his connections to people like him who “see all the oddments and snippets, all those hidden wonders and possibilities waiting in the shadows,” are what keep him strong. Affirming and uplifting, this poetic story is based on Praillon’s experience with her child who has Tourette syndrome. Drawing from Filipino folklore and history, Lesnie depicts the Curiosities as the ghouls and monsters known as aswang, a visualization of what makes people with Tourette syndrome move, while the elder who helps Miro to his feet is based on the Babaylan, priestesses and community leaders connected to the spiritual world who sometimes exhibited neurodiverse traits. Lesnie’s immersive illustrations feature a ravishing palette beautifully depicting the changing colors of the sky and the sweeping landscapes of Miro’s waterfront home. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Winning and wondrous, this picture book is a compelling appreciation of neurodiversity. (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

TINY DINO

Freedman, Deborah
Viking (40 pp.)
$17.99 | April 19, 2022
978-1-5362-2914-1

Who’s a tiny dinosaur? You’ll be surprised.

“I’m a DINOSAUR!” proclaims a hummingbird proudly. A turtle points out that dinosaurs had huge feet that “stomped and clomped.” The hummingbird responds, “Look at my toes! They are just like T. rex! I’m a dinosaur!” The background illustration shows T. rex toes and a close-up of hummingbird toes with the caption “Four toes, three forward-facing.”

A frog notes that dinosaurs had huge bones, but the hummingbird replies that many dinosaur bones were hollow, just like hummingbird bones. A shrew joins the chorus of naysayers and argues that dinosaurs were fierce. “I am FIERCE!” says the hummingbird. And when a crocodile sticks its head in to ask if it heard correctly “that dinosaurs still roam the earth,” the hummingbird proves its fierceness by standing firm. Then the little bird discusses the similarities between itself and the crocodile; they are cousins. It has finally convinced the other animals. Freedman’s main text is entirely in speech bubbles, and as the animals converse, supporting facts and diagrams appear in the background. Her usual stunning watercolors are splats and spatters of bright color that follow the mood of the taxonomic debate. Though the exchanges are humorous, Freedman also folds in lessons on both science and the dangers of assumptions. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An innovative introduction to the relatedness of all animals that will delight budding biologists and dino mavens alike. (author’s note, resources list, website) (Informational picture book. 4-8)

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Frost, Robert
Illus. by P.J. Lynch
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-5362-2914-1

A picture-book adaptation of Frost’s pensive poem. Its four rhyming quatrains are divided into six couplets interleaved with several wordless double spreads; the last four lines each appear on a separate page. Notably, Lynch visually subverts several of the poem’s customary narrative interpretations, depicting a young, light-skinned rider astride a dappled gray horse. While the poem’s line “He gives his harness bells a shake” implies a horse-drawn wagon, Lynch supplies a bell-trimmed bridle instead. Such innovations shift the poem’s authorial voice away from that of the venerable poet, adding a fresh layer of mystery to the purpose of this traveler’s journey. The narrator’s clothing, suggestive of the late 19th or early 20th century, includes a long dress, a belted jacket, a sturdy,
wide-brimmed hat, and thick work gloves; a bedroll is stowed behind the saddle. Where the poem mildly personifies the horse, who “must think it queer / To stop without a farmhouse near,” Lynch depicts the dismounted rider fondly cradling the animal’s head as twin puffs of breath exit his nostrils. Belying this “darkest evening of the year,” Lynch illuminates the blue-greys of snow-laden conifers and frozen lake with a pallid gold winter sunset and a fleeting moon. Variable perspective—from bird’s-eye to close-up—bestows a quasi-cinematic sense as the coming dawn draws the rider’s furtive look. Endpapers bracket the journey, from twilit village to sunup, horse and rider long gone. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Lovely pictures newly elucidate this renowned, euphioni­ous work. (Picture book/poetry. 5-10)

APPLE AND MAGNOLIA

Gehl, Laura
Illus. by Patricia Metola
Flyaway Books (40 pp.)
$18.00  |  Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-947888-35-7

With support from Nana, Britta sets out to help one of her favorite trees heal.

Britta is a capable, vivacious girl who insists that her two favorite trees—Apple and Magnolia—are best friends. Exuberant artwork with vigorous brush strokes depicts brown-skinned, curly-haired Britta smiling up at her arboreal friends in the daytime and dancing near them as they sway at night. When Magnolia’s branches begin to droop, irresistible Britta, flanked by her pets, brainstorm ways to help Magnolia connect with Apple, measuring the distance between the trees as the months progress: She creates a cup-and-string telephone, knits an enormous scarf, and hangs a string of lights, all in a determined attempt to connect the two trees. Britta’s light-skinned, bespectacled Dad and her dark-skinned, plugged-in older sister, Bronwyn, are skeptical of Britta’s efforts. In an effective use of repetition, her father “nicely” rejects Britta’s ideas, and Bronwyn pooh-poohs everything with the qualifiers absolutely, positively. Wise, dark-skinned Nana encourages Britta by sharing wisdom, prompting ideas with questions, and joining in her tree-healing campaign. As the author’s note mentions, cutting-edge science underlies this seemingly whimsical story; and observant readers will notice that Britta’s observations, measurements, and data-keeping capture the scientific method in action. Nana’s assertions about the power of “unusual friendships” encourage readers to consider this heartwarming tale in both literal and figurative ways.

What’s not to love about this endearing and effervescent picture book? (Picture book. 3-6)

ODD BIRDS

Meet Nature’s Weirdest Flock

Gehl, Laura
Illus. by Gareth Lucas
Abrams Appleseed (42 pp.)
$8.99  |  June 14, 2022
978-1-4197-4223-1

Who doesn’t want to take flight and soar sometimes? Young ornithologist wannabes or children simply dreaming about taking to the skies would do well to cast their eyes on this thought-provoking, dazzlingly colored little book filled with some examples of wonderful birds with rather unusual physical characteristics and narrated in punchy, rhythmic verse. Readers/listeners will pick up facts about some fascinating avians that possess weird attributes, such as blue feet, baldness, enormous beaks, oversized red pouches, and imperviousness to high temperatures. Here’s a tidbit that will really make kids sit up and take notice: The hoatzin smells like poop! In the end, though, the text confronts kids with a fact that will truly give them pause: Since humans don’t have beaks or feathers, maybe birds think that we’re the odd ones. No surprise, then, that on the cover, a bird with mesmerizingly huge round eyes stares directly out at readers—unwinged as—in wonder. Set against stylized backgrounds, the boldly hued illustrations depict the birds realistically in terms of color, shape, and characteristic. Notably for a board book, there’s factual backmatter here: a small color photograph of each bird named in the text along with interesting facts about each one and an explanation of the odd feature mentioned in the book. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A winning mix of illuminating facts and charming art—this book definitely isn’t for the birds. (Board book. 2-5)

BERRY SONG

Goade, Michaela
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$18.99  |  June 14, 2022
978-0-316-49417-5

A magical intergenerational story of gifts and cultural rituals shared between a grandmother and her granddaughter.

A Tingit grandmother takes her young granddaughter to a nearby island for a berry-picking adventure in the forest. To alert the forest bear and the various types of berries that glow “like little jewels” of their presence, the pair sing a harvest song: “Salmonberry, Cloudberry, Blueberry, Nagoonberry, Huckleberry, Soapberry, Strawberry, Crowberry.” Grandma teaches the girl that “we speak to the land…as the land speaks to us,” and “we sing too, so the land knows we are grateful.” As they gather berries in the misty rain, they listen to the sounds of insect wings, inhale the sweet scent of cedar, and feel the soft moss on tree branches. Back at home, “the kitchen glows like a summer sky” as the girl, her grandmother, her father, and her younger sister make syrup,
marmalade, jelly, jam, pie, and scones to share. When winter comes, the forest is described as "dreaming, waiting for berry song." Seasons change, marking the passage of time and leading to a bittersweet, full-circle ending. This beautifully written story by Caldecott medalist/debut author Goade features breathtaking, atmospheric artwork inspired by the wild landscape of her hometown, Sheet’ká, Alaska, and incorporates rich symbolism and imagery from Tlingit culture. A closing author’s note elucidates sacred Tlingit principles mentioned in the story, and dazzling endpapers identify different berry varieties. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A touching story of familial love and of respect and gratitude for the bounty of the land. (Picture book 4-8)

WHERE WONDER GROWS
González, Xelena
Illus. by Adriana M. Garcia
Cinco Puntos Press (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Jan. 1, 2022
978-1-947627-46-8

Celebrate the wondrous stories that exist all around thanks to the marvels stored in rocks.

A group of dreamers follows Grandma to her special garden. They spread a plush blanket upon the ground and gather the Earth. Expanding on the infinite flights of fancy unearthed in dreamers then ponder the meteorites in their hands, envisioning and Garcia’s latest enchanting collaboration plumbs deeper into the natural curiosities that shape readers’ earthly realities. It’s a sweet summoning embodied by Gonzalez’s starry-eyed text, an assortment of phrases and statements that gesture toward the promise found in young readers everywhere. Garcia’s muralist background lends itself here to striking, gorgeous artwork that embodies a whimsical sense of cosmic compassion. Overall, the art showcased in this hopeful manifesto soars.

Simply dazzling. (rock facts) (Picture book 5-10)

JIGSAW
Mystery in the Mail
Graham, Bob
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$18.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-5362-2499-3

Assembling a large jigsaw puzzle that arrives from parts unknown gives the Kelly family months of pleasure—and a final challenge.

“ONE PIECE IS MISSING!” A fruitless search of the house and some hard thinking by Mom lead to the conclusion that it must have gone out in the trash—which sharp-eyed readers will already know having followed the tiny but brightly colored bit in previous scenes from floor to vacuum to trash can and out to the sidewalk for pickup. So the Kellys head for the recycling center and sort through a towering mountain of love letters, tickets, cards, and old newspapers. “Shouldn’t take long,” says young Katie with impressive optimism. “It’s waiting around and will find us again,” agrees Dad. And, against all odds, the piece does find them, making its way home after the family’s long, discouraging search on the sole of Dad’s boot. Now how will Katie and little sister Kitty send a thank-you note to the puzzle’s anonymous sender? Sandwiched between before-and-after endpaper views of a puzzle scene of anthropomorphic African animals joyfully leaping into a pond, Graham offers an episode as rich and intimate in feeling as it is spare both in words and visual style. Human figures in the informally drawn, often wordless scenes are light-skinned throughout. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A celebration of small miracles and the hope that makes them happen. (Picture book 6-8)

MY FADE IS FRESH
Grant, Shauntay
Illus. by Kitt Thomas
Penguin Workshop (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-593-38708-5

A girl arrives at the barbershop with hair everywhere and leaves with the freshest fade.

The adventure starts when the narrator walks into the barbershop, where Black folks are working, styling, sitting, and talking. The child sits and asks for “THE FRESHEST FADE UP ON THE BLOCK!” Instead of getting right to it, the hairdresser suggests other options—a trim, an Afro, cornrows—and cuts bit by bit. As the girl’s hair slowly gets shorter, other patrons suggest different options, like spikes, twists, or locs. Time passes as the suggestions keep pouring in, and the hairdresser and the child’s mother become visibly distressed. Finally, it all comes to an end when the child’s hair is short enough for her to say, “Just line me up.” The rhyming text is great fun to read, with perfect rhythm and style, though at times it can be slightly difficult to tell who is talking. The call and response...
detailing myriad creative Black hairstyles is both a humorous romp and a glorious celebration of Black beauty. The gentle message of a girl choosing her own look despite others’ attachment to her long hair is neither lost nor overdone. Thomas’ illustrations attend to every detail and exude energy, community, and warmth as they cycle through interesting characters and the narrator’s many different looks en route to her chosen fade. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This fun, powerful, and empowering tale belongs on every shelf. (Picture book. 3-8)

KEEPUNUMUK
Weeâchumun’s Thanksgiving Story
Greendeer, Danielle, Anthony Perry & Alexis Bunten
Illus. by Gary Meeches Sr.
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-62354-290-0

The Thanksgiving story, told from the perspective of the Wampanoag people.

A Wampanoag grandmother plants her garden with weeâchumun (corn), beans, and squash, or the Three Sisters. When her grandchild asks to hear the story of Thanksgiving, N8hkumuhs tells them that their people call it Keepunumuk, “the time of harvest,” and explains what really happened. The tale opens with Seagull warning Weeâchumun—depicted as a woman with a translucent body—of the Pilgrims’ arrival; Weeâchumun worries because many of the First Peoples who cared for her have gone to the Spirit World, and she fears this will be her last winter. Fox keeps an eye out and in spring tells Weeâchumun and her sisters that the newcomers endured a hard winter; many died. Weeâchumun and her sisters want to help: “We will send the First Peoples to help the newcomers.” The Wampanoag people teach the survivors how to plant corn, beans, and squash. The settlers hold a feast to celebrate the harvest; though it’s remembered by many as the first Thanksgiving, backmatter explains that because of the disease and warfare brought by the settlers, for the Wampanoag people, it is remembered as a day of mourning. Rich, saturated acrylics imbued with a touch of magic add to the vibrancy of this important, beautiful story. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A much-needed Thanksgiving retelling that centers the Wampanoag people. (glossary, information on the Wampanoag, map, recipes) (Picture book. 3-7)

PLAYTIME FOR RESTLESS RASCALS
Grimes, Nikki
Illus. by Elizabeth Zunon
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-72823-893-7

It’s time to get to work having fun.

A brown-skinned child awakens to Mommy’s command to “get to work,” adding, “Your job is called play.” As narrator, Mommy tells this story in second person to the child—“You’d play all day / if I let you”—and talks as if this conversation about work is an oft-repeated ritual between herself and her child. In matter-of-fact text that exudes tenderness, Mommy recounts how her little one plays in the rain, in the sun, and in the snow, in the fall leaves, at the duck pond, and in many other places, indoors and out. Readers might recognize this mother–child pair in the fall leaves, at the duck pond, and in many other places, indoors and out. Readers might recognize this mother–child pair. In every spread, Zunon’s illustrations highlight this familial bonds. When Daddy comes home, he plays tic-tac-toe in sock feet with his child on the floor while Mommy finishes napping on the couch after telling Daddy, “Your turn.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A stunning, warm story about the many ways that play sparks joy. (Picture book. 3-7)

IF YOU’RE A KID LIKE GAVIN
Grimm, Gavin & Kyle Lukoff
Illus. by J Yang
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | July 12, 2022
978-0-06305-756-2

Some choices are harder than others.

Growing up, student Gavin Grimm knew about choices. He knew whether to eat worms on a dare, whether to sneakily adopt a pet frog and hide it from his mother, and that he had to make a choice about standing up for his right to use the boys’ bathroom at school. This last choice, however, was deemed controversial by a transphobic teacher and by students who bullied Gavin. But Gavin still had a decision to make: He could stay silent, or he could fight back. In this picture-book, trans activist Grimm, with author Lukoff, documents his early life and his role fighting for trans rights, a battle that sadly is far from over. The story’s simple but direct text and vibrant digital illustrations work in tandem to create a beautiful, harmonious story that deftly documents Gavin’s fight and explains why trans rights are basic human rights. While librarians and educators will find this an
essential title for their shelves, book clubs and individual readers will equally find it useful for discussion, contemplation, and as an excellent introduction to the discussion of trans rights from a humanist perspective. While Gavin's story is far from over—and he may have many rocky roads ahead—this book will help readers and their caregivers better understand why it was necessary for him to make these difficult but vital choices.

There’s no choice here. Buy it! (Picture book biography. 6-10)

SAL BOAT
(A Boat by Sal)
Heder, Thyra
Abrams (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-4197-5750-1

A boy can build a boat by himself, but launching it is another matter.

Small in body but large in determination, solitary Sal starts his newest project by ransacking his mom's garage and then proceeding to gather old boards, discarded paint, and seemingly random junk from all over his small seaside town. What he constructs has walls, windows, and a peaked roof. But Sal shrugs off the skeptical comments of passersby (“What, have they never seen a boat before? Zero imagination in this town”). When it’s done, it is indeed a (house)boat and, in the luminous illustrations, a magnificent one, solidly assembled from bric-a-brac and splashed with intense colors. Triumph gives way to frustration, though, as an onlooker’s questions about how he’s going to drag it down to the shoreline leads to a series of devastating failures. Along with effectively capturing the setting’s small-town feel in her watercolors, Heder depicts a light-skinned protagonist whose changing facial expressions and body language offer a positive study as he goes from intense, scowling concentration to delight, dismay, then despair, resignation, and, bit by bit, anger.

A literally buoyant reminder that sometimes it takes a village. (Picture book. 5-8)

MAGNOLIA FLOWER
Hurston, Zora Neale
Adapt. by Ibram X. Kendi
Illus. by Louis Wise
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-309831-2

Scholar Kendi adapts a short story published by Hurston in the Spokesman in 1925.

The Mighty River tells the whimsical, mischievous Brook the story of Bentley, who flees slavery for a Florida forest where Black and Native people live free together as Maroons. Bentley marries Swift Deer, a Cherokee woman who escaped the Trail of Tears, and they have a daughter named Magnolia Flower, who “came at the time of the flowers opening.” When the Civil War ends, Magnolia falls in love with John, a Black man whom Bentley dislikes because he is poor. Bentley locks John up in their house to keep him away from Magnolia, but one night, Magnolia frees John and escapes with him by boat, making the Mighty River a part of their story. The tale comes full circle when Magnolia and John return 47 years later to reflect on and affirm their love. Deeply committed to sharing Hurston’s writing with young readers, Kendi writes in his author’s note about the elements of Black folklore in the story, such as making nature a speaking character. And, as he stresses in a historical note, the tale is a powerful example of Black and Native resistance—an aspect of history that far too often goes undiscussed. Wise’s earth-toned, opalescent illustrations make the trees, water, and flowers feel just as key to the tale as the humans. The excellent marriage between lyrical text and stunning visuals makes for a moving, memorable story. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An artfully rendered tale of life and love that also conveys an essential but often overlooked chapter in U.S. history. (Picture book. 5-10)

H IS FOR HARLEM
Johnson, Dinah
Illus. by April Harrison
Christy Ottaviano Books (48 pp.)
$18.99 | July 19, 2022
978-0-316-32237-9

An alphabetic journey through Harlem, past and present.

Beginning with “A is for Apollo Theater” and ending with “Z is for Zora Neale Hurston,” this historically rich picture book highlights the significant people, places, works of art, memorable publications, and more that have long made Harlem a hub of Black culture. Some letters focus on well-known institutions, such as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and the Harlem Globetrotters. Others shed light on lesser-known individuals like Mabel Fairbanks and Sharon Cohen, who created a path for Black youth to learn figure skating, and Impact Farm, an organization that has turned abandoned lots into thriving...
urban gardens. Harrison’s stunning, colorful, highly textured illustrations complement and expand upon Johnson’s textual snapshots, which offer just enough detail to encourage children to deepen their knowledge of Harlem. Johnson also gives a nod to other children’s picture-book creators by spotlighting Bryan Collier, whose award-winning picture book _Uptown_ celebrates Harlem. This is a beautiful and welcome celebration of Black joy. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A gem that whets the appetite to learn more about a city where art is as alive as the people who live there. (author’s note) (Picture book. 5-10)

One family’s fight to stay together.

When Juarez’s mom was 18, she traveled across the Mexican border into the United States to attend school, work, and live. She met and married a U.S. Marine, and they had two daughters. But when Juarez was 8, her mom was deported to Mexico. The girl was devastated by the loss of her mom, and her mother’s absence left the family confused and distraught. Desperate to reunite her family, Juarez wrote letters to Congress and the president, among others. When these letters received media exposure, lawyers were able to help Juarez’s mother return to the country. Juarez, now a teen, with co-author Norman, tells the story of her family’s struggle to reunite and underscores the importance of speaking out against injustice. This sincerely told story conveys the difficulties and heartbreak that families of undocumented immigrants encounter as well as the complexity of the pathways to citizenship in the United States. Martinez’s illustrations use color to depict the devastating effects on the family; a close-up of a young Juarez huddled on the floor is especially poignant. Yet the gentle artwork tempers the sadness.

Both Spanish and English editions of the story are available; the message is powerful in any language. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An inspirational and heartfelt story that will resonate with young activists. (author’s note, photos) (Picture-book memoir. 5-9)

The brutal killing of a Black youth turns his mother into an activist for justice.

This poignant volume about the murder of Emmett Till focuses on his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, and how her son’s death drove her to seek justice, first for him and then for the Black community. Mamie and her family moved from Mississippi to the outskirts of Chicago, hoping for a better life. Mamie married young boxer Louis Till. Their baby boy had many medical problems, but Mamie refused to institutionalize him. When a chance came for Emmett to spend time with family in Mississippi, she was reluctant but gave in. He had not been there long before word came that he was missing. When his body was found, it was barely recognizable and Mamie was told not to open the casket. However, she was determined that the world would know what was done to Emmett, and the images from the open viewings had a major impact on the growing civil rights movement. Although those accused of his murder were allowed to go free, Mamie continued her fight for social change, ensuring Emmett Till’s story would not be forgotten. This story is told with hauntingly lyrical language that successfully captures the tenor of the time and brings to life its subjects. The text is enhanced with powerful expressionistic art crafted from cut paper and silhouettes. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A devastating, uniquely told story that will resonate. (author’s and illustrator’s notes, soundtrack, glossary, timeline, sources) (Picture-book biography. 8-12)
a storm, lightning strikes. Burned and battered but not dead, the giant tree is then attacked by an insect hoard. No food exits the tree, but instead, remarkably, the surrounding trees send their own excess food and water back to their ailing compatriot. Meanwhile, the seedling continues to grow. Accompanying at-times poignant text, the book’s rich illustrations remain fairly realistic while using clever visual clues to explain different concepts. For example, to indicate the kind of help that passes among the trees, each type of message sent through the fungi appears as a small colored symbol. The end result drills home this complicated idea of tree communication in a way that many kids will appreciate. Additional photographic backmatter with more information on trees rounds out the book. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Smart, concise explanations of a tricky topic leave readers only wanting to learn more. (activities) (Nonfiction picture book. 6-10)

**THE DEPTH OF THE LAKE AND THE HEIGHT OF THE SKY**

*Kim Ji hyun*

*Floris (48 pp.)*

$17.95 | April 19, 2022  
978-1-78250-742-0

A wordless ode to the serenity of breathing deep in nature.

A child with pale skin, dark hair, and Asian-presenting features plays with toys in an apartment in a bustling city. Soon the child and their parents are driving to visit relatives in the country. Tall trees replace skyscrapers, and grass replaces pavement. Mesmerized first by family photos on the living room wall and then by the lush outdoors, the child wanders down shady paths, accompanied by their equally curious dog. Arriving at a vast lake, the child dives in and finds a submerged world, with waving plants and fish that seem to beckon. This watery space is serene like the countryside above, and the child revels in it before surfacing to lie on the sunny dock. Later, the child and the dog gaze at the starry sky, inviting readers to do the same. Kim’s mostly monochromatic illustrations nevertheless vary in line weight and texture, bringing to life the protagonist’s verdant surroundings and perfectly capturing the transformation from city child to a wilder one. Shifting perspectives vary between close-ups of the child’s wondrous expressions and their tiny form amid a dense forest, an expansive lake, and a luminous night sky. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A simple yet marvelous musing on the beauty of the great outdoors. (poem by the author) (Picture book. 4-7)

**MUSHROOM LULLABY**

*Kraegel, Kenneth*  
*Candlewick (32 pp.)*  
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-5362-0842-9

This bedtime fantasy features an intimate glimpse into the imagined world of fungi.

Short sentences, lilting rhymes, and harmonious visuals help viewers grasp the subject matter: “This is a mushroom that grows in the park. / This is a mushroom that glows in the dark.” Kraegel invites readers in by showing a homey mushroom dwelling and switching to the second person; since the “you” is never depicted, all will feel included. Friends are welcome, too: A snail, caterpillar, ladybug, and butterflies visit. They play volleyball, strategize chess moves, and sip lemonade under the flowers. A nearly square trim size and ink-and-watercolor compositions with an abundance of curves and rounded shapes create a setting filled with quiet joy and a sense of security. Stippling and other surface patterns provide texture and gradations of light. As the day winds down, the warm palette becomes even more intense, with glowing embers in the fireplace and deep orange-red walls and decor. The cozy interior is filled with neatly arranged toys, books, musical instruments, and stuffed animals. Stars and the moon are visible through the circular window, and as the viewer pans out to portray a community of mushroom homes in all their glorious variety, listeners learn that while it is time to “turn out the light,” they are wished “sweet dreams, / a soft rest… // and a very good night.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A mycological charmer. (Picture book. 3-6)

**A DAY FOR SANDCASTLES**

*Lawson, JonArno*  
*Illus. by Qin Leng*  
*Candlewick (48 pp.)*  
$17.99 | May 10, 2022  
978-1-5362-0842-9

An idyllic day at the beach silently unfolds.

As they did in *Over the Shop* (2021), Lawson and Leng create ample space for the reader to supply the story. The artwork begins and ends with lovely vistas of sea gulls on a deserted beach and a white family—a mother, father, and three kids—arriving and departing by bus. An image of the older boy running through dunes and beach grass, waving his shirt like a flag, sets the tone of exuberant joy. Everyone on this beach is cheerful and relaxed. Readers see beachgoers of various ages, skin tones, and body types engaged in sundry activities, including swimming, wading, taking photos, and playing catch with a beach ball. The siblings build and rebuild a sand castle, molding, shaping, and decorating it with found treasures only to have it repeatedly destroyed by the tide or sunbathers. The parents don’t try to solve this problem, instead allowing the
These techniques are characteristic of the Dada art movement, and materials with interesting textures. The narrative is set on a beach. The design is inspired. Potty humor and wordplay abound: “It says here there’s a toilet in an art show and every tourist wants to grab a sand bucket and head to the beach.” Collages employ acrylics, watercolors, digital ink, and strips of colored paper, while the dialogue is presented in capital letters in different colors and fonts; some appear pasted on. The artist is first glimpsed holding a pen and standing next to Mona Lisa, who sports an inky mustache and goatee. Readers then see a star pattern shaved into Duchamp’s hair—examples of how a bizarre sensibility permeated his art. The book is primarily concerned, however, with the furor caused when Duchamp purchased the toilet from a sanitation company (“Come to Dada,” he croons affectionately) and submitted it to the “fancy art show.” Collages employ acrylics, watercolors, digital ink, and materials with interesting textures. The narrative is set on strips of colored paper, while the dialogue is presented in capital letters in different colors and fonts; some appear pasted on. These techniques are characteristic of the Dada art movement, contextualized in a more straightforward (but still engaging) tone. Single-page and double-page montages consist of rows of square and rectangular panels are used to compress time, highlight characters’ emotions, and create bridges between scenes. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A wondrous wordless picture book that will make readers want to grab a sand bucket and head to the beach. (Picture book. 2-7)

Marcel Duchamp’s use of a urinal to challenge assumptions about art in 1917 New York has inherent kid appeal—and Mack exploits the possibilities.

The artist is first glimpsed holding a pen and standing next to Mona Lisa, who sports an inky mustache and goatee. Readers then see a star pattern shaved into Duchamp’s hair—examples of how a bizarre sensibility permeated his art. The book is primarily concerned, however, with the furor caused when Duchamp purchased the toilet from a sanitation company (“Come to Dada,” he croons affectionately) and submitted it to the “fancy art show.” Collages employ acrylics, watercolors, digital ink, and materials with interesting textures. The narrative is set on strips of colored paper, while the dialogue is presented in capital letters in different colors and fonts; some appear pasted on. These techniques are characteristic of the Dada art movement, contextualized in a more straightforward (but still engaging) tone. Single-page and double-page montages consist of rows of square and rectangular panels are used to compress time, highlight characters’ emotions, and create bridges between scenes. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

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A wondrous wordless picture book that will make readers want to grab a sand bucket and head to the beach. (Picture book. 2-7)

Tomatoes in My Lunchbox

Mak, Jeff

Henry Holt (48 pp.)

$19.99 | Aug. 23, 2022

978-1-250-77716-4

A young immigrant doesn’t recognize their own name when students and teachers say it aloud; it’s like “it doesn’t fit in their mouths.”

The narrator has come to a new country, and their heart aches for home (neither their name nor their nation of origin is mentioned in the text). They left “the place where [their] name fit” for a world full of Emmas and Olivias and Sophies. Believing life would be easier as an Emma, the narrator tries to be like a classmate, but that doesn’t quite fit either. The tomatoes in their lunchbox don’t help. They bite into them like an apple, spilling seeds all over their shirt. The narrator then remembers advice from their grandmother: “A smile can lighten a heavy load.” A timid smile leads to tentative friendship with one classmate, then another, as slowly the protagonist starts to realize they do belong here. This is a beautifully told and illustrated story that expresses, with sensitivity and inspired use of figurative language, a child’s attempt to fit with the dominant culture—a common experience that will resonate with many readers and inspire empathy in others. Rich, vivid illustrations make superb use of color and convey a sense of movement. The main character is brown-skinned; the classmates are diverse in terms of skin tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A poetic book about the power of a smile and what it means to find home. (afterword) (Picture book. 4-8)

A Kunwinjku Counting Book

Maralngurra, Gabriel & Felicity Wright

Enchanted Lion Books (40 pp.)

$22.95 | May 31, 2022

978-1-59270-356-2

This volume, counting to 12 in both English and Kunwinjku, presents illustrated information about animals found in West Arnhem Land, in Australia’s Northern Territory.

Each entry includes the digit, the written numeral in a descriptive phrase, and a general species name in both languages. The text color for the digit and written numerals is ochre—helpful, since Kunwinjku numerals can be multiple words. Several paragraphs precisely describe the animal’s natural habitat, characteristics, and significance to the Aboriginal peoples of West Arnhem Land. Often, these animals are valued as food, and both traditional and modern methods of hunting and cooking them are mentioned. On the page counting “Eight water pythons / slithering in the mud / Kunbidkudji dja danjbik / borlokko
When appropriate, he makes cultural distinctions in how different regional groups relate to the species. "Duwa people...cannot eat borlokko because of their religious beliefs, but Yirridjdja people (another group) can." Animals include spoonbills, echidnas, turtles, and knob-tailed geckos. The exquisite illustrations derive inspiration in technique, colors, and visual iconography from ancient rock paintings preserved within the region. Intricate ink hatching, or rrrr, "x-ray style" (the depiction of the animals' insides), and a traditional palette of ochre, browns, white, and black richly distinguish this work. Maralngurra is a member of the Ngaingbali clan; Wright is of settler heritage.

Handsome bookmaking, integral cultural information, and dynamic illustrations interact perfectly. (Further information, artist bio, pronunciation notes) (Informational picture book. 6-10)

**HOPE IS AN ARROW**
*The Story of Lebanese-American Poet Khalil Gibran*
McCarthy, Cory
Illus. by Ekua Holmes
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$17.75 | July 5, 2022
978-1-5362-0032-4

A profile of the author of *The Prophet*, incorporating atmospheric images and phrases from his writings.

In retracing the events of their subject's life, McCarthy focuses on two themes: the experience of growing up in two countries and Gibran's "secret hope" that through his art and words he would someday have a gift to give to the world. Born Khalil Gibran Gibran in Lebanon to the Maronite faith, he fled sectarian strife as a child to Boston, where his name was shortened. He was sent back to Lebanon to finish his education and meditate among the cedars and then wound up in New York ("the electric shining heart of America"), where, McCarthy writes, he painted and composed poems intended "to connect the people of Lebanon" and "help Americans come together in celebration of their many differences." His paintings and drawings, which ran to nudes, get little scrutiny here, but that inner dream was realized in a short but powerful book that has brought generations of readers "straight to the heart of hope."

Appended source notes in smaller type add both psychological insight, with mention of his "existential depression" and emotionally abusive father, and biographical detail. Incorporating snippets of patterned and printed papers into stunning painted collage illustrations, Holmes creates images of dignified figures of various ages, mostly people of color, placed in diverse settings rich in hues that underscore the overall intensity of feeling. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A reverent invitation to an enduring classic for new audiences. (Bibliography) (Picture-book biography. 6-9)

**ACTION!**
*How Movies Began*
McCarthy, Meghan
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-5344-5230-5

McCarthy presents an ambitious encapsulation of the birth of movies with humor and modern touches.

Blending her customary big-eyed cartoons with a more sophisticated realism, McCarthy offers a stirring, occasionally quirky deep dive into early film. From Eadweard Muybridge’s galloping horse to the last movies of the silent era, a selection of famous films is presented as McCarthy chronicles cinema history. Meticulous art captures architectural details, silent film stars, and even the world’s earliest example of a silly cat video (“The Boxing Cats” from 1894). The book links early films with
movies kids may have seen: the Maschinenmensch of Metropolis is paired with C-3PO of Star Wars, Harold Lloyd’s Safety Last with Hugo and Back to the Future, and so on. Some inclusions, like Johnny Depp’s appearance in Benny & Joon, are unfortunate in light of their stars’ behavior. McCarthy briefly addresses the prejudice confronted by people of color in the film industry, with special attention paid to Josephine Baker and contemporary films like Black Panther. Backmatter includes five stories from film’s past, all worthy of their own books. The overall effect is less exhausting than it is inspiring. Kids will reach the end and likely be disappointed that the story doesn’t continue. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Movie history deserves no less than this stunning encapsulation, cleverly designed and gorgeously rendered. (author’s note, bibliography) (Nonfiction picture book. 7-12)

SANCTUARY
Kip Tiernan and Rosie’s Place, the Nation’s First Shelter for Women
McDonnell, Christine
Illus. by Victoria Tentler-Krylov
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-5362-1129-0

Kip Tiernan “passed through a door and there [was] no turning back.” She was compelled to help homeless women.

Food is scarce for Granny’s large family, but she still feeds the strangers at her door during the Depression. Granddaughter Mary Jane, known as Kip, helps. Fast-forward to the 1960s. Kip, an adult, is moved by the social consciousness of Rosie’s Place, the United States’ first shelter just for women. When she notices women disguising themselves as men to gain entrance, she campaigns to create a special shelter for them, one with flowers and music and where the residents are respected. Finally, in 1974, she turns an abandoned market into Rosie’s Place, the United States’ first shelter just for women. At each stage of Kip’s journey, illustrations capture the mood. The front endpapers, washes of gray and blue, lead into mostly gray scenes from the Depression, with spots of bright colors in Granny’s kitchen and on Kip’s dress. Splashes of color highlight scenes of the civil rights movement when Kip, as an adult, dedicates her life to helping end poverty, and the grays and colors merge in his thoughts. “ ‘So it’s just me now,’ he thinks, ‘alone with myself?’ ” Before long, his imagination wanders as he slips into sleep. The ever changing blanket, it seems, becomes the canvas for his unnamed doubts and uncertainties, his unchecked fantasies and figments. Set against lakes of striking deep red and black, the threads of the blanket weave and stretch into different shapes and symbols, echoing Mello’s whimsical text (translated from Portuguese by Hahn) in all its compelling allure. At the book’s core, João’s bedtime reveries wed a simple premise with magnificent possibilities. Over several pages, readers consider João’s blanket as it flutters as if in the wind, trembles under the fidgety feet of its drowsy owner, and strains against “a fish that’s bigger than us.” A passing reference to a father who “goes out fishing” hints at a source of João’s ruminations. Soon, João wakes with a question: “Who unraveled my blanket?” To return to his
“Speaking to heart and eye in equal measures, a beautiful treatise on remembering life and helping those left behind.”

THE CIRCLES IN THE SKY
Mountford, Karl James
Candlewick Studio (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5362-2498-6

The twin desires to mourn and to comfort imbue a simple fable played out by a woodland cast. Though Fox is eager for rest after a long night of hunting, his curiosity is piqued when he hears the birds singing a strange new song. He follows them to a dead bird in a field. Fox’s confusion attracts the attention of Moth, who finds it difficult to explain what has happened to the bird. Instead, Moth tells Fox how the moon reflects the sun’s rays, even long after the sun has gone. Fox struggles to understand until Moth explains that the bird is dead. “I was trying to be kind,” Moth tells Fox. “Sad things are hard to hear. They are pretty hard to say, too. They should be told in little pieces.” As Fox grapples with the newfound realization, Moth offers solace if not the explanation he was seeking. Mountford does dual duty in giving voice to both the confusion that comes with death and a template on how to be there for those in pain. Tonally, the book never turns precious, the storytelling clear, concise, and sympathetic. All this is wonder-fully accompanied by digital art resembling woodcuts and lithographs, the black of the fox, the birds, and the moth contrasting keenly with the colors of the natural world surrounding them. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Speaking to heart and eye in equal measures, a beautiful treatise on remembering life and helping those left behind. *(Picture book. 4-7)*

THE RAINBOW PARADE
Neilson, Emily
Dial Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 31, 2022
978-0-593-32658-9

Inspired by the author’s childhood memories of attending San Francisco Pride, this picture book offers a delightfully dynamic child’s-eye view of the festivities. Emily, a young White girl, and her two White moms take the train to join their “family of friends” alongside the parade route. Emily narrates the story in the first person, relaying her observations. She admires the bikers and the loud, proud, colorful marchers and performers, who vary in size, skin color, physical ability, and age and who wear “whatever makes them feel most like themselves.” But when Mommy spots a group of LGBTQ+ families (“just like us!”) marching and suggests they join them, Emily worries she’s “not loud or proud enough to be in the parade.” Her moms’ poignant, encouraging responses are just what she (and likely, many readers) needs to hear. Neil-son employs simple, accessible language to deliver a buoyant tale that fleshes out the notion of Pride—an integral cultural concept within the LGBTQ+ community—by showing rather than telling. The stylized digital illustrations include true-to-life details that affectionately reflect the array of outfits, identities, and signage one might encounter at a Pride celebration. Meanwhile, the pitch-perfect visual pacing (the artwork shifts effortlessly between immersive, full-bleed pages and spot illustrations) captures the movement, scope, and many moods of the parade. Readers familiar with San Francisco may recognize the BART train, which helps establish the setting. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An exploration of community and belonging that’s highly recommended for all families and all bookshelves. *(Author’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)*

A RIVER’S GIFTS
The Mighty Elwha River Reborn
Newman, Patricia
Illus. by Natasha Donovan
Millbrook/Lerner (48 pp.)
$31.99 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022

Newman explains that in what is now Washington state, the Elwha River flowed north to the sea, nourishing the salmon that came each year to lay eggs. There were enough salmon to feed the birds, the animals, and the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, the Strong People, for thousands of years. But when Europeans arrived in the 1790s, they cut down ancient trees to build houses near the river and wrote laws declaring that the Strong People couldn’t fish or own land. In 1890, dams for generating electricity were built, effectively destroying the river and keeping the salmon from returning. In 1940, Olympic National Park expanded its boundaries to include the dams, and the Strong People worked together to restore the lost river and its habitat. The removal of two dams—the Glines Canyon Dam and Elwha Dam—took years of perseverance and cooperation among the Strong Peo-ple, the National Park Service, and scientists. It was 2011 when the dams were finally removed; several years later, the rushing river called the salmon home again. Donovan’s illustrations, rendered in pencil and ink and digitally, are dynamic, with thick black outlines that pop off the page. Sidebars elaborate on elements introduced in the main text. Beautifully illustrated and informative, this story conveys the fragility of our environment and the need to protect it. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An illuminating glimpse at the Elwha River and its gifts. *(Author’s and illustrator’s notes, timeline, sources, further reading, maps, photographs) (Informational picture book. 8-12)*
The Universe shaped the child’s features, including “full lips / to speak your truth” and coiled hair, then adorned the child. Describing how the child was created, Obuobi begins, “When the Universe decided to create you, / she drew you from the earth— / rich, / dark, / and full of everything that gives life.” The Universe shaped the child’s features, including “full lips / to speak your truth” and coiled hair, then adorned the child with gold, breathed life into them, and sent them to the Sun for light and to the Moon for wisdom. Finally, the Universe, personified in the form of a female figure with thick hair, filled the child with love from her own arms, whereupon “her work was complete.”

A stunning work of art. (Picture book. 3-8)

This new creation myth centers darkness as a positive force and positions the Black child as a child of the Universe. Night skies, images of nature, and a Black parent and child grace the pages of this picture book addressed to the child. Describing how the child was created, Obuobi begins, “When the Universe decided to create you, / she drew you from the earth— / rich, / dark, / and full of everything that gives life.” The Universe shaped the child’s features, including “full lips / to speak your truth” and coiled hair, then adorned the child with gold, breathed life into them, and sent them to the Sun for light and to the Moon for wisdom. Finally, the Universe, personified in the form of a female figure with thick hair, filled the child with love from her own arms, whereupon “her work was complete.”

A heartwarming family story that underscores the value of creativity, passion, and hard work. (author’s note) (Picture book memoir. 5-9)

Designed to be held vertically, this nearly wordless picture book challenges readers to reexamine the white space of the page as two humanoid figures dressed in bright yellow and deep blue emerge from their completely covered home into a snow-white world. The artistic choice of blanketing the page in white means that the protagonists’ actions are often obscured. Their bodies disappear behind snowballs and snow boulders, and the white-on-white design means that readers must interpret some movements and actions, much like a person watching a mime show. This one will have children shivering with delight as they try to figure out the movements of a snowball fight or the act of building a colossal snow person—a well-placed gatefold proves just how colossal as what appears to be a yellow mountain is revealed as a mammoth carrot. Larger storyline sequences may find the mostly spare illustrations difficult to see, but this one is clearly meant to be shared one-on-one or in smaller groups, and storytellers who feel comfortable engaging readers with open-ended questions and breaking for discussion will find this a blizzard of fun. The added detail of a die-cut cover creates an appealing look that will draw in curious readers. Characters’ skin is bluish-gray.

Brisk fun for everyone! (Picture book. 4-6)

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Brisk fun for everyone! (Picture book. 4-6)
rhyme warns of Teller’s Hollow (“A sip from the chalice, we enter his palace / Break bread for the Keeper, now we descend deeper…”). Three ensuing pages of wordless, hyper-realistic, full-page illustrations rely on a palette of Dust Bowl colors, showing, first, a slight young girl exiting a dreary stucco house and entering an equally dreary, occupied whitish car; the car then winds its way through a desolate desert. As the car pulls over, the brothers spot flowers and pick some for their mother. When they come upon a fantastical palace, the brothers, hungry and thirsty; eat and drink the food they find; the girl alone resists temptations in this odd realm ruled by a lion called the Teller and populated by dozens of other animals. At last, the girl safely shepherds her brothers to the stark institution housing their mother; more mysteries arise. This is a strange tale, laden with ambiguities. However, herein lies the appeal; succinct, carefully chosen text and hauntingly beautiful artwork create a story that demands that its readers return to each page, trying to figure out answers to questions whose answers exist only in readers’ imaginations. This mesmerizing work offers potential jumping-off points to discuss many topics, including magical realism, symbolism, family relationships and roles, and mental health. Characters are light-skinned and dark-haired. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Drink from this chalice. (Picture book. 7-12)

BEFORE OF YOU, JOHN LEWIS
Pinkney, Andrea Davis
Illus. by Keith Henry Brown
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$15.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-338-75908-2

A picture-book biography in verse highlighting the friendship between John Lewis and the young African American boy whom he inspired.

In her signature expressive and soulful style, Pinkney introduces readers to young Tybre Faw, a boy from Tennessee who learns about Sen. Lewis from reading books. Inspired by Lewis’ lifelong fight for justice and equal rights, Tybre convinces his grandparents to make a 4-hour drive from their home in Tennessee to Selma, Alabama, where every year Lewis conducts an annual pilgrimage across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in honor of his historic showdown, which helped usher in the Voting Rights Act. There, the two meet and a friendship is sparked. Woven into the narrative is the story of how Lewis, inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., went on to become a civil rights hero. With deep emotion, Pinkney captures the generational struggle for freedom and takes readers from Dr. King’s radio speeches during the Jim Crow era to the Black Lives Matter movement of today. Brown’s watercolor-and–quill pen illustrations are striking and larger than life, adding great depth and meaning to the verse. Backmatter includes a statement further describing the relationship between Lewis and Tybre, a timeline of Lewis’ life, captioned photographs, and the poem “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley, which Tybre delivered at Lewis’ funeral service. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This eloquent tribute is a must-read. (Picture-book biography. 6-10)

BEAUTY WOKE
Ramos, NoNieqa
Illus. by Paola Escobar
Versify/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-358-00841-5

What is beauty? Who is Beauty? A puzzled young Boricua wants to know.

Is it true what the media says? Are her people “DANGEROUS / DIRTY / LAZY”? What about the blood of her African ancestors that runs through her veins and that Abuela describes as “onyx”? Doesn’t the pride of her Taíno heritage mean anything? Beauty sees her people marching proudly in parades. She hears Abuela teaching her the truth of her identity, but the reality of the outside world weighs her down, and she runs. Embarrassed, she doubts her worth and wonders why she can’t be like everyone else, even rejecting her gold hoops and her durags adorned with the Puerto Rican flag: “¡QUÉ EMBARAZOSO!” Her family knows that Beauty is lost and that her “eyes were open, / but she was sleepwalkin’.” Her Mami rallies the family for an emergency schooling session. Under the powerful hands of la bisabuela, vecinos, and familia, “Beauty was WOKE.” Ramos’ poetic ode to identity and validation winds itself through evocative imagery in both English and Spanish, connecting the strength of community with self-acceptance. From one-word stanzas echoing with a mother’s heartbeat to flowing anthems of pride, each page exudes energy and passion. Escobar’s powerful panorama of diversity is a blazing exclamation point to Beauty’s triumphant journey.

This bold manifesto of cultural awareness reaches out to awaken the sleepwalkers among us. (Picture book. 6-10)

DIGESTION! THE MUSICAL
Rex, Adam
Illus. by Laura Park
Chronicle Books (76 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4521-8386-2

Will sweet, nutty Li’l Candy’s plunge to stardom prove transformational? Every time.

On a dark stage lit by neon bright flashes of dazzle and dominated by a towering, cutaway human body; a round, pink ingénue takes a leap of faith to the Broadway rhythms of a chorus of little carrots: “Past the teeth now! Past the tongue now! Past the larynx. Or go higher in the head instead and come back out the nose! But she slides down the esophagus,
where all the foodstuff goes.” Proving along the way that she’s not just empty calories but has a nutritional heart of gold—or, more precisely, peanut—and pausing only for the occasional production number (“My name’s Platelet! / If you’re hurtin’ / I make plugs to stop / the spurtin’”), she, or her remains, arrive at last in the large intestine just in time for the big finale. “LET’S. GET. THIS. POTTY. STARTED. / EVERYBODY PANTS DOWN....” Taking a cue from Maris Wicks’ sensational Human Body Theater (2015), this showstopper gives the purposes and processes of digestion the lavish, glitzy production they deserve, from teeth to toilet. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

As “gross and amazing” as its topic, certain to receive thunderous ovations—standing or otherwise. (Informational picture book. 5-8)

CREEPY CRAYON!

Reynolds, Aaron
Illus. by Peter Brown
Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-5344-6588-6
Series: Creepy Tales!

When a young rabbit who’s struggling in school finds a helpful crayon, everything is suddenly perfect—until it isn’t.

Jasper is flunking everything except art and is desperate for help when he finds the crayon. “Purple. Pointy...perfect”—and alive. When Jasper watches TV instead of studying, he misspells every word on his spelling test, but the crayon seems to know the answers, and when he uses the crayon to write, he can spell them all. When he faces a math quiz after skipping his homework, the crayon aces it for him. Jasper is only a little creeped out until the crayon changes his art—the one area where Jasper excels—into something better. As guilt-ridden Jasper receives accolade after accolade for grades and work that aren’t his, the crayon becomes more and more possessive of Jasper’s attention and affection, and it is only when Jasper cannot take it anymore that he discovers just what he’s gotten himself into. Reynolds’ text might as well be a Rod Serling monologue for its perfectly paced foreboding and unsettling tension, both gentled by lightly ominous humor. Brown goes all in to match with a gray-scale palette for everything but the purple crayon—a callback to black-and-white sci-fi thrillers as much as a visual cue for nascent horror readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Chilling in the best ways. (Picture book. 4-7)

NO! SAID CUSTARD THE SQUIRREL

Ruzzier, Sergio
Abrams Appleseed (40 pp.)
$15.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-4197-5524-8

Ruzzier’s trademark artistic style accompanies this tale of defending who you are.

A diapered rodent is remarkably perturbed by Custard the Squirrel. Right off the bat, the rodent asks if Custard is, in fact, a duck. Custard may initially look like a duck to readers, but the refrain—“ ‘No,’ said Custard the Squirrel”—leaves little room for doubt. Still, the rodent just won’t let it go. From numerous angles, the rodent attempts to get Custard to give in and act like

Celia Laighton Thaxter loved the beauty of birds, flowers, and the ever changing sea.

Born in 1835, she grew up on two islands off the shores of Maine and New Hampshire. As a young child, she planted marigolds to brighten the gray and white landscape of rocks, waves, and clouds on White Island, where her father was the lightkeeper. When Celia was 12 years old, her family moved to Appledore Island, where her father opened a hotel that catered to artists and writers. There, Celia planted a new, bigger garden with flowers of many varieties. Married life brought her to the mainland, where she and her husband raised their family. Homesick, Celia painted pictures and wrote poems that captured her memories of island life, becoming a well-known, celebrated poet in her time. Every spring, year after year, she returned to Appledore Island to tend to her glorious garden. Using third-person narration, Root and Schmidt describe Celia’s seasonal activities with great admiration, carefully naming the flower and bird species to which she felt so deeply connected. Sweet’s lush, detailed watercolor, gouache, and mixed-media illustrations greatly enhance the text. Readers will be delighted to realize that the stylized handwritten words appearing in sidebars are Celia’s own lovely, heartfelt poems. All characters present White. Additional fascinating information about Laighton Thaxter is provided in the backmatter. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A splendid introduction to a lesser-known nature poet and the landscapes that inspired her. (additional facts, timeline, bibliography) (Picture-book biography. 5-9)
“A hard truth for hard times.”

MY UNCLE IS COMING TOMORROW

by Buffy Sainte-Marie

Illustrated by Julie Flett

Greystone Kids (40 pp.)

$18.95 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-1-77164-807-3

A love letter to family, home, and Indigenous traditions.

Cree singer/songwriter Sainte-Marie offers a glimpse of her people, their land, and their traditions in this picture book based on the lyrics to one of her songs. Through the eyes of a young child, the book brings to life the cold winter days, the awe of looking up at the nighttime sky, the freedom of running through fields of fragrant summer flowers, the delight of children who dance and sing, and the changing of the seasons. Most of all, with the refrain “Still this love goes on,” the story reminds readers of the joy we experience upon returning to those whom we love and who love us. The soothing cadence of the words, along with heartwarming illustrations by Flett, conjures up images, smells, sounds, and touch as silhouetted buffalo race across the plains and a child with eyes closed smells the burning of sweetgrass. Both the words and the bold artwork, rendered in pencil and pastel and composed digitally, evoke emotional memories of friends and family and of the place we call home. Flat colors contrast with intricate textures, making for an immersive experience. Readers will want to celebrate their own family stories with their children and share knowledge to be passed on. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This story will remain in readers’ hearts long after this book is shelved. (sheet music, author’s note) (Picture book 3–5)

HOT DOG

by Doug Salati

Knopf (40 pp.)

$17.99 | May 24, 2022

978-0-5933-0843-1

Cool ocean breezes prove to be the perfect antidote to city burnout in this loving doggy tale.

On a hot summer’s day in a metropolis reminiscent of New York, a middle-aged human and a wiener dog run errands. But today the little dog is feeling overwhelmed by the crowds and the heat. Spare text reveals their unhappiness: “too close! too loud! too much! THAT’S IT!” The dog digs in their heels, refusing to go any further. The owner sympathizes and immediately whisks the little dog away. Not simply off the streets, but from a train to a boat to an island, “wild and long and low.” After a day playing by the sea (and encountering what turns out to be a seal), they return to the city, where the world has cooled down and the two can come home to dinner and a sleep filled with dreams of seals. Salati expertly captures the stifling claustrophobia of hot and crowded city streets. One can almost feel the palpable temperature shift when the colors on the pages move from vibrant oranges, reds, and yellows to blues and greens, like a tonal reprieve. Happily, the book avoids demonizing cities in favor of the country, showing instead how a bad day affects your every sense. Spare poetic text also perfectly captures this small canine’s mindset. The dog’s human presents as White; other characters are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

You needn’t be a dog owner to identify with this expertly wrought tale of physical and emotional relief. (Picture book 3–6)

MY UNCLE IS COMING TOMORROW

by Sebastián Santana Camargo

Translated by Elisa Amado

Aldana Libros/Greystone Kids (40 pp.)

$16.95 | Aug. 30, 2022

978-1-77840-006-3

A bench and a closed door mark the milestones in an excited child’s life.

The child grows older as they faithfully await a beloved uncle who never shows. As the protagonist sits watching the door, they excitedly note the things they’ll tell their uncle about: their progress in school, an upcoming move, their new son. In scene after scene, time trundles on as the child evolves into a teen and finally to nothing but a memory in the fruitless anticipation of a dream never realized. The uncle, it is later explained, has become one of the “disappeared.” Santana Camargo’s deceptively simple black line drawings against stark white paper allow for no meandering of attention. The protagonist’s—and readers’—focus is on the door that remains shut. Each unwaveringly hopeful line begins with “Great!” in anticipation of the visit (“Great! Then I can tell him about this girl that I like”—and in contrast to the unseen bleak reality.
“A stunning bedtime tale infused with a bit of suspense.”

MOONLIGHT
Savage, Stephen
Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-8234-5084-8

Full of mystery and intrigue, a personified beam of moonlight is on the move as a child sleeps, wakes, wonders, and is reassured.

Solitary text on a dark page suggests that something is out there—awake, alive, and moving. It’s in a lush jungle, where a hushed tone pervades and gazelles bound away. It is slithering, tumbling, hiding, seemingly ready to pounce. When dense landscapes open to the sea, the mood lightens from ominous to adventurous. Something catches a plane, then a train and rides through mountain passes. But the relief is short-lived as readers quickly realize the something is coming closer, into their neighborhoods and rooms. At the height of suspense, a child awakens in a room with a toy plane and a framed picture of a gazelle—hints that what readers just witnessed were parts of a dream. Not fearful, the child longs for the moonlight to return.

Savage uses linocuts in a limited palette of various hues of blue to create deceivingly simple, atmospheric illustrations with sophisticated depth. Bathed in blue, the child’s race is unclear. Repetitive patterning and striking compositions create loads of visual play, while the descriptive, minimal text—sometimes only a phrase per spread—sets the tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A stunning bedtime tale infused with a bit of suspense.
(Picture book. 4-7)

THE MOON FROM DEHRADUN
Shamsi, Shirin
Illus. by Tarun Lak
Atheneum (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-66590-679-1

A child accidentally leaves a beloved doll behind when their family is forced to abruptly flee during the Partition of India. It’s 1947, and Azra lives with their family in the Indian city of Dehradun. As Azra tells readers, Dehradun has been home to their family for generations, but lately they’ve noticed that everyone seems angry. While Azra’s mother explains that people are frightened, Azra still doesn’t fully understand as they hold Gurya, the doll that their grandmother made for them when they were a baby. Everything changes when Azra’s father rushes home just before dinner and announces that the family must leave immediately. With their dinner left untouched, the family quickly fills a few bags with their belongings and leaves, Azra soothing baby Chotu as they prepare. But when Azra realizes Gurya was left behind in the confusion, Azra’s father says they cannot turn back. Shamsi’s text vividly portrays the confusion and pain experienced by Azra’s family as well as the generosity of the strangers they encounter on their journey to their new home in Lahore. Relying on a muted palette and loose yet expressive linework, Lak skillfully conveys the uncertainty and fear felt by those who endured Partition. The book’s sweet conclusion also illuminates the power of new beginnings in desperate circumstances. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A poignant and memorable tale. (map, glossary, information on Partition and the author’s family’s experiences) (Picture book. 4-8)

A GIFT FOR NANA
Smith, Lane
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
$18.99 | April 12, 2022
978-0-593-43033-0

All gifts are perfect when they come from the heart.

Rabbit goes on a “journey through a green and grand forest” in order to get a gift for his nana even though it is “not even a major hare holiday.” He travels very far in search of the perfect gift and encounters many new friends whom he asks for help. Each of them proffers Rabbit something they can easily make or acquire: The moon offers a “crescent smile,” a whale proposes a glass of water, and so on. Ultimately, Rabbit finds the perfect gift for Nana all on his own, and his nana absolutely adores it. Although the story is a bit predictable, it is amusing—readers will laugh at the anthropomorphic volcano’s explosion and Rabbit’s exhaustion from his journey, among other chucklesome scenes. Smith’s gesso, oil, and cold wax illustrations are exquisite and almost ethereal. The friendly, many-eyed creature referred to as a “stickler” is at once haunting and intriguing. The moon is Tim Burton-esque and seems to glow and pop off the page. Pleased with his choice of gift, Rabbit has the moon’s smile on his face. The predominance of full-bleed double-page spreads accentuates Rabbit’s long quest. The different font sizes, styles, and colors will aid emerging readers with dyslexia.

A cozy story that will transport readers to faraway places.
(Picture book. 4-7)
POWWOW DAY
Sorell, Traci
Illus. by Madelyn Goodnight
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-58089-948-2

In this contemporary story, an Indigenous tradition inspires hope in a young girl.

Powwow Day, a Native American social gathering, arrives, but River is still recovering from an unnamed illness and feels too weak to dance. Dressed in her jingle dress and matching moccasins, she longs to join her family and friends in the Grand Entry procession. She hears the drums—"BAM. BAM. BAM."—and watches the elders enter the circle with flags and feathers. The fancy dancers "twirl and ribbons whirl," while the "grass dancers sway and weave themselves around the circle," but River can't "feel the drum's heartbeat," and her "feet stay still." The emcee calls for the jingle dress dancers to enter the arena. Although River needs the ceremonial healing dance, she can't do it. Thankfully, River's friend says she will dance for her. The rows of shiny cones on the dresses make music as the jingle dancers move: "clink, clink, clink." The girls "dance for the Creator, the ancestors, their families, and everyone's health." Watching her sister, cousins, and friend dance, River's heart begins to open and conviction enters her soul. She finally feels the drumbeat fully, but is it her time to dance? Goodnight's vibrant, energetic digital illustrations capture the beauty and intricacy of powwow regalia as well as the unique atmosphere of a powwow gathering. Together, the artwork and text sensitively portray and celebrate a powerful ritual that upholds the culture, healing traditions, and creative spirit of Native American communities. No specific tribe is mentioned in the story, though a visual echo of Amos' feet poking out of his bedclothes as he sleeps and then decide to venture forth to awaken her. Leaving the barn is daunting, as Milk Cow says, "We will have to find courage." Erin Stead's illustration style closely resembles that which she employed in Sick Day, though the palette here is attuned to the darkness of pre-dawn hours, ultimately giving way to the warmth of the sunrise. Before that happy ending, a whimsical reference to a "sleeping giant" is accompanied by a picture of enormous stocking feet, toes pointing to the sky, which offers a visual echo of Amos' feet poking out of his bedclothes as he sleeps. And yet, this is a farm setting, not a zoo, and the light-skinned farmer is a woman, not a man. The plot is also slightly more complex, with dream references that may prompt discussion about what happens in the reality of the story world and what is all a dream. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Waste no time in adding this gem to the storytime shelf. (Picture book: 2-7)

THE SUN IS LATE AND SO IS THE FARMER
Stead, Philip C.
Illus. by Erin E. Stead
Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-8234-4428-1

Animal friends pull together in another collaboration from the Steads.

A disruption in routine prompts a worried group of animals to work together, just as the zoo animals rallied together when Amos McGee fell ill in the Steads' first joint picture book, A Sick Day for Amos McGee (2010). As in that Caldecott-winning title, Philip Stead's artful text employs repetition and just-right word choices to result in a pleasing aurality. A mule, a milk cow, and a miniature horse wonder why the farmer hasn't arisen yet and then decide to venture forth to awaken her. Leaving the barn is daunting, as Milk Cow says, "We will have to find courage." Erin Stead's illustration style closely resembles that which she employed in Sick Day, though the palette here is attuned to the darkness of pre-dawn hours, ultimately giving way to the warmth of the sunrise. Before that happy ending, a whimsical reference to a "sleeping giant" is accompanied by a picture of enormous stocking feet, toes pointing to the sky, which offers a visual echo of Amos' feet poking out of his bedclothes as he sleeps. And yet, this is a farm setting, not a zoo, and the light-skinned farmer is a woman, not a man. The plot is also slightly more complex, with dream references that may prompt discussion about what happens in the reality of the story world and what is all a dream. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Celebrating kids, art, and supportive communities, this gem deserves a wide audience. (author's note) (Picture book: 4-8)
Blue is not just a color.

Coen, a young Indigenous Australian boy, is having a difficult day. His body is coiled and tense, his feelings are “a deep, murky kind of blue,” and bed is the only place he finds relief. Mum says that “it can’t be that bad.” Dad thinks fresh air will do the trick. “What’s wrong with you?” his little sister, Junie, innocently demands. Coen feels “like a lost kite: loose in the breeze, with feelings that tangled like string”—and tangled Coen wants to be left alone. His family doesn’t understand. Then, little by little, Coen begins to respond to his parents’ and sibling’s loving patience and their assurance that his blue feelings won’t last forever. Author/psychologist Tomlinson deftly delves into the “muddled-up” moods of childhood depression with sympathy and compassion. With emotive descriptions such as “it was a slumping, sighing, sobbing kind of day,” the text invites readers to empathize rather than advise a child who is very much in pain. Mordey’s illustrations incorporate character design based on her own family, bringing a special warmth to this depiction of a racially-mixed household and their tender interactions. The limited palette of gentle blues, pinks, and apricot allows viewers to focus on the family members’ emotions. The author’s note further encourages families to recognize the different ways children process emotions and provides suggestions for helping children work through these overwhelming feelings. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A loving tribute to the power of loved ones’ support during trying times. (Picture book 4-9)

Explore how intricate storytelling and painted books arose in Mesoamerica before the arrival of the Europeans.

Told from the perspective of a child speaking to a brother, this trip through Mesoamerican bookmaking begins with a summoning: “Our world, my brother, is an amoxcalli”—a “land of books.” There are nods to other Mesoamerican civilizations—the Chontaltin, the Mixtecah—before the narrator proclaims, “And we, the mighty Mexihcah who dwell in the valley of the volcanoes, make books too.” From there, readers follow along through a breakdown of how the Mexihcah (referred to as Aztecs in English) created books. The child explains how their parents, tlahcuilohqueh (“painters of words”), work in the amoxcalli (“house of books”). Tonatiuh deftly outlines the lengthy processes devoted to the creation of the multipaged, colorfully rendered amoxcalli, from decorating book covers with feathers and precious stones to making paint out of insects. Tonatiuh probes deeper into Mexihcah culture as the narrator discusses education, literacy, and religion, describing how the four Tezcatlipocah, or gods, created the world and the god Blue Hummingbird sparked a great migration. Throughout each shift in focus, Tonatiuh’s respect and reverence for the subject shine through loud and clear as he shares knowledge of Mesoamerican books almost lost to the past (a detailed author’s note states that, following the Spanish conquest, many of the books were destroyed). As always, the author/illustrator brilliantly conveys emotions and atmosphere with his colorful visuals—an inspired offspring of pre-Columbian art. A glossary defines the Nahauatl words used throughout. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Utterly indispensable. (bibliography, websites) (Informational picture book 5-10)

Katie is a girl who is always nice, polite, and agreeable—well, almost always.

Everyone says that Katie, who has straight dark hair, dot eyes, and a big curve of a smile, is a pleasure. She’s a good sport, helps with her little brother, Chuck, and makes her parents proud. But she has a secret: Sometimes she grumblesquinches. That’s when “my insides tighten and I think mean thoughts.” It’s when she wishes her brother didn’t wake her up or take her seat. It’s when she wishes she didn’t have a little brother at all. Even when Chuck puts his hand right into her bowl of cereal, she grumblesquinches her bad feelings down. Katie’s mother, who also has straight dark hair, and her father, who has a ruddy complexion and brown hair, think Chuck is just being adorable. But when Chuck tries to hug her with his milky hands and butterfly face, ruining her new rainbow shirt, her feelings cannot be grumblesquined for any longer, and she explodes: “Chuck ruins everything!” Her pent-up anger pours out, and then Katie is scared. What if her parents don’t think she’s a pleasure anymore? Yum’s sweet colored-pencil illustrations perfectly convey Katie’s personality and emotional landscape and deftly work with the text to portray the complexities of her inner life. Readers who can relate will be reassured by the loving response from Katie’s mother. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sensitive and emotionally true, a comforting portrayal of big emotions. (author’s and illustrator’s notes) (Picture book 4-8)
“A perfect little slice of life with a unique take on kindness and compromise.”

**BIG TRUCK, LITTLE ISLAND**

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<td>Van Dusen, Chris</td>
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Island residents in Maine figure out a novel, neighborly solution to a traffic jam caused by a large stuck vehicle.

A big truck and trailer are carried across the water on a barge to a small Maine island. There, on its way up a curving, narrow road, the truck loses its grip on the road, its wheels stuck in mud. This creates a problem: Cars on each side can’t get through to their destinations. Kids carried in those cars are missing swim meets, ballet practice, and school projects, among other appointments. The solution is simple if the residents, who are racially diverse, trust one another: Swapping cars allows the families on either side to get to their destinations. Eventually, the truck is rescued, delivering its precious cargo to Paris, and those cows, Lionel eventually goes on his potty to a resounding “YES, LIONEL, YES!” The story is sublime in its simplicity, and the humor will delight its intended audience as well as the caregivers helping remind them of the appropriate place to potty. The primary-hued illustrations excellently capture Lionel’s mood and humor. In the grand scheme of life, potty training doesn’t take too long (huzzah!). But when you’re in the throes, it can seem like an eternity—Lionel will make that eternity much more tolerable. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Potty training has never been so much fun. (Board book 2-4)*

**GIBBERISH**

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A boy begins school in a new country where everyone speaks gibberish.

Poignant front pages set the scene as a tiny woman and boy set sail from a tropical land and an airplane flies from a colorful landscape into a dulling gray sky. The story thus begins in a new grayscale landscape where only Dat, an Asian-featured boy, and his mother are in full color as he heads off to school. Vo ingeniously makes everything about this new environment feel foreign and surreal: the palette, the bulbous vehicles, and especially the wacky 1940s-style cartoon figures Dat encounters who speak in unintelligible icons inside speech bubbles (and repeatedly get his name wrong). Cartoon classmates are various types of humanoid creatures—some one-eyed, some horned—with large, expressive googly eyes, while Dat is finely drawn in realistic color, his facial expressions perfectly conveying his struggles with this new environment and culture. But then one of his classmates engages with him. The two realize they can communicate and share English words through drawings, and as their bond blossoms, the new friend gains pale-skinned color, realistic form, and a name: Julie. Vo’s use of color and style as metaphors is not new, but the execution is stellar, creating a viscerally uncomfortable experience while also infusing the narrative with humor throughout. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A visually and emotionally immersive immigration story. (Picture book 4-8)**

**LIONEL POOPS**

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Oh, the places you’ll poop. The potty-training phase is a period of time filled with joys, frustrations, and the dawning realization for both caregivers and toddlers that everything has the potential to become a toilet. Veillé encapsulates that joie de vivre in the story of Lionel, a young lion happily going about his day until nature calls. But where shall Lionel do his business? Should he go No. 2 on a herd of cows? Should he unloose his caboose on some tennis balls? Perhaps he should go on the Eiffel Tower instead. With each passing suggestion, an unseen narrator (and many a young reader) responds with a resounding “NO, LIONEL, NO!” sending the young lion off to his next possible target. Thankfully, especially for the good citizens of Paris, and those cows, Lionel eventually goes on his potty to a resounding “YES, LIONEL, YES!” The story is sublime in its
Howard University and his political career in Maryland and as a congresswoman, to his death. Readers come away with many facts about and direct quotes from Cummings, but more importantly they will also glean why so many loved him. Weatherford and Freeman paint a tender picture of the leader that shows his sensitivity and concern for others, rooted in his religion, that spanned his entire life. The book opens with a speech written by Nancy Pelosi, and the backmatter includes an excerpt of a statement from the Congressional Black Caucus. There’s also a timeline of Cummings’ life, a bibliography, and the sources of the direct quotes made by Cummings on each spread. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Pays due honor to Elijah Cummings’ memory and his dedication to the people he served. (Picture book/biography. 5-9)

“The faith of Elijah Cummings: The North Star of Equal Justice

Weatherford, Carole Boston
Illus. by Laura Freeman
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Jan. 11, 2022
978-0-393-30670-5
978-0-393-30671-2 PLB

Though he was told that he would never be able to read and write well, Elijah Cummings defied his naysayers to become an honored figure in American politics and an especial champion for children and education.

In this picture-book biography, readers learn that Elijah Cummings was one of seven children born to his parents, Ruth and Robert Cummings. The Cummings left the racist South and settled in Baltimore, Maryland, where Cummings would spend the rest of his life. The book follows Cummings from his childhood, when he first realized he wanted to study and practice law, through his acceptance and graduation from Howard University and his political career in Maryland and as a congresswoman, to his death. Readers come away with many facts about and direct quotes from Cummings, but more importantly they will also glean why so many loved him. Weatherford and Freeman paint a tender picture of the leader that shows his sensitivity and concern for others, rooted in his religion, that spanned his entire life. The book opens with a speech written by Nancy Pelosi, and the backmatter includes an excerpt of a statement from the Congressional Black Caucus. There’s also a timeline of Cummings’ life, a bibliography, and the sources of the direct quotes made by Cummings on each spread. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Gorgeous and enlightening, nourishing both mind and soul. (online resources) (Historical picture book. 4-10)
**DARK ON LIGHT**  
*White, Dianne*  
Illus. by Felicita Sala  
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)  
$18.99  |  Dec. 6, 2022  
978-1-5344-8789-5

A bedtime chant capable of transforming anyone into a night owl.  
Sumptuous watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil illustrations show a day shifting from sunshine to twilight to a deepening night sky. Meanwhile, three children are pulling on their boots, grabbing their flashlights, and heading out into a nighttime world as alive as it is welcoming. As the children search and explore, the text repeats the words dark on light through mesmeric rhymes. “Orange the moon, burnished and bright. / Meadow and owl and dark on light.” At last the children peek into a burrow and find their dog, the object of their search. The nighttime is welcoming here, and the children return home to the cozy arms of their parents. Truly the entire enterprise feels similar in tone to Janice May Udry’s *Moon Jumpers* (1959), illustrated by Maurice Sendak, as when the children ramble through fields of fragrant lavender beneath a brilliant sky. This is a book capable of banishing nighttime fears, showing the night to be a time of wonder, exploration, and even comfort. Sala’s art matches the cadences that he’s grown two inches—he’s no longer a “shrimp.” But the words, the spread of shadowy vignettes showing scenes of the struggles young Black people face—being stopped by police or treated with hostility by White people. After, Jay’s parents and grandparents envelop him in a loving embrace, assuring him that he has done nothing wrong. Williams’ narration is shaped by a convincing, youthful first-person voice, and Uchendu’s powerful art conveys both the joyful energy of childhood and the pain of adults who can’t shield children from a racist world. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*  
A loving approach to sharing painful realities with children, this book strikes a chord. *(Picture book. 3-5)*

**THE TALK**  
*Williams, Alicia D.*  
Illus. by Briana Mukodiri Uchendu  
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (40 pp.)  
$18.99  |  Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-5344-9529-6

As Jay moves from childhood to preadolescence, loving adults prepare him for what that means for him as a Black boy.  
Jay, who loves superheroes and racing his friends, is thrilled when his parents instruct him on how to act when pulled over by police. When Jay starts to leave the house in his hoodie and earphones, his parents call him back in for a talk, depicted in a wordless spread of shadowy vignettes showing scenes of the struggles young Black people face—being stopped by police or treated with hostility by White people. After, Jay’s parents and grandparents envelop him in a loving embrace, assuring him that he has done nothing wrong. Williams’ narration is shaped by a convincing, youthful first-person voice, and Uchendu’s powerful art conveys both the joyful energy of childhood and the pain of adults who can’t shield children from a racist world. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*  
A loving approach to sharing painful realities with children, this book strikes a chord. *(Picture book. 3-5)*

**BIG CATS**  
*What Do Lions, Tigers, and Panthers Get Up To All Day?*  
*Williams, Tyus D.*  
Illus. by Chazya Prabhat  
Neon Squid/Macmillan (48 pp.)  
$16.99  |  March 1, 2022  
978-1-68449-207-7

Vignettes about lions, jaguars, tigers, pumas, and other predator cats blend science and exciting narratives.  
The dangerous and fascinating creatures that make up the Felidae family each get the spotlight in this picture book from wildlife ecologist Williams. Through stories that unfold each hour over the course of a day, from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., Williams drops facts about various types of large cat within satisfying scenes. A smart two-page spread introduces the book by explaining which cats belong to the Panthera and Puma branches of the cat family tree, how they are related to domestic cats, and which cat is no longer with us. *(Spoiler: The saber-toothed tiger went extinct 10,000 years ago.)* The incredible speed of a cheetah, the climbing skills of a black panther, and the stealthy stalking techniques of the puma—which yowls and screeches because it can’t roar—aren’t just listed as dry facts. They are part of a set of stories that show how these cats interact with environments all over the world and with creatures such as African elephants, black caimans, and spotted hyenas. In between scenes are more detailed two-page spreads covering camouflage, where cats are found in the wild across the world, their relative sizes, and what biological features make them jump high, chomp strongly, and run at high speeds. Throughout, Prabhat’s graceful art makes vivid use of color as it depicts cats in moments of intense action but stops short of including blood or gore in hunting scenes. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*  
A carefully constructed, absolutely engaging primer on fierce cats in the wild. *(glossary, index)* *(Picture book. 6-8)*
Kapaemahu
Wong-Kalu, Hinaleimoana, Dean
Hamre & Joe Wilson
Illus. by Daniel Sousa
Kokila (40 pp.)
$17.99 | June 7, 2022
978-0-593-53006-1

A rich retelling of an ancient Indigenous Hawaiian legend.
Long ago, four mahu (spirits) traveled from Tahiti to Waikiki, Hawaii. Neither male nor female, they were “a mixture of both in mind, heart, and spirit.” Each had a specific “skill in the science of healing.” Their leader, Kapaemahu, “healed by laying on hands.” Kapuni “possessed great spiritual power.” Kinohi could look inside a person and see what was ailing them. Kahalohai had the gift of distance healing. The mahu shared their wisdom with the islanders, who, in turn, erected a monument in their honor; four enormous boulders were moved down a mountain and placed together on the beach. The mahu ceremonially transferred their powers to the rocks then vanished. For centuries the stones remained on Waikiki Beach; times changed, and eventually the monument lay forgotten under the city. It has since been recovered, but its history and meaning continue to be erased. Written in both Olelo Niihau and English, this picture book, based on the authors’ Academy Award–shortlisted screenplay, underscores the importance of preserving sacred spaces and is a powerful reminder of how story honors our ancestors. Filled with cultural details and beautifully illustrated in vibrant tropical colors, the book pays homage to Indigenous Hawaiian healing traditions and affirms two-spirit people. The fascinating backmatter provides background information about the original Hawaiian legend and Niihau dialect. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A poignant monument to the power of hidden Indigenous histories. (author’s note, glossary) (Picture book. 7–12)

THE WORLD BELONGED TO US
Woodson, Jacqueline
Illus. by Leo Espinosa
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$18.99 | May 10, 2022
978-0-399-55494-8

Kids burst out of school and into summer vacation.
Now they can play outside all day till the streetlights come on, when moms call them home. This nostalgic homage to Woodson’s childhood in her beloved Brooklyn evokes the senses: the sounds of laughter and double Dutch rhymes, the sight of sidewalk chalk and bottle cap games, and the taste of an ice cream cone with rainbow sprinkles from the ice cream truck. The refrain, “In Brooklyn / in the summer / not so long ago,” appears in text the color of summer heat: red, orange, yellow. The bell-bottom plaid pants; white, knee-high, color-ringed tube socks; and loud-and-proud Afros pinpoint this story’s ‘60s or ‘70s setting. The amazing diversity of the neighborhood comes through both in Espinosa’s lively, colorful retro illustrations, which depict Black, brown, and White children, and Woodson’s lyrical text, which describes kids calling “out to each other / in Spanish / in English / in Polish / in German / in Chinese.” They also get along well, with the older kids looking out for the younger ones and those with ice cream money sharing with those without “because some days the ones with no money / were us.” Espinosa depicts many characters with mouths wide open, emphasizing their unbridled delight and loudness. Author and illustrator offer a refreshing reminder of a pre-internet time when full-immersion play was the summer activity and kids took full advantage. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An intergenerational family story of freedom.
A girl with a big, curly Afro and her little brother, both light brown–skinned, live in a high-rise city apartment building. Because of stormy summer weather, they must stay inside. As a remedy for boredom and bickering, their grandmother advises them to “use those beautiful and brilliant minds of yours.” And they do, throughout all four seasons of the year. Colorful butterflies and a vibrant little bird that often appear flying around the siblings represent their freedom, which is only ever as far away as an open book or the doorways of their imaginations. López illustrates the inside of the family’s apartment with drab, muted colors that emphasize the children’s confinement. In contrast, the outdoor scenes, illustrated primarily in pastels, exude luminosity and convey the youngsters’ exuberance. Rather than being selfish with their ability to fly, the sister and brother share it with the neighborhood kids. The protagonist/narrator shares that her grandmother learned to fly from “the people who came before,” who were “brought here on huge ships, / their wrists and ankles cuffed in iron.” This recalls Virginia Hamilton’s legend, The People Who Could Fly (1984), referenced by López in one illustration and discussed by Woodson in her author’s note. Some readers will notice an intertextual reference to the pair’s previous title, The Day You Begin (2018). The ebullient mixed-media artwork explodes with color and extends the richness of the text. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An uplifting story that will inspire kids, especially brown girls and boys, to dream. (Picture book. 4–8)
A girl growing up in Hawaii finally experiences snow, but it isn’t what she expected.

Claire’s teacher assigns them to make dioramas about the seasons, and Claire is disappointed to get winter. Claire has lived on the Big Island of Hawaii all her life and has never seen real snow. To give her a taste, Claire’s father takes the family up to Mauna Kea to see snow, but it’s a disappointment. The snow is hard and blocky, like ice; she can’t run around because of the altitude; and the snowman they build is all lumpy. Claire dreams of becoming a snow angel, flying away to a snowy place that is more beautiful and more special than the island. Then the family makes a trip to Hapuna Beach, where her parents share their knowledge of the Native Hawaiian names of the hundred winds and many sea creatures. Claire begins to see the beauty of the place she calls home. Both Yamanaka and Lukashevsky were born and raised in Hawaii, and their affection for it shines in this beautiful homage to the Big Island. Claire embodies the unique and universally resonant, this fascinating tribute to bring the Mamas, the child, and their relationships to life.

A radiant tribute to groundbreakers to inspire the next generation. (Collective biography 5-8)

Yes we will
Asian Americans Who Shaped This Country
Tang, Kelly
Dial Books (40 pp.)
$18.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-593-46305-5

A celebration of the achievements of Asian Americans.

Succinct text and the combined talents of diverse artists bring vibrancy and color to the portrayal of Asian American pioneers. A cold, mountainous landscape greets readers as Chinese workers toil on the transcontinental railway. It is explained that many migrated to America for opportunity, and a small caption reveals that 20,000 workers endured perilous working conditions. Though Asian American immigrants were told “to get out” and that “they couldn’t stay,” the trailblazers on a subsequent list have shown how they have broken barriers and thrived in rebuke. Every illustration is unique in scope and style to match the spotlighted individual. Dan Santat offers dynamic lighting and perspective as basketball player Jeremy Lin goes in for a slam-dunk. Sujean Rim renders abstract portraits with splashes of color for designer Vera Wang and ballet dancer Lia Cirio. Kitkat Pecson gives an eye-popping portrayal of author Jenny Han and activist Amanda Nguyen, while Julia Kuo evokes warmth in an intimate family dinner scene for author, activist, and chef Padma Lakshmi. The list includes individuals of East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian backgrounds in the fields of STEM, art, politics, and advocacy. While brief captions give the name and a quick overview of each subject’s achievements, more detailed biographies are included in the author’s note. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

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Succinct text and the combined talents of diverse artists bring vibrancy and color to the portrayal of Asian American pioneers. A cold, mountainous landscape greets readers as Chinese workers toil on the transcontinental railway. It is explained that many migrated to America for opportunity, and a small caption reveals that 20,000 workers endured perilous working conditions. Though Asian American immigrants were told “to get out” and that “they couldn’t stay,” the trailblazers on a subsequent list have shown how they have broken barriers and thrived in rebuke. Every illustration is unique in scope and style to match the spotlighted individual. Dan Santat offers dynamic lighting and perspective as basketball player Jeremy Lin goes in for a slam-dunk. Sujean Rim renders abstract portraits with splashes of color for designer Vera Wang and ballet dancer Lia Cirio. Kitkat Pecson gives an eye-popping portrayal of author Jenny Han and activist Amanda Nguyen, while Julia Kuo evokes warmth in an intimate family dinner scene for author, activist, and chef Padma Lakshmi. The list includes individuals of East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian backgrounds in the fields of STEM, art, politics, and advocacy. While brief captions give the name and a quick overview of each subject’s achievements, more detailed biographies are included in the author’s note. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Yes we will
Asian Americans Who Shaped This Country
Tang, Kelly
Dial Books (40 pp.)
$18.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-593-46305-5

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A celebration of the achievements of Asian Americans.
SEE YOU SOMEDAY SOON
Zietlow Miller, Pat
Illus. by Suzy Lee
Roaring Brook Press (48 pp.)
$19.99 | June 14, 2022
978-1-250-22110-0

A touching depiction of love across the miles between a grandmother and a grandchild.

Miller's first-person text shares the voice of a child longing for their grandmother, who lives far away. Since they don't know when they'll see each other again, they keep in touch via phone calls, video chats, and letters, with the child imagining playful, fantastical ways they might see each other “someday soon.” The child even imagines being folded up in an envelope, à la Flat Stanley, to be sent in the mail to their grandmother. The titular refrain is repeated throughout the book, voicing a steady hope despite the uncertain timing of a resolution. Lee's illustrations match the childlike tone of the text, adopting a sketchy, loose, cartoonlike aesthetic, and while drawings are largely made up of figures rendered in black, changing background colors, intraiconic text indicating dialogue, and highlights of color add expressive dimension and visual interest. An added die-cut element enhances the art's play with the concept of seeing someone by offering glimpses of characters' faces between pages. A satisfying resolution arrives to close the book, offering solace to those who have endured long separations from loved ones due to the pandemic and also to anyone whose loved ones live far away. Characters’ skin tones vary depending on the color of the page. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Pick up this title someday soon. (Picture book, 2-6)
PIECE BY PIECE
How I Built My Life (No Instructions Required)
Aguilar, David & Ferran Aguilar
Trans. by Lawrence Schimel
Amazon Crossing Kids (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-66250-427-3

A young man from Andorra recounts how he became the first person to build a functional prosthetic arm using LEGO bricks in this memoir translated from Spanish and co-authored with his father.

Due to Poland syndrome, David was born with half a right arm. In a clever introduction, he asks readers to count their fingers, then remarks that they possess no 11th digit, just as he has five rather than 10 fingers. But neither he nor they are missing a thing, he declares. For him, the word disability connotes limitations, while his preferred term, diff-ability, highlights adaptability and possibility. However, his path to acceptance wasn’t easy. With humor and candor, he describes contending with pity, bullying, and romantic heartbreak as a result of his limb difference. Readers will sympathize with his desire to fit in, his frustration at encountering setbacks, and his struggles with high school academics after his beloved abuela’s death. Fortunately, his family’s support was constant; his father was even able to construct devices that enabled him to swim and ride a bike. David quickly discovered his own knack for inventing via LEGO sets, a hobby that culminated in building a prosthetic arm that would make him famous worldwide. Though his stream-of-consciousness narration is occasionally difficult to follow, his wit is engaging, and his interactions with his family are heartwarming. While readers needn’t be LEGO fans to admire David’s ingenuity, fellow builders may be inspired to dream up their own inventions.

Humorous and uplifting. (photos) (Memoir. 9-14)

AMIRA & HAMZA
The Quest for the Ring of Power
Ahmed, Samira
Illus. by Kim Ekdahl
Little, Brown (384 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-316-31861-7
Series: Amira & Hamza, 2

The sibling duo return on another quest to save the world.

It’s been two months since sister and brother defeated Ifrit in Qaf and saved the universe. It’s also the end of summer: Hamza wants to have something awesome to share when school starts, so he goes off to explore an old, abandoned, castlelike house. But a sudden tornado hits, and he wakes up in the Oriental Institute, a nearby Chicago museum, face to face with Ifrit’s father, Ahriman, who has returned in search of the Ring of Power that will allow him to control the human and jinn worlds. To find it, Ahriman needs all three parts of an ancient oculus—and the help of Hamza, who is a Chosen One. Ahriman threatens to destroy everything Hamza loves if he does not help him. After solving a riddle, they claim the first piece from the Oriental Institute, then travel via Ahriman’s tornado to the British Museum and the Louvre to collect the remaining pieces, with Amira and fairy princess Aasman Peri in pursuit. Alternating chapters from Amira’s and Hamza’s points of view capture their thoughts and emotions. Ahmed cleverly weaves in Islamic historical figures, some of whom are ghost Keepers of The Ring who pose riddles, like scholar and philosopher Ibn Sina and scientists and inventors the Banu Musa brothers. Ahmed’s rich worldbuilding continues in this imaginative and absorbing sequel.

A captivating magical adventure. (map, author’s note, notes on fantastical creatures and historical figures, further reading) (Fantasy. 9-13)
The past year has given us a bounty of middle-grade books, from tales of young queer love to superb poetry collections to enchanting fantasies and much more. Below are just a few of the works that have mesmerized us this year.

Star Child: A Biographical Constellation of Octavia Estelle Butler by Ibi Zoboi (Dutton, Jan. 25): A blend of prose, sparkling verse, and photographs, this is more than a mere biography of writer Octavia Butler—it’s an intimate work that will leave readers feeling as though they’ve spent time in her company.

Aviva vs. the Dybbuk by Mari Lowe (Levine Querido, Feb. 22): An Orthodox Jewish girl grapples with her father’s death, her mother’s depression, and the prankster dybbuk only she can see. Lowe’s melancholy work is a spellbinding example of how pain can alienate us—and how a supportive community can bring us back from the brink.

The Woman Who Split the Atom: The Life of Lise Meitner, written and illustrated by Marissa Moss (Abrams, April 12): This fascinating, eye-opening blend of prose and comic book–style art shines a long-overdue spotlight on remarkable physicist Lise Meitner (1878-1968), whose groundbreaking contributions to the field were suppressed and overlooked due to her being Jewish and a woman.

Our Own Little Paradise by Marianne Kaurin, translated by Olivia Lasky (Arctis Books, April 12): This Norwegian import is an emotional, heartwarming story of young people grappling with socio-economic disparities, bullying, peer pressure, and the meaning of true friendship. Nora’s and Wilmer’s families can’t afford fancy holidays, but together they create their own safe haven.

How To Build a Human: In Seven Evolutionary Steps by Pamela S. Turner, illustrated by John Gurche (Charlesbridge, April 12): Turner pulls off an ambitious feat—making the story of human evolution not only comprehensible to a middle-grade audience, but as absorbing as any novel and even at times profoundly moving.

Brand New Boy by David Almond, illustrated by Marta Altés (Candlewick, June 14): Almond again offers readers a warm, humorous, and deeply humane story. The catalyst in this accessible tale that invites profound reflection and features charming illustrations is the arrival of an unusual new pupil at a perfectly ordinary school in the north of England.

The Language of Seabirds by Will Taylor (Scholastic, July 19): An Oregon beach, two 12-year-old boys, and the slow awakening of a sweet romantic love: This textured, character-driven work deftly expresses the feelings of being in between childhood and adolescence, including growing self-awareness of oneself and the fallibility of adults.

The Real Dada Mother Goose: A Treasury of Complete Nonsense by Jon Scieszka, illustrated by Julia Rothman (Candlewick, Oct. 5): Scieszka gleefully mashes up Blanche Fisher Wright’s The Real Mother Goose (1916) and the Dada school of thought; with Rothman adding her spin on Wright’s illustrations, this poetry collection is dynamic and strikingly original.


Thunderbird: Book Two by Sonia Nimr, translated by M. Lynx Qualey (Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Dec. 8): Orphaned Noor and her djinn helper embark on their second world-saving adventure through Palestinian history in search of phoenix feathers in this work translated from Arabic that is filled with moments of triumph and suspense as well as magically evocative scenes.

Mahnaz Dar and Laura Simeon are young readers’ editors.
Though adults aren’t depicted here, in “The Rabbit,” readers learn Mabel’s birth: would she rather a baby sister or a pet rabbit? Kids, Kofi, becomes full of uncertainty and danger. Kwasi, has been chosen to compete. During the match, Kwasi accidentally kills Prince Yaw Boateng, his opponent and the nephew of the King of Lower Kwanta, changing the direction of their lives when the king retaliates. The immediacy of this moment is central to the characters, who must learn the Queen’s English, but Kwasi prefers the stories of his grandfather and the village storyteller. The place demonstrates rabbity attributes. In “The Fight,” Mabel feels frustrated that Maddie always takes the lead on their activities, but the siblings enjoy a loving, trusting, and—mostly—cooperative bond. Delicate line drawings lend a gentle atmosphere and perfectly suit the proceedings. Maddie, who has long, straight, blond hair, and Mabel, who has short, wavy, brown hair, present White and are very expressive.

A real charmer; kids will eagerly anticipate reading about these two. (critical-thinking, writing, and drawing activities) (Early reader. 4-8)

Children welcome and defend a classmate who is, quite literally, new. With fine misdirection, Almond drops in early references to bullying, childhood trauma, and space aliens—as well as robots, which turns out to be the most relevant hint about the stiff and mysterious lad introduced as George who arrives at Darwin Avenue Primary Academy just days before term’s end. But George’s arrogant and secretive keepers at the New Life Corporation have made a serious mistake in selecting the Academy as an “ordinary little school” in which to try out their experimental product. Despite their new classmate’s wooden speech and behavior, the children quickly see him as something more: a boy surrounded by family love and legacy before being abruptly snatched from all he has known. Alexander’s rich language is lyrical and haunting as the water, long a source of comfort for a boy who truly feels at home is the river, where he practices swimming and dreams of defeating his cousin in a race. But before that can happen, all attention turns to the Kings Festival, which features highly anticipated wrestling contests against representatives from their rival village. This year, Kwasi’s older brother, Kwasi, has been chosen to compete. During the match, Kwasi accidentally kills Prince Yaw Boateng, his opponent and the nephew of the King of Lower Kwanta, changing the direction of their lives when the king retaliates. The immediacy of this moment is central to the characters, who must learn the Queen’s English, but Kwasi prefers the stories of his grandfather and the village storyteller. The place demonstrates rabbity attributes. In “The Fight,” Mabel feels frustrated that Maddie always takes the lead on their activities, but the siblings enjoy a loving, trusting, and—mostly—cooperative bond. Delicate line drawings lend a gentle atmosphere and perfectly suit the proceedings. Maddie, who has long, straight, blond hair, and Mabel, who has short, wavy, brown hair, present White and are very expressive.

A real charmer; kids will eagerly anticipate reading about these two. (critical-thinking, writing, and drawing activities) (Early reader. 4-8)
Arango, Andrea Beatriz
Illus. by Alyssa Bermudez
Random House (272 pp.)
978-0-593-56397-7
978-0-593-56398-4 PLB

To navigate her school and home lives through depression and PTSD, a 12-year-old Latina girl retreats into her poetry and journal. Seventh grader Iveliz plans to make this a great year despite recent trauma. Her abuela Mimi’s arrival from Puerto Rico means a chance to feel like a family again, filling in the space left by her father’s absence. But Mimi’s Alzheimer’s has progressed since the last time Iveliz saw her, and Iveliz’s fraught relationship with her distant, always working Mami doesn’t help to keep the peace either. Meanwhile, her friendship with Amir, a boy from Afghanistan, seems to be on the rocks, and Iveliz keeps getting in trouble at school thanks to bullies, an ill-conceived revenge plot, and awkward attempts to forge a new friendship. Going to therapy and managing her medication also eat away at Iveliz even as she tries to find solace in visions of her dad. Full of heartbreak and compassion, Arango’s debut crackles with refreshing frankness and wit. The author excels at building Iveliz’s voice through each poem, leading to a tale that’s quick to read yet hard to put down. The creative use of varied poetic forms supports moments of levity and catharsis. Final art not seen.

Superbly woven; a bold, deep portrayal of a young voice who needs to be heard. (author’s note, resources) (Verse novel. 10-14)

Atimuke
Illus. by Onyinye Iwu
Candlewick (96 pp.)
$15.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5362-2517-4

In this follow-up to Too Small Tola (2021), a Nigerian girl perseveres—and thrives—despite setbacks.

Over three chapters, Tola, the youngest of a family consisting of sister Moji, brother Dapo, and Grandmommy, confronts various problems. “Tola Saves the Day” sees the protagonist trying to get her quarrelsome siblings to do their fair share of cleaning rice, their Saturday chore. In “Tola Takes Control,” Tola assumes more responsibility in the household after Grandmommy falls ill from malaria. Tola goes to buy medicine, and the family, led by Tola, sells groundnuts, just like Grandmommy does, so they can afford food. In the final chapter, “Tola and the Three Fine Girls,” Tola feels jealous when she sees rich children shopping for luxuries but learns that having money and expensive things doesn’t necessarily make one happy. From the family’s inability to afford clean rice to their decision to use Grandmommy’s savings to buy medicine (for 5,000 naira, about US$12), this poignant book conveys great warmth and familial love despite the characters’ tenuous circumstances. Tola is an endearing and utterly relatable protagonist. The tale uses colloquialisms and references that will make Nigerian readers feel at home. Cartoon images full of whimsy bring to life this close-knit family.

Mighty fine! (Fiction. 7-9)
SHINE ON, LUZ VÉLIZ!
Balcárcel, Rebecca
Chronicle Books (332 pp.)
$17.99 | May 3, 2022
978-1-79720-967-8

A sixth grader turns to computer coding after a serious sports injury while adjusting to the unexpected arrival of her half sister.

Before she got hurt, playing soccer was central to both Luz Véliz’s identity and her relationship with her dad, who coached her team. Looking to excel again—at something that won’t hurt her still delicate knee—and to improve her recently strained relationship with her dad by making him proud, Luz throws herself into coding. She has nine weeks to prepare a computer program for a school showcase that may earn her a spot in an advanced robotics class. Luckily, Luz’s kindly neighbor, who used to work in the tech industry, agrees to tutor her. However, just as Luz begins to find her footing off the soccer field, she learns her father has a daughter in Guatemala. After losing her mother, 13-year-old Solana not only moves in, she shares Luz’s room. Solana is outgoing and immediately popular at school, making Luz feel further displaced and jealous. But Luz’s voice resonates: She is sympathetic even in her darkest moments and is appropriately called out and remorseful when she crosses the line. She comes to understand the challenges faced by Guatemalan immigrants, both in risk of deportation and violent threats to life back home. The plot is absorbing and skillfully paced, laced with insight and warmth as Luz learns to embrace both her new sister and her new sense of self.

Inspiring, smart, and beautifully written. (inspiration board, recipes, author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)
In 2020, we called Palestinian American activist Linda Sarsour’s memoir, *We Are Not Here To Be By-standers*, a “candid and poignant” portrayal of an extraordinary life. This year, the co-chair of the 2017 Women’s March and co-founder of pathbreaking social justice organizations MPower Change and Until Freedom makes our list of the best middle-grade books with *We’re In This Together* (Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster, Nov. 29), a powerfully honest and tenderly inspiring young readers edition of her earlier book. Sarsour answered our questions by email.

**Your original memoir was for adults. What inspired you to write for a younger audience?**

I wanted to write for young people so they would feel seen and to inspire them to action. Youth are not just the future. They are our present. Young people must engage in conversations about racism, anti-Muslim sentiment, justice, and solidarity in order to be equipped to react and respond to our complicated world in productive ways.

Also, we can never underestimate the power of representation. Growing up, I wished I had access to contemporary autobiographies of Palestinian-, Arab-, and Muslim American women. Now, knowing that girls everywhere will read my story—one of resilience, pride, and solidarity—makes me proud. I hope it inspires them to step in their full identities.

**When you decided to adapt the book for young readers, what kind of changes did you make?**

I focused on using accessible language that young readers can understand. When it was necessary to use words in other languages or to introduce specific concepts, I provided a glossary. I also shared more stories from my childhood that I know will resonate across race, ethnicity, faith and more. I believe when someone sees themselves in a book, they are more likely to read it, enjoy it, and be inspired by its message.

**What books inspired you in middle school?**

I read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in middle school and I was forever moved. It helped shape my identity as a Muslim American and inspired me to speak truth to power. It also taught me about redemption, faith, and justice. Malcolm X continues to be a north star for me in my journey as an activist and organizer and my quest for racial justice in America. Reading about a Muslim American whose words are quoted all over the world, and who left such an impact, instilled a pride in me that I still carry today.

**Who do you hope will discover this book, and why?**

I am most excited about young girls of color—and especially young Muslim girls—who will see themselves in my stories: I wrote the book that I wish I had when I was growing up.
However, this book is a love letter to all young people. It is an invitation for them to be their unapologetic selves and to join the fight for justice. We cannot win without them. I hope that diverse young people and their parents all over the country discover my book because I believe that anyone who reads it will be inspired. In a dark and complicated world, we must be each other’s light and reminder of a better world ahead.

What book dazzled you in 2022?

They Called Me a Lioness: A Palestinian Girl’s Fight for Freedom by Ahed Tamimi and Dena Takruri. It is a memoir written by a Palestinian girl living under military occupation, and it is about her journey as an activist under brutal circumstances. Ahed’s struggles are similar to the struggles of many young people of color around the globe fighting for a just, equitable world where all children live freely in peace and with joy.

Interview by Mathangi Subramanian.

A once-idyllic town blames an outsider for its woes. Long ago, a fire claimed Stone-in-the-Glen’s beloved Library, which started a sequence of events that eroded all of the nicest things about the town, changing the identity of the place and the townspeople alike as citizens grew suspicious and closed off from one another. When the town fails to support the Orphan House, one orphan runs away so as not to take more resources. Cass is rescued and brought back by the sweet-natured Ogress who lives on a farm at the edge of Stone-in-the-Glen. But her return is spied by a man who misunderstands and thinks the Ogress is abducting children, and the townspeople become riled up against the Ogress by the self-serving, strife-loving Mayor. When the adults won’t listen to the children, they must find another way to help their generous neighbor and repair their broken community. The story's told from a broadly omniscient perspective through slow, thoughtful pacing. Readers will make connections before the characters do—especially regarding the true nature of the villain—and they are given narrative assurance of a happy ending. This offers young audiences security as they grapple with nuanced, realistic portrayals of people who are neither all good nor all bad. It also gives them space to form their own opinions on the book’s philosophical and thematic questions, including the refrain: “The more you give, the more you have.” Main human characters read as White. Combines realistic empathy with fantastical elements; as exquisite as it is moving. (Fantasy. 9–adult)

A 12-year-old girl navigates the effects of past abuse and finds the power to share her truths. Fresh off a seven-week leadership program at Ainsley International School, an elite boarding school, Caprice is eager to see her friends and family back in Newark at the end of an amazing summer. Before she leaves, the head of school offers her a full scholarship, giving her a week to decide whether she wants to return. Once home, Caprice is keen to see her best friend, Nicole, and enjoy what could be her last week of summer at their neighborhood recreation center despite the shadow cast by news of her estranged grandmother’s failing health. Through her first-person narration, readers come to understand that
As her father’s fate takes a toll on Joanna, Güero grapples with Morras, and Joanna carefully opens up to Güero. Güero even among Güero’s friends. Wanting to use his privilege for good, Güero organizes a protest on behalf of Joanna’s father, but the ensuing scrutiny tests Güero, his relationship with Joanna, and his community. This rich verse novel utilizes Güero’s humorous, witty voice to the fullest via varied poetic forms. The author’s deep consideration of Joanna and the other characters is a real delight and results in a story that feels rich in scope. The inclusion of topics like the justice system, detention centers, and changes in language adds further intriguing material for discussion.

Sublime. (glossary) (Verse novel. 10-14)

Caprice is harboring painful feelings tied to incidents of abuse from when she was younger that now influence her interactions with boys, even the one she is developing feelings toward. As the week moves on, an increasingly anxious Caprice must confront her past so that she can have a better future. The raw, poignant text highlights the frequency of misogynistic microaggressions and objectification, while the swift yet emotionally charged ending supports the larger message of consent and the hope of overcoming the lasting trauma of sexual assault. The book’s haunting tone will linger with readers. Caprice and most main characters are Black.

A heart-aching journey that needs to be witnessed. (Fiction. 10-14)

In Bowles’ superb companion novel to They Call Me Güero (2018), young poet Güero’s social consciousness unfolds as he navigates his first romantic relationship with the fiercely intelligent Joanna.

Seventh grade is ending, and Güero’s budding romance with Joanna is getting serious. From sharing their first kiss to meeting her parents during an awkward dinner, Güero commits to being the best boyfriend he can be. As summer unfurls, there are hangouts between Güero y los Bobbys and Joanna y las Morras, and Joanna carefully opens up to Güero. Güero even starts a band with los Bobby’s! Eventually, fall arrives, and with it, eighth grade—and a drastic change as Joanna’s father falls victim to a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid. As her father’s fate takes a toll on Joanna, Güero grapples with dealing with his new teachers. Tensions flare between Güero and Joanna and even among Güero’s friends. Wanting to use his privilege for good, Güero organizes a protest on behalf of Joanna’s father, but the ensuing scrutiny tests Güero, his relationship with Joanna, and his community. This rich verse novel utilizes Güero’s humorous, witty voice to the fullest via varied poetic forms. The author’s deep consideration of Joanna and the other characters is a real delight and results in a story that feels rich in scope. The inclusion of topics like the justice system, detention centers, and changes in language adds further intriguing material for discussion.

Sublime. (glossary) (Verse novel. 10-14)
“Pedal-to-the-metal fun, with moments both scary and triumphant to go with plenty of laugh-out-loud left turns.”

WILD RIDE

Caldarella, Keith
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$17.99 | April 5, 2022
978-1-338-74324-1

A joyride turns into a madcap, world-saving scramble after a group of kids discovers a kidnapped accountant in the trunk of a car.

The rare 1964 Mustang convertible his mom’s fiancé left in the garage proves too much temptation for 18-year-old Greg Decker—but a date with his girlfriend, Marisa Ng, quickly takes a nightmarish turn when the car is towed. First, he has to call on his smart-mouthed 12-year-old sister, Charley, for funds, and she brings friends to the rescue party. Then the car comes out of impoundment with groggy Mitch Rosenfeld trapped inside by a pair of dimwitted hired thugs. It seems that Mitch not only stumbled upon a trove of evidence that media giant Pangea’s unscrupulous billionaire CEO, Alton Peck, has been a bad boy, but also that Pangea’s about-to-be-released household “digital life assistant” is pure, privacy-busting spyware. The chase is on. But while events careen along at a gratifyingly manic clip, it’s the smart, surprising cast (most evidently White, with names cueing some ethnic diversity) that really puts the shine on this epic romp. As the story unfolds, each reveals hidden depths of heart, courage, self-knowledge, conscience, or character. Even the thoroughly villainous Peck comes off in the end as more pathetically flawed than evil.

Pedal-to-the-metal fun, with moments both scary and triumphant to go with plenty of laugh-out-loud left turns.

(Fiction. 10-13)

voices of the people

Bruchac, Joseph
Reycraft Books (96 pp.)
$18.95 | Dec. 21, 2022
978-1-4788-7516-1

Biographical profiles of 34 Indigenous Americans, rendered as poems, are illustrated by nearly 30 enrolled tribal artists.

Bruchac’s introduction dispels stubborn stereotypes about Native people, disputing that their time was “back then, not in the present—or the future.” By presenting profiles chronologically, from The Peacemaker (circa 1000 C.E.) to Wilma Mankiller (1945-2010), he elegantly unspools a more nuanced Native history. Free verse, arranged in stanzas with short lines and simple language, renders complex historical figures relatable for their courage, perseverance, and passion. While some of the subjects—Pocahontas, Geronimo, Jim Thorpe, and others—are covered in student curricula, Bruchac provides unique details and a fresh approach. He refutes the tired trope of a “romance” between preteen Pocahontas and John Smith, explaining that a White observer misinterpreted Smith’s ritual adoption by the Powhatan Nation as violence, mistaking the girl’s ceremonial role as intercession. Warriors, including women, defended their lands against Spanish, British, and American invaders. Po’Pay (circa 1630-1688) helped unify the Pueblo villages against the Spanish colonizers, effectively repelling them for 12 years. Others bridged tribal and mainstream cultures through law, medicine, activism, religion, and art. Throughout, Bruchac meticulously details how the successive colonizers’ brutality, deceit, and coercion scarred both individual members and tribal communities. The stellar art, representing varied media and styles, reifies tribal reverence and often uses humor, irony, and pop-cultural references to skewer stereotypes.

A brilliant integration of Indigenous American art and history. (biographical thumbnails, author’s note) (Historical poetry. 10-14)
AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Wendy Wan-Long Shang

Wendy Wan-Long Shang is the critically acclaimed author of numerous books for children and young adults, including The Way Home Looks Now, which was selected for the 2016 Amelia Bloomer List and received a starred review from Kirkus. In her latest work, The Secret Battle of Evan Pao (Scholastic, June 7), Evan and his family move to a small Virginia town where belonging is predicated on an ancestral connection to the Civil War. Thanks to his Chinese American heritage, Evan is sure he will never fit in—until he discovers a piece of history that changes everything. Shang answered some questions over email.

How did you decide to write a book that included the history of Chinese soldiers during the Civil War? I don’t remember where exactly I first read about Asians in the U.S. Civil War, but I know that once I heard about it, I was absolutely determined to write about it, particularly that moment of joyful discovery. There’s something that changes when you see yourself in your nation’s history in more than one place—no disrespect to the transcontinental railroad—especially when that place is a conflict that continues to define our discourse today.

Did you do any research that you wanted to include in the book but couldn’t? One of the most shocking revelations from learning about these soldiers’ histories was that despite their military service, they were denied citizenship—or had it taken away, as in the case of Kwong Lee, who had obtained naturalized citizenship before the Chinese Exclusion Act. Unfortunately, the main points of his story were just too complicated to tell coherently, so I couldn’t include it. The trick for me in writing about this history was figuring out how to present information in a way that did not get bogged down in the legal details but still made sense to young readers and appealed to their sense of fairness.

Why did you decide to tell this story in multiple perspectives? How did you choose which points of view to use? I cannot tell you how many different ways I tried to tell this story! In the end, the multiple-points-of-view format worked because one of the book’s themes is the need to understand each other’s stories. Each point of view is a slightly different take on what was happening, which means that adds a new level of understanding to what’s happening.

Who is the ideal reader for your book, and where would they be reading it? My ideal reader is someone who is about to hang out with a history-loving aunt or uncle and wants to blow their minds! Maybe they’re cozied up on a couch right as Thanksgiving dinner is being made,
and then in the middle of dinner, BOOM! Knowledge drop.

What books dazzled you in 2022?

When I first heard about Michael Leali’s *The Civil War of Amos Abernathy*, my first thought was no way! Two middle-grade books about hidden histories in the Civil War? Michael looks at the histories of LGBTQ+ people in the Civil War through the eyes of a young Civil War reenactor. His story is engaging and heartwarming.

I was also blown away by the anthology *When You Hear Me, You Hear Us*. Maybe I’m biased because I’m on the board of Shout Mouse Press, which published this book, but it’s a devastating look at how young people are treated in the criminal justice system. Anyone who reads it should question what is done in our name.

*Interview by Mathangi Subramanian.*

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**LITTLE MONARCHS**

Case, Jonathan
Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House (256 pp.)
$22.99 | $14.99 paper | April 5, 2022
978-0-8234-4260-7
978-0-8234-5139-5 paper

A 22nd-century picaresque with nefarious characters, chosen family, unavoidable camping, and lifesaving butterflies. It’s 2101, and most mammals have died from sun exposure—a fate the few remaining humans suffer if they don’t live underground as Deepers. Some Deepers are friendly; others will take what they can get by any means necessary. Since Elvie’s parents departed for Michoacán, Mexico, 8 years earlier in search of more monarch butterflies, ran into danger, and have not returned, 10-year-old Black science whiz Elvie has been cared for by her guardian, Flora, a White scientist. Flora and Elvie hope to make a vaccine that enables humans to tolerate sunlight. They struggle to find food, and Flora’s awful cooking sometimes makes their foraged food inedible. Elvie’s journals, which contain her homework, science notes, and sketches, trace their journey—including tracking their latitude and longitude daily—as they follow the amazing migration path of the monarchs, whose young have the ingredient necessary for making both the sun sickness antidote and the vaccine. The eclecticism of Case’s lively visuals in this riveting graphic novel will keep readers both enthralled and learning. The book teaches some astronomy, botany, biology, entomology, animal science, knot tying, and more. Elvie’s special relationship with Flora, along with her quick wit, scientific knowledge, and careful observation skills, makes her a character worth following. Yet she’s all kid—and one who badly wants to be reunited with her parents.

Superbly written and illustrated; keeps readers breathless and guessing until the end. (author’s note) (Graphic fiction. 8-12)
“Problem-solving through perseverance and friendship is the real win in this deeply smart and inspiring story.”

**SWIM TEAM**

*Christmas, Johnnie*

HarperAlley (356 pp.)


978-0-06-305677-0

978-0-06-305676-3 paper

Leaving Brooklyn behind, Black math-whiz and puzzle lover Bree starts a new life in Florida, where she’ll be tossed into the deep end in more ways than one. Keeping her head above water may be the trickiest puzzle yet.

While her dad is busy working and training in IT, Bree struggles at first to settle into Enith Brigitha Middle School, largely due to the school’s preoccupation with swimming—from the accomplishments of its namesake, a Black Olympian from Curaçao, to its near victory at the state swimming championships. But Bree can’t swim. To illustrate her anxiety around this fact, the graphic novel’s bright colors give way to gray thought bubbles with thick, darkened outlines expressing Bree’s deepest fears and doubts. This poignant visual crowds some panels just like us on the outside but those who feel like family on the inside who matter most. Laced with a lovely yet never heavy-handed message, Castillo’s follow-up to *Our Friend Hedgehog* (2020) is as charming as the first title. The cast of characters is delightful, especially Mole, who refers to her pals by using the word *friend* in different languages. The changing palette draws readers into the seasons—autumnal colors and hints of chilly breezes soon give way to the beauty of snowflurries and, of course, snowhogs.

An endearing and heartwarming journey to define family and self that will resonate deeply. (Fantasy 5-9)

**ISLA TO ISLAND**

*Castellanos, Alexis*

Atheneum (192 pp.)

$12.99 paper | March 15, 2022

978-1-5344-6923-5

A mostly wordless middle-grade graphic novel follows the journey of a Pedro Pan child, one of thousands evacuated from Cuba to the United States during the Cuban revolution.

Marisol’s story opens with black-and-white photographs of her parents’ early lives and then bursts into color. In tidily arranged panels, we see bright homes, delicious food, and beautiful tropical wildlife. Then Fidel Castro seizes power. Food grows scarce, and voices become hushed. When a bomb nearly blows apart Marisol’s bedroom window in the middle of the night, her parents make the difficult choice to send her to New York City. While the White couple who take her in are kind, she cannot understand the speech bubbles falling from people’s mouths, and her classmates are cruel. Everything is dark, gray, and cold—so unlike her vibrant isla—until she discovers the neighborhood library. She starts learning English, and her foster parents take her to the botanical gardens. The trio cook Cuban dishes and dance in the living room. Slowly, color seeps back into Marisol’s world. This beautiful and heartbreaking book bears witness to the experiences of children of the Pedro Pan generation, although not all experienced Marisol’s happy ending. Her story will resonate with Cuban children growing up on their abuelos’ stories and anyone who has had to leave their home and start over. The wordless narrative is incredibly impactful, underscoring Marisol’s alienation and the language barrier she faces.

An important and authentic look at the Cuban refugee experience. (author’s note, recipe, further reading) (Historical graphic novel. 10-18)

**A PLACE TO CALL HOME**

*Castillo, Lauren*

Knopf (144 pp.)

$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-5247-6717-0

978-1-5247-6718-7 PLB

Series: Our Friend Hedgehog

Hedgehog has always known where she belonged...until one day, she isn’t so sure.

Hedgehog is excited about winter coming! Winter means snowball fights, tubing, and making snowhogs! On her way to Owl's house with her best friend, Mutty (a stuffed dog), she runs into...herself? Owl, with the help of his trusty dictionary, tells Hedgehog she has a doppelgänger, although they soon realize it is simply another hedgehog. Something Hedgehog is not entirely comfortable with. Meanwhile, Beaver and Annika Mae (a tan-skinned human girl) are building a Friend Fort. Upon learning of the doppelgänger, Beaver stops his work and takes Hedgehog and her animal friends down the river to find the hedgehog. They discover the Hedge Hideaway, where hedgehogs go to hibernate. Should Hedgehog give up her fun winter plans and hibernate among her own kind? She soon realizes it’s not those who look like us on the outside but those who feel like family on the inside who matter most. Laced with a lovely yet never heavy-handed message, Castillo’s follow-up to *Our Friend Hedgehog* (2020) is as charming as the first title. The cast of characters is delightful, especially Mole, who refers to her pals by using the word *friend* in different languages. The changing palette draws readers into the seasons—autumnal colors and hints of chilly breezes soon give way to the beauty of snowflurries and, of course, snowhogs.

An endearing and heartwarming journey to define family and self that will resonate deeply. (Fantasy 5-9)
A Black girl embarks on an unprecedented journey to tap deeper into her magic.

Ella Durand is an 11-year-old from New Orleans, where she lives with her conjure-politician father, notorious Conjuror mother, grandmother, and little sister, Winnie. Ella makes history as the first Conjuror to be accepted into the Arcanum Training Institute, where she can learn to become a Marveller. Ella is eager to discover her marvel and to find out more about a type of magic so different from what she has grown up with, but integrating into this new school turns out to be harder than she hoped. Fortunately, she makes new friends, Jason and Brigit, who help her better navigate life at the school. After Ella’s family becomes embroiled in controversy due to allegations of their connection to an infamous escaped criminal and her teacher and mentor, Masterji Thakur, goes missing, she needs her friends’ help to help set things right. Clayton does a wonderful job with skillful worldbuilding that is bolstered by vivid, detailed descriptions and smart, witty prose, and readers will be swept up in the magic. The novel celebrates the diverse peoples and customs around her, including, is to forage on Holler Mountain, a dreaded place where no one dares venture. Cornbread doesn’t want Poppy to make that journey alone, so they bravely climb together. The terrified pair have some very unexpected encounters, including with a long-presumed-gone friend, who happens to possess a vast supply of food, which she generously shares with Poppy. When they arrive home, Cornbread’s perspectives on fun have changed! This cute, easy chapter book is a gently humorous tale about steadfast friends with opposite personalities. The bond between the murine buddies is sweet and convincing, and children will enjoy the friends’ lively exploits. Cordell’s trademark loose artwork, rendered in pen and ink with watercolor, is energetic and wonderfully captures gray Cornbread’s and tan Poppy’s activities, easy camaraderie, and expressive faces. Many illustrations appear as panels and insets. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**A delightful new series gets off to a charming start.** (Early chapter book. 4-8)

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**THE MARVELLERS**

*Clayton, Dbonielle*

*Illus. by Khadijah Khatib*

*Henry Holt (416 pp.)

$16.99 | May 3, 2022

978-1-250-17494-9

**HONEY AND ME**

*Drazin, Meira*

*Scholastic (304 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-338-15543-3

**CORNBREAD & POPPY**

*Cordell, Matthew*

*Little, Brown (80 pp.)

$15.99 | Jan. 4, 2022

978-0-3759-5487-0

Series: Cornbread and Poppy, 1

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*Drazin, Meira*

*Scholastic (304 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-338-15543-3

Best friends navigate relationship changes and inner growth as they enter middle school.

Modern Orthodox Jewish sixth grader Milla Bloom is thrilled when her best friend, Honey Wine, transfers to her school but struggles with jealousy and forming her own identity as she approaches her bat mitzvah. Being in school together creates tensions between the girls, especially when they choose the same topic for a speech competition. They must also write bat mitzvah speeches, and Milla admires the way Honey carves her own path (“where I see roadblocks, she sees different routes”), while she struggles to make choices that don’t always match what her mom wants for her. Choice is a strong theme not just for Milla, but for her mother, who gave up her career for her family but wasn’t able to have more children other than Milla and her little brother, Max. The need for approval and appreciation is also well developed, as is feeling connected and anchored to one’s culture and religion; in addition to her parents, Milla has strong support from her aunt and a teacher. The story’s structure is chronological, with sections named for major events in the Jewish calendar, emphasizing the way that Milla’s life is organized around them. The Blooms and the Wines are coded White; one of Honey’s younger brothers is autistic; a member of their shul is a Holocaust survivor.

**Authentic, joyful, achingly real.** (Hebrew and Yiddish glossary, author’s note, list of Jewish festivals) (Fiction. 9-13)

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**CORNBREAD & POPPY**

*Cordell, Matthew*

*Little, Brown (80 pp.)

$15.99 | Jan. 4, 2022

978-0-3759-5487-0

Series: Cornbread and Poppy, 1

Two mouse best friends approach life differently. Cornbread’s an organized, detail-oriented planner; he gathered his winter food supplies and stocked his shelves in advance. No risk taker, he. Not so pal Poppy: She’s always busy biking, hiking, and having adventures. “Nah, I’ll do it later,” is her motto. Unfortunately, she realizes too late that “later” has arrived and she’s got nothing put by. After searching, she and Cornbread discover there’s no food left anywhere. The only solution, Poppy concludes, is to forage on Holler Mountain, a dreaded place where no one dares venture. Cornbread doesn’t want Poppy to make the fearsome trek alone, so they bravely climb together. The
Henry David Thoreau spent many years observing seasonal changes in the natural world; now, a new biography for young readers chronicles the seasons of his life.

The book begins with a description of Thoreau’s outdoory childhood spent collecting wildflowers, leaves, and seeds on his grandmother’s farm in Concord, Massachusetts. As a teenager, Henry explored the small town’s rivers and wetlands and “learned the voices of birds, frogs, and insects too.” After studying Greek, Latin, and German at Harvard, he taught at the district school until his beloved brother’s untimely death forced him to reevaluate his life. He started journaling and writing essays and poems inspired by his excursions in nature. Determined to carry out an “experiment” in “living more simply,” he dwelled by himself in a tiny house at Walden Pond for two years. The narrative goes on to describe Thoreau’s writerly life and literary accomplishments; his foray into land surveying; his public lectures; his involvement in the anti-slavery movement; and his many adventures and groundbreaking contributions as a naturalist. Dunlap’s generous text unfolds at a leisurely pace and excels at narrative language to make both her vaguely medieval, vaguely French setting and the art and craft of bread making vivid, but kneads her protagonist (the two-legged one) into a resilient, responsible soul who can stay true to everyone she loves no matter how difficult or disagreeable. The main human cast is White presenting; two supporting characters have brown skin.

The Life and Seasons of Henry David Thoreau
Dunlap, Julie
Illus. by Megan Elizabeth Baratta
Tilbury House (96 pp.)
$18.95 | Jan. 11, 2022
978-0-88448-908-5

A marvelous life survey of a perennially relevant historical figure. (Author’s notes, resources) (Illustrated biography. 7-12)

The Patron Thief of Bread
Eagar, Lindsay
Candlewick (448 pp.)
$19.99 | May 11, 2022
978-1-5362-0468-1

An 8-year-old urchin, “one-fourth street dirt and three-fourths stolen food scraps,” finds herself caught up in an agonizing struggle to reconcile conflicting loyalties.

The Crowns, a ragged band of waifs, is the only family Duck has ever known—so when its sneering, verbally abusive leader lionizes in an attempt to reconcile conflicting loyalties. But strange events are affecting the city: Boulangeries are closing at an alarming rate due to contamination of baked goods by the Thing, while locations of the new Pain-tastique chain are opening. The two are connected and involve high-level greed, corruption, secret codes, and formulas. Self-doubting Nell is prone to paralyzing fears, but she is braver than she knows as she overcomes setbacks and real dangers. Eagle masterfully maintains suspense, dispensing new clues as the events escalate, with twists and turns galore and a cast of charming, loyal friends, all set against the special atmosphere of Paris. Soft, full-page, pencil-and-ink illustrations highlight key events. A satisfying conclusion finds the villains punished, bakeries restored, and a whole new life for Nell. Most characters present White; there is a Tunisian family in the supporting cast.

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A tour de force. (Mystery. 10-14)
“A stellar, hauntingly beautiful narrative.”

MOONWALKING

CELIA CRUZ

Edelman, Claudia Romo & William Alexander

Illus. by Alexandra Beguez

Roaring Brook Press (128 pp.)

$16.99 | April 12, 2022

978-0-8234-4651-3

Series: Hispanic Star, 2

A biography of iconic Afro-Cuban musician Celia Cruz that pays special attention to her early years.

Úrsula Hilario Celia Caridad Cruz Alfonso got her start in music when she was tasked with singing lullabies to young relatives at bedtime—Celia’s lullabies were so dynamic that the children stayed awake and demanded more songs instead of drifting off to sleep. With the encouragement of her favorite instructor, she set her plans to become a teacher aside in order to pursue a career in music. Celia’s meteoric rise to stardom was not without difficulty, but her hard work and support from family and fellow musicians kept her on track to becoming one of the most famous Latine singers in history. The book explores topics such as the prejudice Celia faced because of her darker skin, political turmoil in Cuba during the 1950s, and Celia’s painful exile from her home country, all within the context of her career and celebrity. It’s clear that Celia touched those around her with her dynamic talent and innovative musicality and used her status to advocate for others. Engaging illustrations and informative sidebars further enrich the heartfelt information text. Positive affirmations are sprinkled throughout the book; readers will come away inspired to follow Celia’s positive example. Backmatter includes an author’s note from Alexander and a note from the nonprofit organization Hispanic Star, which partnered with the publisher for this series.

A compelling look at the radiant life of La Reina de la Salsa. (facts) (Biography. 8-12)

MOONWALKING

Emberley, Michael

Miller-Lachmann

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (224 pp.)

$16.99 | April 12, 2022

978-0-374-31437-8

Alternating perspectives explore an interracial friendship forged amid family turmoil and societal injustice and tension in pre-gentrification Brooklyn.

After Joseph John “JJ” Pankowski’s father is blacklisted for participating in the 1981 air traffic controllers’ strike, his family moves from Long Island to his father’s childhood home in Brooklyn, where his Polish grandmother still lives. They leave behind the Catholic school where JJ was bullied as well as his older sister—rarely mentioned, for reasons that JJ, who is cued as autistic, doesn’t yet understand. One of the few White students at his new middle school, JJ observes:

“Things / That / Make / No / Sense. // One out of twenty kids / in the school / but one out of four kids / in honors class.” There he meets Pierre “Pie” Velez, a Puerto Rican and Congolese “genius kid” and graffiti artist who struggles to care for his mother, who has mental illness, and younger half sister in the predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhood of Los Sures. The boys become friends via their shared love of art: For JJ, it’s music, especially the Clash, and for Pie, it’s artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. An encounter with the police highlights the differences between them, threatening their friendship. The coauthors’ equally strong contributions evocatively bring the characters and setting to life through visual poetry. The even pacing makes for an engrossing read, and the characters’ pain and promise will remain with readers.

A stellar, hauntingly beautiful narrative. (authors’ notes, sources) (Verse novel. 11-15)

I DID IT!

Emberley, Michael

Holiday House (40 pp.)

$14.99 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-0-8234-4651-3

Series: I Like To Read Comics

You can do it, too.

An adorable creature with catlike ears, a tail, and a big red nose wants to do things! Dressed in a pink and green striped onesie (complete with matching ear covers), they set out to experience life, from building block towers to playing catch to climbing trees. But although they try their best with each new activity, they ultimately conclude that “I can’t do it!” That changes, though, when it comes to riding a bike. With the support of their friends—small animals and little robots—they try, fail, but then try again. And although the first long-term ride ultimately ends in a crash, the little protagonist has gained the confidence to proudly proclaim, “I did it!” It’s a quiet story but one that will speak volumes to young readers experiencing new challenges. Emberley masterfully balances colorful characters and the use of white space, keeping the focus on the action and the emotions associated with trying and failing. This title will be cherished by librarians, educators, and caregivers for its simple yet direct message but also by young readers, who will see themselves reflected in the main character. When it comes to excellent books, Emberley does it! (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Joyfully encouraging—just what uncertain little ones need as they make their first forays into independence. (Early reader. 3-6)
SINGING WITH ELEPHANTS
Engle, Margarita
Viking (224 pp.)
$16.99 | May 31, 2022
978-0-593-20669-0

Inspired by her friendship with a famous poet, an 11-year-old attempts to rescue a baby elephant.

Oriol is homesick for Cuba, bullied at school for her Spanish accent, and mourning her Abuelita, who died after their family moved to California to help her receive a diabetes treatment that failed. Set in Santa Barbara in 1947, this novel in verse follows Oriol, who finds comfort in caring for animals at her parents’ veterinary clinic and at a nearby wildlife ranch where movies are filmed. She also befriends an elderly neighbor, later revealed to be a fictionalized version of a real historical figure: Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean poet of mestizo Incan and Basque heritage and the first Latin American winner of the Nobel Prize in literature. Mistral teaches Oriol to write poems as a way of coping with her emotions and later encourages her to write a petition to help free a baby elephant cruelly separated from her mother and twin sibling. The book is replete with lovely, nearly magical imagery: In one scene, the mother elephant uses her trunk to swoop Oriol off her feet for a hug. In another, elephants and humans march together for justice. Throughout, the power of words—both to help children find where they belong and to make the world a kinder place—profoundly resonates.

Brilliant, joyful, and deeply moving. (author’s note, poem by Gabriela Mistral, further reading) (Verse historical fiction. 8-12)

ROLL FOR INITIATIVE
Formato, Jaime
Illus. by Sara Gianassi
Running Press Kids (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-7624-8106-4

A middle schooler starts up a Dungeons & Dragons party. Sixth grader Riley’s best (and only) friend is her older brother, Devin, who’s left Florida for California and college; now she’s facing middle school alone. Having to learn independence without Devin’s guidance and hand-holding, she decides to write a Dungeons & Dragons campaign for him so when he comes home for the holidays, she can take a turn as their Dungeon Master. But Riley draws the attention of Lucy, a neighbor Riley thought was too cool for her, who wants to play D&D. Soon they’re joined by Hannah, a high-energy neighbor from their apartment building, and Jen, an artistic, high-achiever classmate. Riley’s emotional, sensitive nature—which causes her social anxiety—enables her to perceive the insecurities of those closest to her and support them. Her growing confidence is challenged by her brother’s purist take on D&D, however, especially when his own emotional fragility brings him home early, expecting to take on his old caretaker role and cramping her newly autonomous style and social life. The D&D elements give enough detail to guide a new player and capture the tabletop game vibe without overwhelming the narrative. The interpersonal conflicts are all based in affection and care, and the ending rewards Riley’s growth. Riley, her family, and Hannah are White; Jen is Black, and Lucy has a Black father and White mother. Spot art enhances the text.

Maxes out its stats in empathy, creativity, and character growth. (Fiction. 8-14)

FREESTYLE
Galligan, Gale
Colors by K Czap
Graphix/Scholastic (272 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-338-04580-2

Two kinds of performance arts are better than one in this feel-good comedy. The eighth grade dance crew known as Eight Bitz are stuck between styles. Their captain, Tess Reyes, runs a strict routine with an eye toward the upcoming Bronx Battle tournament. Cory Tan, a skilled improviser, wants to play fast and loose for maximum style. High school looms over the dancers. Cory’s parents recruit his classmate Sunna Ahmad to tutor him in hopes of his getting into an elite school. Sunna becomes a friend and confidante once Cory discovers her secret talent, and he learns yo-yo throwing tricks from her. The cartooning instincts on display are superb, always making room for setting, emotion, movement, and color for great visual variety. Welcoming urban community spaces are highlighted throughout, including parks and public transit. Middle school emotional turmoil is expressed more than once in the form of written and deleted texts. At the same time, mutual appreciation between friends and love from family form positive, affirming bonds. While the story focuses most on Cory and Sunna, everyone gets moments to shine. The cast is cued as broadly diverse through names, physical appearance, and other contextual clues.

This inviting, heartfelt story will get readers into the groove of self-expression and lasting friendships. (Bonus comics) (Graphic fiction. 10-13)
**NOWHERE BETTER THAN HERE**
Guillory, Sarah
Roaring Brook Press (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-250-82426-4

Jillian Robichaux is determined to fight back when her beloved home’s threatened by coastal erosion. Tiny Boutin, Louisiana—with houses built on tall stilts—has survived devastating hurricanes, but it’s unusually heavy rain that causes a massive flood and blows her estranged father back into her life. After rescuing an elderly woman’s old photographs from her flooding house, 13-year-old Jillian doesn’t recognize some places in the pictures, despite her hometown’s being a keystone of her identity. Investigating further, she learns how much of her town has ended up underwater over the past half-century. Worse, the state doesn’t want to repair the damaged bridges or schools (instead shuttling kids to a larger town’s schools), devastating Boutin’s chances for recovery. Stubborn Jillian teams up with her brainy cousin and an artistic activist friend from her new school for a three-pronged approach to the disaster: a video and photographic oral history project to preserve locals’ memories, a petition to save the school, and service helping ecological groups plant marsh grass to combat coastal erosion. The projects’ trajectories manage to balance optimism, empowerment, and realistic ideas of what success looks like—the last causing emotional struggles for Jillian. Most characters are Cajun; there are two prominent Black characters, and southern Louisiana’s Vietnamese community is acknowledged. Fictional Boutin’s dilemmas are inspired by real climate change events.

**THE FLAMINGO**
Guojing
Random House Studio (144 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-12731-5

A child’s visit to their grandmother creates lasting stories. At Lao Lao’s coastal home, flamingo motifs are everywhere. The child asks Lao Lao about a feather in a flamingo-shaped cup, and as the scene shifts, we see a girl walking along a beach and discovering an egg, out of which a flamingo chick eventually hatches. In between kite flying, bao steaming, and their own coastal walk, Lao Lao shares her story with her grandchild. Friendship between the flamingo and the girl grows, but the time comes for goodbyes. The flamingo flies away, and the girl hopes for the bird’s return. Just as Lao Lao’s story concludes, a flock of flamingos serendipitously fills the sky. Grandmother and grandchild must part, too. Back at home, feather in hand, the child begins to write their own story, and their imagination takes flight. Guojing’s tender tale uses the migration of birds to explore how family bonds endure despite separation and the passage of time. The spare text in this mostly wordless tale is well placed. Rendered in Photoshop, watercolor, and colored pencil, the illustrations depict expressive faces and dynamic perspectives, beautifully capturing the joy of a hug, the wonder of visiting new places, the sadness of saying goodbye, and the hope of reuniting. The use of color is inspired; muted illustrations with pops of reddish pink depict the present, while both Lao Lao’s and the child’s stories are portrayed in vibrant hues. Use of the term Lao Lao cues the characters as Chinese, though locations aren’t specified.

This tale soars. (Graphic fiction. 5-9)

**THE LEGEND OF THE DREAM GIANTS**
Hansen, Dustin
Shadow Mountain (240 pp.)
$18.99 | March 8, 2022
978-1-62972-986-2

A lonely young giant ventures into a town in search of food only to learn hard lessons about humankind and his own storied lineage. Berg may be a giant who is greatly feared, but he himself is a child, hungry and looking for companionship. After he is injured, Berg is rescued by Ünhold the Giant and learns about his star-blue-sand–magic. Fearing the giant, who has a fearsome reputation, Berg flees to Eisenstadt, where he meets young, red-haired Anya, who is unafraid, curious, and kind. It’s his experiences in Eisenstadt that force Berg to come to terms with the coexistence of humankind’s darkness and sweetness and the age-old truth that things are not always what they seem. Hansen has created a compelling world that gives the feel of an old-fashioned fairy tale coupled with beautiful, black-and-white illustrations that contain echoes of the art nouveau era. These depictions of bears and wolves tell the story of Berg’s dreams, representing the quiet power of giants and the vicious persistence of humans. This artwork is stunning and heavy with emotion; for example, one shows a baby bear clinging to its parent as the parent’s life and magic slip away into the sky. Berg’s friendship with Anya is heartwarming and heartbreaking, as is his relationship to Ünhold. Hansen’s lilting writing has the feel of an epic poem, a tale of growing wise and of learning how to both hold on and let go.

A moving and evocative must-read. (Fantasy. 9-12)
“Quietly, delightfully superb.”

OH, SAL

Henkes, Kevin
Greenwillow Books (144 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-06-24492-4

Henkes’ third book centered on the Miller family—after the Newbery Honor The Year of Billy Miller (2014) and Billy Miller Makes a Wish (2021)—follows Billy’s 4-year-old sister, Sal.

Sal’s New Year’s Day has plenty of big moments of misunderstanding—and understanding. She is full of feelings today and sheds more than a few tears. Two people in her household seem like interlopers—the new baby, just over a week old, who doesn’t yet have a name, and Papa’s younger brother, Uncle Jake, whose exuberance and habit of calling her Salamander are extremely irritating. Plus, she’s misplaced a treasured gift from Santa—her favorite pair of a set of seven flower-themed underpants. Henkes’ keen awareness of the ways it is hard and constantly revelatory to be a child gives this simple family story a sense of heart and happiness. Endearing spot drawings—Sal imagining elves making underwear, for example—convey whimsy and cheer. The third-person narrative sticks close to Sal, observing this close, loving household from her perspective. Though Sal knows that Uncle Jack and Papa are brothers, her surprise when she realizes that her uncle is her father’s younger brother (“…she never thought of them as kids. And she never thought about who was older. All adults seemed generally the same age to her”) is a realistic example of how children make sense of family relationships and the world. Henkes channels the inner lives of his protagonists with sensitivity and respect—his audience will feel seen. Characters are cued White.

Quietly, delightfully superb. (Fiction. 5-9)

THE DEADLIEST HURRICANES THEN AND NOW
Hopkinson, Deborah
Scholastic Focus (208 pp.)
$25.99 | $7.99 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-338-36017-2
978-1-338-36019-6 paper
Series: The Deadliest, 2

Sept. 8, 1900, was a day no one in Galveston, Texas, would ever forget.

In a White part of town, 5-year-old Katherine Vedder wasn’t worried until her brother and cousin reported “that the Gulf looked like a great gray wall about fifty feet high.” Young African American newlywed Annie Smizer McCullough, who lived close to the beach, feared her beloved roses would be washed away in the storm. But no one was prepared for the devastation that would leave at least 8,000 people dead. In the States, it was originally thought the storm would head north after passing over Cuba; U.S. bias against Cuba prevented their warning that it was in fact heading west from being heard. Without modern technology, weather forecasters were dependent on tools such as barometers and rain gauges and their experience with previous storm patterns. This well-laid-out book tells a thrilling and terrifying story by combining science with social context. Quoting oral histories, journals, and letters, Hopkinson shares the vivid recollections of survivors. She also presents an inclusive portrait of the differences between African Americans’ and White people’s experiences of this natural disaster during a time of segregation. Photos of hurricanes and their aftereffects provide light and texture to her narrative. Readers will feel the impact of climate change includes.

An exciting, well-executed book that will captivate young readers. (Nonfiction. 8-11)
Can a young American girl navigate cultural and linguistic differences with her Japanese grandfather? Gigi, a girl with pale skin and short, dark brown hair, can't wait until Ojiisan (grandfather) comes to live with her family, which includes her Japanese mother, her White father, and Roscoe, their playful dog. But when the family meets Ojiisan at the airport, Gigi's hopes for instant connection are dashed in the face of language and culture barriers. Disappointed, Gigi tearfully confides in her mother, who helps to clear up the misunderstandings. Though Gigi is upset that her grandmother tucked away the drawing she made instead of opening it, Mom explains, “Most Japanese people his age think it’s rude to open a present in front of the person who gave it to them.” With support from Mom, Gigi reaches out again to Ojiisan and finds that they can teach each other the words and cultural norms they don’t yet know. This book combines a large font, colorful cartoon art, and an age-appropriate plot in order to introduce the topic of cross-cultural differences (and the emotions that come with bridging them). Gigi experiences a wide range of feelings, which young ones can consider as they follow her story.A glossary contains a handful of Japanese words used in the story but does not include any hints at pronunciation. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An affirming option in the quickly diversifying field of early-reader books. (Early reader 5-8)

Jewell builds upon the foundation of her bestselling This Book Is Anti-Racist (2020) with a primer on anti-racism, intersectionality, and ways of effecting change. Defining anti-racism as “the act of making a choice to be active and resist racism,” the author discusses racial identity, power, and activism, covering important vocabulary and concepts along the way. She incorporates age-appropriate language in rendering complex topics—such as privilege, intersectionality, and colonization—with clarity and precision, aided by buoyant graphics depicting a diverse group of children. “Putting It All Together” summaries at the end of each chapter reinforce key takeaways. The lessons highlight youth agency, awareness, and autonomy: Jewell makes it clear that she believes in readers: “You are a really good problem solver, and you can help us adults find ways to make the world a much better place to live in for everyone.” Her book offers a way for young people to learn about themselves and their communities, make careful distinctions between how they define themselves and how society may see them, and become champions for change as they combat prejudice and discrimination. Most importantly, she shows young people that this work is not meant to be done alone and encourages them to join a community of others working toward a more free and just world. Adults might just learn something, too—there are gems for everyone.

An instructive textbook for our time, illuminating the questions and community actions youth need to transform the world. (glossary, recommended reading) (Nonfiction. 8-12)
American Jennifer moved from the Midwest into the house describing events before Jennifer vanishes, the book dives right into the action as Jennifer goes missing in the first chapter. At an early age, pale-skinned Shahrzad, with her springy black curls, is “always waiting for another story.” By the time she meets a sad boy in the park, she is an adept storyteller and budding writer. The account of the boy’s family—they fled an angry nation takes flight via a toy airplane. Her encounter with the angry king hones her narrative powers while enabling the king to transcend his prolonged grief and revoke his harsh laws. The illustrations convey Shahrzad’s probing wit and a youngster’s whimsical representation of the story world, which includes a reference to One Thousand and One Nights (or “maybe it was just ten”). While Shahrzad wears the same dress throughout the book, her appearance varies, alternating in scale and vantage point, thereby raising an intriguing question about the protagonist’s perspective. Are we seeing her as a “girl” or as a writer recalling her own childhood memories? In this manner, the overall narrative invites us to ponder the nature of time as both cyclical and linear. Clever construction and intertextual inspirations weave a thought-provoking homage to a fabled heroine and master storyteller. (Picture book. 5–8)

This refraiming of the classic One Thousand and One Nights explores universal themes through a contemporary lens. Having fallen in love with stories at an early age, pale-skinned Shahrzad, with her springy black curls, is “always waiting for another story.” By the time she meets a sad boy in the park, she is an adept storyteller and budding writer. The account of the boy’s family—they fled an angry nation takes flight via a toy airplane. Her encounter with the angry king hones her narrative powers while enabling the king to transcend his prolonged grief and revoke his harsh laws. The illustrations convey Shahrzad’s probing wit and a youngster’s whimsical representation of the story world, which includes a reference to One Thousand and One Nights (or “maybe it was just ten”). While Shahrzad wears the same dress throughout the book, her appearance varies, alternating in scale and vantage point, thereby raising an intriguing question about the protagonist’s perspective. Are we seeing her as a “girl” or as a writer recalling her own childhood memories? In this manner, the overall narrative invites us to ponder the nature of time as both cyclical and linear. Clever construction and intertextual inspirations weave a thought-provoking homage to a fabled heroine and master storyteller. (Picture book. 5–8)

This story about one girl’s reaction to another seventh grader’s disappearance reveals the internal impact of bullying. Mallory Moss, a 12-year-old girl in a small Florida town, was the first to meet Jennifer Chan. Chinese American Jennifer moved from the Midwest into the house across the street during the summer. Mallory, who is Korean and implied White, knows that the new girl will have trouble once their predominantly White, Christian school begins: For one thing, Jennifer believes in aliens. Alternating between chapters labeled “Now” that are set in the present day and “Then,” describing events before Jennifer vanishes, the book dives right into the action as Jennifer goes missing in the first chapter. Texts start flying between Mallory and her friends as they worry about what Mallory calls “the Incident” with Jennifer that took place a few days before her disappearance. While the search for Jennifer intensifies, Mallory replays prior events with growing dread, looking for clues. The storyline slowly reveals cracks in friendships, with Mallory questioning her responsibility for many pieces of this puzzle. Keller successfully captures the emotional ennui of middle school tweens who are jockeying for social status, anxious and riddled with doubt, and yearning for a sense of identity. There is clearly enough hurt to go around, and this story provides one solution for getting through dark days.

A mesmerizing look at bullying and its aftereffects. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8–12)

Small-town life for the 12 seventh graders of Fawn Creek, Louisiana, gets turned upside down. When new student Orchid Mason arrives—a rare occurrence in a town that hardly ever sees change—her stories of living in Paris and New York City seem too good to be true. Painfully shy Dorothy and her best friend, Greyson, who doesn’t fit his father’s gender expectations, are enraptured by Orchid’s stories of the world, which give them hope for something better than life in a place where Gimmerston Chemical is the main employer. But not everyone is as welcoming, and Janie, the queen of the social scene, plots to put the new girl in her place. Lessons on similes, metaphors, and poetry from Mr. Agosto, their English teacher whose family left Venezuela for Fawn Creek when he was small, are brilliantly used to enrich the characters’ observations. Kelly has created a strong ensemble cast of students, all of whom present White, realistic problems rooted in family life, friendship, and school. Having grown up pigeonholed into expected roles, how can they fit in while following their own passions? The book begins with the mystery of Orchid and ends with universal lessons in self-acceptance, standing up to bullies, and the power of kindness. The rural Southern setting is well developed and is enhanced by occasional full-page illustrations.

An emotionally resonant story about authenticity and belonging. (Fiction. 8–12)
“A searingly relevant opus to intellectual freedom.”

**ATTACK OF THE BLACK RECTANGLES**

King, Amy Sarig
Scholastic (272 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-68052-2

Sixth graders stand up against censorship and systemic bias.

Mac Delaney wants to recognize the unvarnished truth, whether he’s wondering about how many Declaration of Independence signers owned slaves, embracing Indigenous land acknowledgments at the dinner table, or questioning blacked-out words in classroom copies of Jane Yolen’s award-winning Holocaust novel, *The Devil’s Arithmetic*. However, Mac’s teacher defends censorship—as well as a bevy of school and town regulations and discriminatory attitudes surrounding LGBTQ-pride, dress codes, curfews, and access to junk food. Mac lives with and is close to his single mother and grandfather; his disengaged father’s dishonesty and explosive anger damage his feelings of self-worth. Mac has support from aromantic and asexual friend Denis and feminist classmate Marci. Mac exhibits real growth in his understanding of Marci’s perspective and advocacy. Reading *The Devil’s Arithmetic* also influences a Vietnamese American classmate to use her real given name, rather than the Anglicized form, something she felt pressured to do in their 97% White town. Though the school’s administration resists the young people’s challenges, the students’ movement builds a promising following on the way to a cathartic showdown with the school board. The protagonists clarify the various issues for readers who may not be aware of them, and the story skillfully encourages keeping open minds and extending grace to the oblivious and hostile alike. An author’s note addresses the real-world events that inspired the book.

A searingly relevant opus to intellectual freedom. (Fiction. 9-12)

**MARSHMALLOW CLOUDS**

*Two Poets at Play Among Figures of Speech*

Kooser, Ted & Connie Wánek
Illus. by Richard Jones
Candlewick (72 pp.)
$19.99 | March 15, 2022
978-1-5362-0303-5

Free-verse meditations, mostly on rural and country subjects, with atmospheric illustrations.

Mingling their unsigned entries, Kooser and Wánek use similar language and cadences to write of marshmallows on a blue plate (“They’re partly cloudy”), a harpist on a stage playing “a great golden moth,” tadpoles as punctuation marks, a book as a sandwich with “a few words of mustard introducing / the chewy salami of history,” and like transformations of familiar, or at least recognizable, sights. The tone is generally solemn, though glints of humor shine through—“One summer day I was boiled and salted / like a peanut. I was the meat / in a heat sandwich, the dog in a hot”—and the sensibility is so attuned to outdoors and country experiences that the one real miss here is a wry remark about city people never getting to step in a cow pie. (No, in cities it’ll come from a dog.) In the accompanying paintings, Jones incorporates images from each poem into subdued landscapes or domestic settings...often to lovely effect, as in one scene of brown ponies amid birches on a snowy hillside and another of sinuous, nearly bare trees with intimately interwoven branches. A child on the cover has brown skin; the rest of the rare human figures either appear light-skinned or face away from the viewer.

Imagination stretchers, likely to appeal most to introspective readers fond of finding unexpected pairings and connections. (dual afterwords) (Illustrated poetry. 10-13)

**THE SECRETS OF THE STORMFOREST**

Lapinski, L.D.
Aladdin (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-5344-8357-6
Series: Strangeworlds Travel Agency, 3

Strangeworlds faces its biggest challenge yet.

Flick’s life since she first entered the Strangeworlds Travel Agency has been a series of adventures in different worlds where her unusual magic is needed to shore up the multiverse. Now she and best friend Jonathan have discovered that all of the mysteries they’ve encountered in previous adventures were due to the magic-devouring Seren, who will destroy the multiverse if they aren’t stopped. Flick, now 13, must face what it means to have power as she negotiates loss and first love (with Jonathan’s cousin Avery, a girl literally from another world). As befits the greater stakes, this is an altogether less whimsical tale, with unusual magic is needed to shore up the multiverse. Now she

A moving conclusion to a delightful trilogy. (Fantasy. 9-14)
A heart-rending story of loss, community, friendship, and what it takes to heal and survive.

AVIVA VS. THE DYBBUK

THE HANMOJI HANDBOOK
Your Guide to the Chinese Language Through Emoji
Li, Taeon, An Xiao Mina & Jennifer 8. Lee
MTeen Press/Candlewick (160 pp.)
$24.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-5362-1913-5

A visual manual employs digital-age symbols to introduce one of the world's oldest living forms of writing.

Leveraging widely recognizable and pictographic emojis, this innovative work appeals to humans' language instinct and innate playfulness, dismantling potential psychological barriers when approaching something that may feel difficult or inaccessible. The colorful and icon-filled design creates explicit connections between Hanzi—Chinese characters—and emoji, enticing readers to browse and explore together with the anthropomorphic porcine narrator, Jiji, whose profile shows the emoji representing his hanmoji name, Snout Snout.

Comparing Hanzi with other logographic languages including Egyptian hieroglyphs, Sumerian, and Mayan, the contents inform and intrigue regardless of one's prior knowledge of the Chinese language. How might two tree emojis make the word forest? How many spoken language groups and written forms does Chinese currently have? (Answer: 10 and two, respectively)

And what is a tonal language? Using crisp layouts, thoughtful descriptions and examples, and illustrated charts, this comprehensive primer entertains while explicating a high-context language family without overgeneralizing or oversimplifying. It also incorporates Chinese culture and philosophy and educates readers about the history and process of emoji creation, among other topics. Through their broad, comparative approach, the savvy creators also demonstrate the hybridity and constantly evolving nature of languages in general.

Clever, complex, yet concise and fun: This guide promises to engage language learners and curious readers. (Nonfiction. 11-18)

DIFFERENT KINDS OF FRUIT
Lukoff, Kyle
Dial Books (320 pp.)
$17.99 | April 12, 2022
978-0-593-11118-5

A girl on the cusp of middle school searches for understanding about herself, her parents, and the changing world around her.

At the start of sixth grade, White cisgender girl Annabelle doesn't dare hope for surprises from her final year at her private school in the suburbs of Seattle. She itches to escape and discover wonders awaiting her outside the confines of her neighborhood—like drag brunch. However, her expectations for a boring year are turned upside down when Bailey, a White nonbinary student with the coolest rainbow shoes, and a new teacher with exciting plans for the curriculum join Annabelle's class. Unfamiliar feelings pull Annabelle into a fast friendship with Bailey despite her father's vocal disapproval and her mother's discomfort. Confronting her parents about their attitudes uncovers a side of her family history that Annabelle never could have imagined. Annabelle's first-person narration snaps with vivacious personality and humor. Lively banter and quirky facts contribute levity as Annabelle explores topics that weigh on her like privilege, climate change, privacy, and her own lack of vocabulary to describe her identity. Even adults in the story, particularly Annabelle's father, face challenges to their beliefs that require them to reflect and grow. Lukoff reflects diversity in the world around Annabelle while also heightening her awareness of spaces that are not as inclusive as they claim to be and exploring what to do with that understanding.

Inquisitive, engaged, and action-seeking. (Fiction. 8-12)
A young bunny copes with the death of her father and the move to a new home.

Mama moves her children, Cress and baby brother Kip, one spring evening as the moon is in the sky. Their new home is in a dead, hollow oak tree called the Broken Arms; its ramshackle state reminds Cress of the Watercress family’s loss. Natural dangers, including, most saliently, a snake nicknamed the Final Drainpipe and Monsieur Reynard the fox, feel more immediate here. As they settle in, there’s a perfect seasoning of domesticity, adventure, and contained peril, as on the day Cress and Finian, from a neighboring squirrel family, are swept over a waterfall on a raft. Cress confronts—and charms—Tunk the Honeybear with aplomb, but then she and Finny are briefly held captive by an arrogant, pretentious skunk. Maguire’s narrative offers wry puns, rich vocabulary, and entertaining dialogue, and Litchfield’s glowing, slightly stylized, full-color illustrations present an enchanting, magical peek into this woodland world. Cress’ personality is nicely realized as a child on the cusp of growing up as she deals with sorrow, crankily takes responsibility for Kip, and argues with her mother (who, like Little Women’s Marmee, puts her own anger in check to step up for her children). The anthropomorphized world feels true to itself and to the animal natures inhabiting it.

Warmhearted and utterly charming. (Animal fantasy. 7-11)

A supernatural story of one boy’s survival in the darkest of times, set in a dystopian London.

It has been two years since Luke Smith-Sharma last saw his family. Kidnapped along with thousands of other children, he spends his days shoveling coal in Battersea Power Station, hidden away from the world. The setting is palpably Dickensian, covered in steam and soot, and controlled by Cruella de Vil–like villain Tabatha Margate. White and Indian Luke is also half-ghost, able to see things others cannot. Aiding Luke in his efforts to escape are richly developed supporting characters: his best friend and bunkmate, Ravi; plucky new girl and plumber’s niece Jess; and Alma, a ghost girl yearning for closure. Along with Luke’s newfound ghosting skills, Alma teaches him how to leave the physical world and fly above steampunk London, where he gains a larger perspective on their predicament. The situation becomes harrowing as he learns of Margate’s despicable plans. Some of the content is quite gritty and dark as the novel critiques social inequities; it feels like Charles Dickens, Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials, and Neil Gaiman’s The Graveyard Book rolled into one. Mann creates empathy for Luke, who shows clear hope and compassion for others during this evil time. The quick-witted humor and fast pace keep the entertainment factor high.

Thrilling. (Fantasy. 8-12)

Four young people deal with the harsh realities of Castro’s Cuba in this novel by author and Sesame Street actress Manzano.

In overlapping short stories, readers hear from Ana, Miguel, Zulema, and Juan about how Castro’s revolution affected their lives. They come from different backgrounds, reflect Cuba’s racial diversity, and suffer varied consequences in the aftermath of Castro’s rise to power. Ana’s father is home from fighting in the mountains with Fidel; her family, like many Cubans, wanted to build a better country only to realize too late that Fidel had fooled them. Miguel, on the other hand, is one of thousands of Pedro Pan children, sent to the U.S. alone to protect them; he arrives in Miami and goes to live in an orphanage. Zulema and her rural community learn to read thanks to young brigadistas—but they’re only allowed access to state-sanctioned propaganda. In Havana, Juan loses his best friend, who eagerly participates in the militaristic pioneros; being on opposing sides wreaks havoc in their lives. Through these young people’s experiences, the realities of Cubans’ lives are presented in nuanced and complex ways in this thoroughly researched work. Many moments will ring true to young Cubans who have grown up on family stories, down to the slang and details of daily life at the time.

A well-researched, thoughtful, and moving look at post-revolutionary Cuba. (author’s note, historical notes, timeline, resources) (Fiction. 9-13)
A FIELD GUIDE TO MERMAIDS
Martin, Emily B.
Henry Holt (144 pp.)
$13.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-250-79432-1

A guide to watery habitats and their residents.

Definitively making the point that mermaids can be found anywhere there is water—even a little, or for a little while—Martin depicts dozens of types, each linked to a specific (real) locale and arranged by their favored habitats, from deep ocean abyssal zones to shallow desert pools, hot springs to swimming pools. Martin notes 11 species that dwell in wetlands alone, including residents of both fresh and saltwater marshes as well as mangrove swamps, bayous, baygall bogs, freezing wetlands, and ciénagas. There are male merfolk, the author admits, but she sticks to the feminine term. To assist young nature detectives, each mermaid is posed in a natural setting along with selected specimens of wildlife that share the same habitat. As mermaids are great mimics, they tend to resemble their wild companions, and so along with displaying individual adornments and embellishments, they are each as distinctive looking as the accurately rendered fish, marine mammals, reptiles, and other not-so-mythical creatures on view. Moreover, enlightening discussions of mermaid behaviors and environmental concerns mingle with general questions and activities suitable for any encounters with nature. Readers will come away uniquely prepared to find and identify these elusive creatures as well as the vast array of aquatic niches they (putatively) inhabit.

An indispensable, encyclopedic resource for nature quests—mythological or otherwise. [Fantasy. 11-15]
“An emotionally resonant narrative skillfully connecting the past, present, and future.”

HOLLER OF THE FIREFLIES

In New York and Appalachia, a shy, gentle, Black boy must find a way to honor his gifts and his truths.

Twelve-year-old Javari Harris, who is short for his age and has strabismus, lives with his family in Bushwick, a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in Brooklyn. After the family returns home from a rally protesting the killing of an unarmed Black man by the police, they find a lease termination notice on their door, threatening what has been the family’s home for three generations. The opportunity to spend two weeks in West Virginia at a STEM summer camp couldn’t come at a better time for Javari. It offers relief from the pressures of home, particularly ongoing conflicts with his mother, who seems to project her fears about raising a Black son onto him. At camp, a mysterious interloper offers an unlikely friendship, an opportunity to learn about Appalachia beyond the confines of the camp, an education into the region’s rich history and challenges, and growing self-awareness for Javari. Though surrounded by racially diverse campers, Javari cannot escape racism. Complex characters and authentic conversations, particularly between Javari and his former Amtrak porter grandfather, provide rich content for exploring the enduring trauma of White supremacy. Thoughtful explorations of issues such as corporate greed, the opioid crisis, water rights, and the little-known history of Affrilachians abound in this outstanding novel.

An emotionally resonant narrative skillfully connecting the past, present, and future. (Fiction. 10-13)

DIFFERENT: A STORY OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Montañés, Mónica
Illus. by Eva Sánchez Gómez
Trans. by Lawrence Schimel
Eerdmans (88 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-8028-5598-5

In alternating chapters, siblings Paco and Socorro narrate their eight-year journey from the Spanish Civil War’s terrors to freedom in Venezuela.

Translated from Spanish, child’s-eye perspectives on daily life are overshadowed by danger: The children’s father, a “Rojo” who sided with the Republic against Francisco Franco’s rebels, has fled for his life to France, forcing the family into an impoverished, secretive existence. Paco, 9, changes child’s play for sudden status as “man of the house.” Constantly hungry (as the wife of a Rojo, his mother isn’t allowed a ration book), he fantasizes about stealing a classmate’s mouthwatering lunch. Socorro, 7, who manifests stress through food aversion, calmly provides day-to-day details that belie the brutality of life as the uprising births the fascist regime. As World War II concludes, Paco’s hopes of Franco being overthrown wane. Montañés beautifully conveys time’s passage through Paco’s sad stoicism. His father manages just five letters in eight years, but the fifth, from Venezuela, announces that he has a job and has obtained emigration papers for the family. The long journey culminates in a new life for the now teenagers, who marvel at having ample food and constant electricity. Though their accents reveal their refugee status, “being different had stopped being something dangerous” at last. Gómez’s accomplished, somber-toned illustrations inject occasional levity, capturing Socorro’s clever scheme to change schools and exaggerating Paco’s imagined sandwich theft.

The well-crafted narrative, nuanced art, and appended historical context combine for a salient, important work. (Historical fiction. 9-14)
MEITNER was a relentless researcher subjected to rabid prejudice. Following the death of his father, his mother struggles to provide for their family. Life improves when his mother marries Paul Joe Peele. Daddy Paul, as Rufus and his sister call him, insists that they find a better home than their run-down house. So the family rents a home on the property of Miss Boone, the owner of a mill that employs most of the town—a move that angers some White people in the community, as the other families living on the property are mostly White. The civil rights movement is a major topic of conversation for young and old alike, and Rufus wants to learn all he can. Plans for a march involving the works, and Rufus hopes to contribute to his community’s struggle for an end to segregation. Eleven-year-old Rufus Jackson Jones Jr. lives in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. Following the death of his father, his mother struggles to provide for their family. Life improves when his mother marries Paul Joe Peele. Daddy Paul, as Rufus and his sister call him, insists that they find a better home than their run-down house. So the family rents a home on the property of Miss Boone, the owner of a mill that employs most of the town—a move that angers some White people in the community, as the other families living on the property are mostly White. The civil rights movement is a major topic of conversation for young and old alike, and Rufus wants to learn all he can. Plans for a march involving Dr. Martin Luther King and the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth are in the works, and for the first time, students will march. The first marches result in jail for many but continue to grow until the protestors face police dogs and fire hoses. Moses takes readers inside the movement that saw its youngest become effective challengers to the segregation status quo. Her narrative seamlessly weaves a personal family story with the larger one of struggle for an end to segregation.

A stirring, cleareyed look at the young people who risked much for social change as they fought for their civil rights. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 9-12)

A scorching profile of a brilliant physicist whose proper recognition was long delayed thanks to sexism, antisemitism, and personal betrayal.

In a career much like her older contemporary Marie Curie’s, Meitner was a relentless researcher subjected to rabid prejudice against women in the sciences. Nevertheless, she was rewarded some grudging, minimal support through her world-changing discoveries. She had the further obstacles of being Jewish in Hitler’s Germany—and of working closely and fruitfully for decades with Otto Hahn, who, as Moss carefully documents, then pressured her to quit the Berlin institute he headed rather than shield her from the Nazis, neglected to mention in his lecture after being awarded a Nobel Prize that she had provided the essential insights about nuclear fission that explained his experimental results, and repeatedly dismissed her as bitter. Despite being a Nobel also-ran no fewer than 48 times, Meitner made multiple attempts to mend fences with Hahn, even while taking him to task for joining the postwar German apologists. Meanwhile, she twice narrowly escaped capture on her flight from the Third Reich, worked with Allied intelligence during the war, and went on to become a pacifist who, like Einstein, was horrified at the way nuclear energy was weaponized. She cuts a small, neat, shy figure in the scene-setting graphic panels that open each chapter, but her intellect and determination shine on every page.

A bright tale of a life dedicated to science, well stocked with dramatic moments and discoveries. (author’s note, timeline, glossary, biographical profiles, notes, bibliography, image credits, index) (Biography. 11-14)

A trio of German siblings must fend for themselves in order to survive during the final months of World War II. It’s October 1944, and Papa has finally been called to serve in Hitler’s army. Not long after, the Russian army breaks through German lines, spurring the family to abandon their village and seek safety in the midst of a terrible blizzard. The children become separated from their mother, and 11-year-old Liesl must honor the promise she made to Mama to take care of 7-year-old Otto and toddler Mia. The children are quickly found by some Red Army soldiers and taken to their temporary quarters, where a kindly German-speaking Russian means to protect them, but when the arrangement becomes too dangerous, they are forced once more to flee. The siblings attempt to survive on their own in the forest along with other orphaned German children known as the Wolfskinder, or wolf children. The children’s physical and emotional journeys, inspired by real events, are poignantly depicted as they struggle against the elements, hunger, and foes and try to understand the nonsensical nature of war and the unimaginable things it forces people to do to survive. Heiduczek’s hauntingly atmospheric art adds to the story’s emotional impact.

A lesser-known story beautifully and sensitively told. (Historical fiction. 10-15)
Selections from Neruda’s final work come magically to life with inventive illustrations in this bilingual volume.

Completed shortly before his death in 1973, the original collection of 74 poems posing 320 questions has here been whittled down to 70 questions selected from 39 poems appearing both in English and the original Spanish. Readers will be enchanted by their mind-expanding whimsy and creativity. Chilean artist Valdivia’s stylized artwork, executed predominantly in blues, reds, and yellows against black or white backgrounds, feels grounded in folk-art traditions. Created with pencil and ink, with photographs in the illustrator’s note showing the work in progress, the full-page art is visually captivating and enhanced with texture—lines, splatters, blotting—both complementing and extending the text. “Does the earth chirp like a cricket / in the symphony of the skies? // Who shouted for joy / when the color blue was born?” is accompanied by a charcoal cricket standing against a dizzying swoop of blue expanse and the curve of rising mountains and vegetation. “Where can you find a bell / that rings inside your dreams? // Where does the stuff of dreams go? / Does it pass into the dreams of others?” is juxtaposed with reds, and yellows against black or white backgrounds, feels grounded in folk-art traditions. Created with pencil and ink, with photographs in the illustrator’s note showing the work in progress, the full-page art is visually captivating and enhanced with texture—lines, splatters, blotting—both complementing and extending the text. “Does the earth chirp like a cricket / in the symphony of the skies? // Who shouted for joy / when the color blue was born?” is accompanied by a charcoal cricket standing against a dizzying swoop of blue expanse and the curve of rising mountains and vegetation. “Where can you find a bell / that rings inside your dreams? // Where does the stuff of dreams go? / Does it pass into the dreams of others?” is juxtaposed with

A gorgeous work that stretches the imagination and details the senses. (editor’s note, translator’s note) (Illustrated poetry. 5–adult)

The middle volume in this trilogy translated from Arabic follows orphaned Noor as she travels through time on another world-saving quest to collect phoenix feathers.

This time, Noor lands, disoriented, in 1177 Jerusalem. Met with suspicion as a stranger, she must prove her trustworthiness: Will anyone believe she’s not a spy but a 21st-century Palestinian girl able to control fire, with a talking cat friend who is really a djinn named Sabeeka? As before, Noor is helped by a girl

who could be her identical twin. It emerges that Noor, new rescue Zainab, and earlier doppelgänger Andaleeb each possess magical traits matching those of the phoenix. Hiding out in a cave with an Arab community fighting back against the Crusaders, Noor remains focused on acquiring the next phoenix feather. But when everyone learns of nefarious plans to burn the contents of the library of the al-Aqsa Mosque the following day, she and Sabeeka join the rescue effort. Knowing the dangers of revealing information about the future, no matter how buoying, Noor does not give anything away; still, readers will not miss the reassuring theme of maintaining hope during times of duress. The book portrays people who have sustained many losses, individually and as a group, and who sometimes disagree but remain united in their resistance. Earthy humor and moments of wonder balance the suffering. Readers need not be familiar with historical figures such as Conrad and Saladin; history is woven seamlessly and accessibly into the novel.

Fast-paced, magical, and inventive. (Fantasy. 11-14)

Transplanted from Oman to Michigan, an Arab boy adjusts to his new life while missing his beloved grandfather in this stand-alone companion to The Turtle of Oman (2014).

After weeks of worry and fear about leaving his home; his grandfather Sidi; and his friends, 8-year-old Aref’s finally on the plane with his mother, poised to join his father in Ann Arbor, where they will live while his parents attend graduate school. As the plane ascends, Aref’s relieved, excited, and fascinated with everything during their flights to Paris, New York City, and Detroit. They settle into their small apartment, and Aref’s parents attend classes at the university while he starts third grade at a diverse new school that reminds him of his old one. Aref enthusiastically savors the sights, sounds, and scents of Michigan, especially the deciduous trees, small turtles, and snow— so different from Oman’s palm trees, large turtles, and desert. Gradually Aref’s fear of feeling strange in Ann Arbor dissipates, but he still misses Sidi, who’s not doing well without his grandson. If only Sidi could overcome his fear of new things and come visit. Nye’s inimitable, poetic prose beautifully captures Aref’s emotions as he meets the challenges of international travel and adjusting to a new community and culture while worrying about Sidi. Seamlessly continuing Aref’s story but accessible to new readers, this novel deftly explores the meaning of home. Final art not seen.

A humorous, sensitive, and poignant family-centered take on moving to a new country. (Fiction. 8-12)
Discovering “a new type of god” in this final installment in the outstanding Olympians series.

Depicted eerily as an enigmatic, unclothed figure wrapped in flames, Hestia, goddess of hearth and home—and the oldest of the Olympians—narrates this strange and wild tale of Dionysos' birth and rise. The youngest of the gods, Dionysos is conceived by a human mother and raised first as a girl then as a boy before he goes on to invent wine, vanquish death itself, and ultimately claim his seat on Mount Olympus with the rest of his immortal clan. Though not immune to tender feelings (such as when he meets the spirit of his dead mother, Semele, in the realm of Hades and when he marries Ariadne after she’s dumped by that cad Theseus), Dionysos generally comes off as a slap-happy party animal. He cavorts through the illustrations shirtless, displaying appropriately godlike charm and charisma as he dispenses his marvelous beverage far and wide and gathers followers—of both the mythological and racially diverse human variety—for wild rumpuses. “The Olympians may be deathless, but no god is as alive as Dionysos,” Hestia observes. More than any of his fellow deities, he is “a god of the people. Of humans. Because he was born of them.” The pages of this well-conceived graphic novel are laid out using an irregular grid that emphasizes some panels while retaining flow. All major characters present as White.

A by turns epic, amusing, and tragic caper that’s even more toastworthy (for obvious reasons) than its 11 predecessors. (sources, resources, discussion questions, endnotes) (Graphic mythology. 10-14)

FRIZZY
Ortega, Claribel A.
Illus. by Rose Bousamra
First Second (224 pp.)
978-1-250-25962-2
978-1-250-25963-9 paper

Marlene, a young Dominican American girl, seeks to embrace her natural hair. Sundays are the worst—they’re the day each week when Marlene’s mom brings her to get her hair straightened at the salon. It’s a painful, arduous process, but Mami insists it’s the only way to look your best in front of others and be presentable at events like her cousin’s quinceañera. Marlene is constantly bombarded with ideas about “good hair” and critical comments about her looks. Thankfully, Tía Ruby, with her abundance of natural, bouncy curls, reassures Marlene that straightening her hair isn’t a requirement for looking beautiful, which sets a fire in Marlene’s heart. With the guidance and support of Tía Ruby and best friend Camilla, Marlene embarks on a natural hair journey with her head held high. Ortega masterfully navigates topics like anti-Blackness and oppressive beauty standards passed down through generations. Bousamra’s eye-catching color scheme, dominated by soft shades of pink and blue, and expressive illustrations showing Marlene’s vibrant community are the perfect vessel for this story. An especially tender scene in which Marlene finally experiences a pain-free wash day speaks volumes about the healing themes present throughout this graphic novel. Marlene’s journey of personal growth will evoke catharsis and joy.

A sparkling tale starring a resilient young protagonist. (Spanish glossary) (Early reader. 4-7)
A timely affirmation that hate has no place in school.  
**NIKHIL OUT LOUD**

*Nikhil Out Loud*  
_Pancholy, Maulik_  
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins  
(320 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-0-06-309192-4

At eighth grade theater kids rise up against homophobia in their community. A grandparent’s sickness brings 13-year-old Indian American voice acting star Nikhil Shah and his family from Los Angeles to Ohio. Starting eighth grade in a new school gives Nikhil anxiety, but he quickly befriends a crew: DeSean (who is Black), Monica (who is Korean American), and Mateo (who is Mexican American). Once his celebrity identity is discovered, Nikhil doesn’t just sign autographs and repeat, to his classmates’ delight, a catchphrase from *Raj Reddy in Outer Space*, the animated show he works on, but gets cast as the lead in the school’s musical revue. His profile rises even higher when Nikhil discloses to the school newspaper—and, essentially, the world—that he is gay. The overwhelming support is overshadowed by his Nana’s negative reaction and a community member’s homophobic letters and protests. But the cast members rally their school community behind Nikhil, using their art to make a powerful statement. Pancholy’s sophomore effort is a layered coming-of-age tale, melding puberty’s woes with familial expectations and grief. Unresolved tensions rise quickly in his Gujarati Nana and Nani’s household as the family members get reacquainted with each other but also pave the way for some truly tender moments. The sweet, peck-on-the-cheek–level romance is delightfully middle school—as is the squeeworthy joy alongside more difficult moments. 

*A timely affirmation that hate has no place in school.* (Fiction. 9-13)

**SEEN AND UNSEEN**

*What Dorothea Lange, Toyo Miyatake, and Ansel Adams’s Photographs Reveal About the Japanese American Incarceration*  
_Partridge, Elizabeth_  
Illus. by Lauren Tamaki  
Chronicle Books (320 pp.)  
$21.99 | Oct. 25, 2022  
978-1-4521-6510-3

Though Dorothea Lange was commissioned by the government to document the experiences of those of Japanese descent who were imprisoned at Manzanar, California, during World War II, many of her images were impounded only to be released years later. Toyo Miyatake, who was imprisoned with his family, took great personal risk to build his own camera and documented things Lange had been forbidden from photographing. He eventually became the official photographer and captured more intimate and celebratory events. Finally, Partridge and Tamaki examine Ansel Adams, who “had not been against the incarceration” and “wanted to photograph mostly loyal Nisei” (those of Japanese descent born in the United States). He largely took portraits and posed photos. Aside from the work of the photographers, the book also touches on the Manzanar Riot and the loyalty questionnaire. Powerful visuals blend photographs, reproduced primary source documents, and smudgy, paint-lined illustrations and make dynamic use of color. Accompanied by clear, straightforward text, this arresting work brings history to vivid life. 

A bold combination of art, media, and records create a compelling read. (map, further information on the period and on civil liberties, biographies of the photographers, discussion of the model minority myth) (Nonfiction. 9-12)

**BLACK BIRD, BLUE ROAD**  
_Pasternack, Sofiya_  
Versify/HarperCollins (320 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022  
978-0-358-57203-9

For years Ziva bat Leah’s quest to cure her twin brother Pesah’s leprosy has consumed their lives. When his health worsens, their parents arrange for him to be taken to a colony. But after Pesah has a celestial vision at their birthday party indicating that he will die on Rosh Hashanah, Ziva decides they must run away. Along with Almas, a sheydim, or demon, she rescues, they travel to the city of Luz, the only place the Angel of Death can’t go. Pasternack’s story is rich in the rhythms, values, and deep magic of Jewish culture and life in the Turkic Jewish empire of Khazaria. It revels in an often overlooked mythology, deploying exciting fantasy elements with ease. Ziva struggles with her fiery nature—stubbornness that is also an intense desire for justice. Her single-minded focus on saving Pesah blinks her to the inevitability of death and the complexities of both their own fears and needs as she comes to understand them. Pesah is brilliant and gentle, kindhearted Almas faces prejudice for his demon nature, and the three form a charm traveling trio even amid fear and pain. More than simply an adventure, this is a story about grief and illness and arguing with the rules of the world, enduring and enjoying the living that happens between now and the end, threaded through with the profound, unshakeable love of two brave siblings. 

*Propulsive, wise, and heartbreaking.* (afterword, glossary) (Historical fantasy. 9-12)
**Northwind**  
Paulsen, Gary  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (256 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jan. 11, 2022  
978-0-374-31420-0

A solitary young traveler paddles through an archipelago of natural, often dangerous, wonders, learning as he goes.  
Though the metaphorical layer lies barely beneath the surface in this short novel, Paulsen’s spare prose and legendary knowledge of the challenges and techniques of wilderness survival make the journey through a landscape that evokes historical Scandinavia compelling reading. Sole survivor—and that just barely—of the gruesomely depicted cholera that sweeps through his camp, 12-year-old Leif comes away with a dugout canoe, a few basic outdoor skills, and the command from a dying, respected elder to head north. Subsisting largely on blackberries and salmon, he travels a winding route through fjords and a seemingly endless string of islets and inlets where he finds both danger and delight in searching for food and shelter, literally coming face to face with bears and whales, struggling to survive a deadly tidal whirlpool, and coming to understand the importance of seeing and learning from the ways and rhythms of “this place and all places that will come to me.” Calling on memories, Paulsen writes in an autobiographical afterword of his Norwegian immigrant grandmother’s tales. References to Odin and whalers give the setting a timelessly folkloric feeling. Final art not seen.  
A voyage both singular and universal, marked by sharply felt risks and rewards and deep waters beneath.  
*(Historical adventure. 9-13)*

**Tumble**  
Pérez, Celia C.  
Kokila (368 pp.)  
$17.99 | Aug. 16, 2022  
978-0-593-32517-9

Adela Ramirez’s life is like a telenovela. At least that’s how it feels for the seventh grader, who has discovered something that her remarried, pregnant mom has been hiding about her biological father’s identity: He’s actually Manny “The Mountain” Bravo, a famous luchador! When Addie decides that she would like to meet him, she is thrown into the world of the Bravo family’s wrestling dynasty. Though Manny remains distant, Addie’s other newly introduced relatives welcome her with open arms, and she is immediately included in the family pastime. Addie quickly learns that each member of the Bravo family is also wrestling with their own personal struggles, including living up to the family’s illustrious name. On top of that, Addie must decide whether being adopted by her doting stepdad would be a positive next step. Addie navigates her new connections, middle school drama, disappointments, big decisions, and surprises with courage and humor. The characterization is strong, and the book offers portrayals of authentic, complicated relationships that are written with care, showing readers that biological family and found family can be equally important. Addie and her family are Mexican American; secondary characters are racially diverse, and one of Addie’s uncles is a drag queen.  
A plucky, heartwarming tale that celebrates the complexity of family relationships.  
*(Fiction. 9-14)*

**The Sheep, the Rooster, and the Duck**  
Phelan, Matt  
Greenwillow Books (240 pp.)  
$16.99 | March 8, 2022  
978-0-06-291100-1

Farm animals and French children unite to save the fledgling United States from a scheming mastermind in this airy 18th-century adventure.  
Well-informed readers will recognize the titular creatures as the passengers carried into the skies by Montgolfier’s inaugural hot air balloon flight at the Palace of Versailles in 1783. Few, however, will be aware that the three—brilliant aeronautical sheep engineer Bernadette, swashbuckling rooster Pierre, and gifted duck tactician Jean-Luc—went on to lead secret lives righting wrongs and battling evildoers. Notable among the latter is the villainous magician Cagliostro, who, having caught wind of the fact that Benjamin Franklin, a witness to the famous flight, jotted down plans for weaponizing hot air balloons and creating a giant heat ray, has seized both the renowned inventor and his notebook in pursuit of a nefarious plan to make himself King of America. Here, in a mix of prose and profuse graphite drawings that break into mostly wordless sequential panels for action scenes, Phelan lays out a rousing series of chases, clashes, ambushes, and rescues both on and above the ground on the way to a triumphant outcome. The author adds to the animal trio two young humans to do the piloting. He also trots in a host of other historical personages, including Joseph Guillotin (“as sharp a fellow as you are to find in Paris”), Franz Mesmer, King Louis XVI, and Marie Antoinette.  
A grand, giddy, and, at times, literally soaring tale.  
*(author’s note) (Adventure. 8-11)*

“At a plucky, heartwarming tale that celebrates the complexity of family relationships.”  
*Tumble*
TWIN CITIES
Pimienta, Jose
Random House Graphic
(256 pp.)
$20.99 | $12.99 paper | $23.99 PLB
July 19, 2022
978-0-593-18063-1 paper
978-0-593-18062-4 paper
978-0-593-18064-8 PLB

Twelve-year-old twins forge individual paths—and begin to lead diverging lives—at separate schools along the Calexico-Mexicali border.

Sixth grade is officially over. For Teresa and Fernando, summer vacation zips by in a series of frolics and chores, perhaps their last season as an inseparable pair. Then the first day of seventh grade arrives. Teresa prepares herself early to cross the border into Calexico to attend an American middle school; Fernando remains behind in Mexicali to continue school in their town. Different school beginnings greet each sibling. Without his sister (and two best friends, who are at Teresa's school), Fernando spends his time alone, counting down the minutes until school ends. Teresa, meanwhile, finds new peers and seems right at home in her new American school. Those initial steps prove only temporary. In an ingenious use of panel sets to separate each twin's journey on the page, Pimienta masterfully builds the tension and pressure between Fernando and Teresa, together at home and apart at school. Wandering off one day, Fernando befriends an older student who gradually exerts his considerable influence and introduces him to weed. High academic stress and lofty parental expectations chisel away at Teresa, and her initial enthusiasm falters slightly under the weight of her new reality. Sibling squabbles and confrontations—captured in all their raw nuance thanks to the author's deft writing and scrappy artwork—build to a wonderful breakthrough point.

Transcendentally good. (author's note, sketches, map, supplemental note) (Graphic fiction. 8-12)

WINDSWEPT
Preus, Margi
Illus. by Armando Vêve
Amulet/Abrams (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-4197-5824-9

An unlikely hero embarks on a quest to find her missing sisters.

In Tagalong's world, youngers under 15 are not allowed Outside their homes to avoid being swept away by snow squalls. Finn, the boy who invited her, and three younger boys. They're poised to journey into the Unknown to find their windswept siblings. Not sure she really belongs with them, Tag nevertheless joins along and, after Finn vanishes, distracts and inspires them with remarkable stories from her book. Aided by three spellcasting sisters, various magical objects, and some trickery, Tag emerges as a determined and creative hero as she confronts treacherous danger alone in a dramatic climax. Inspired primarily by the Norwegian fairy tale “The Three Princesses in the Mountain Blue,” this edgy, somewhat dystopian tale set in a world where race holds no significance masterfully blends European fairy-tale motifs with timely warnings about human greed, waste, and destructiveness while extoling the power of storytelling. Richly descriptive prose and delicate, atmospheric black-and-white illustrations enhance the fairy-tale flavor.

A powerful tale about a preteen pushing back against systemic injustice. (Fiction. 9-13)
**WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER**
*A Young Readers Edition of We Are Not Here To Be Bystanders*
Sarsour, Linda
Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster (440 pp.)
$17.99  |  Nov. 29, 2022
978-1-5344-3929-0

The co-organizer of the 2017 Women's March on Washington shares the story of growing to be unapologetically herself in this young readers' adaptation of her 2020 memoir.

Sarsour reminisces about growing up Muslim and Palestinian American in the 1980s and ’90s and her journey to becoming a community organizer. She reflects on visiting Palestine as a child, living in an underserved Brooklyn community, and how witnessing parallel injustices in both places sparked an understanding that would influence her future work. The author contrasts her youthful struggles with identity and her longing for recognition (many peers knew nothing about Palestine and questioned why it was not on the classroom map, and she was frequently mistaken for Puerto Rican or Italian) with later parallels in America after the 9/11 tragedy and organizing social justice movements both locally and nationally. Weighty and challenging matters are addressed in a straightforward way in approachable language that allows young people to understand the triumphs and tribulations of an activist’s life. Much of what Sarsour writes will feel relatable to readers, especially her process of dealing with identity and loss, and she offers space for them to see their own experiences reflected in hers. The moments of accomplishment, struggle, sadness, and perseverance shown here provide a touching, uplifting image of America that is seldom represented.

*Equal parts inspiring, emotional, and informative: a necessary read. (glossary, endnotes)* *(Nonfiction. 9-14)*

**LOLO'S LIGHT**
*Scalan, Liz Garton*
Chronicle Books (232 pp.)
$16.99  |  Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-79721-294-4

Millie is a genuinely happy person; she’s a comedian who loves making other people laugh—until the day she cannot laugh anymore.

Twelve-year-old Millie Donally feels so mature when their neighbors the Acostas ask her to watch their baby daughter, Lolo, when they go out to dinner. Millie’s older sister is their usual sitter, but she can’t make it. Everything goes well, and Millie goes home happy and proud of herself only to wake in the morning to find out that Lolo passed away during the night. Even though the sudden infant death syndrome is not her fault, Millie is transformed overnight from carefree to guilt-ridden and depressed. The only bright spot (figuratively and literally) is the warm yellow light shining from Lolo’s room. Millie swears she feels a warm electrical hum as well, although no one else seems to notice it. Millie attempts to move forward, but how do you go on after something like this? How can she be with her friends, who can’t truly understand what she’s feeling? Even the class project she had looked forward to, incubating chicken eggs, is now in Millie’s eyes ripe with potential for disastrous failure. Millie’s slow process through grief and guilt—with help from a family therapist—is extraordinarily well written, taking readers on the heartbreaking, difficult, and necessary journey that follows unthinkable loss. Characters are minimally described and read White.

*A poignant coming-of-age story that explores the ripple effects of death, loss, and forgiveness.* *(Fiction. 10-14)*

**THE REAL DADA MOTHER GOOSE**
*A Treasury of Complete Nonsense*
Scieszka, Jon
Illus. by Julia Rothman
Candlewick (80 pp.)
$19.99  |  Oct. 5, 2022
978-0-7636-9434-0

Deconstructed nursery rhymes entertain and delight in this mischievous endeavor.

It’s not every nursery-rhyme collection that pays homage to the Oulipo school of thought (more specifically, Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style* (1947)), but then again, few have Scieszka’s keen eye for the absurd. Here, he applies a Dada sensibility to Blanche Fisher Wright’s classic 1916 publication *The Real Mother Goose*. Taking six of Wright’s original nursery rhymes, illustrations and all, Scieszka and partner in crime Rothman reimagine each poem in six different ways. From haiku and recipes to N+7 codes, pop quizzes to plays on Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” and much more, the rhymes are inventive and laugh-out-loud funny. Rothman plays with the original Wright illustrations, stretching, cutting, and reworking them in countless ways. This one is squarely aimed at an audience of older kids, and teachers and parents will revel at the extensive backmatter that includes everything from histories (of Morse code, Esperanto, spoonerisms, and more) to explanations of anagrams, hieroglyphics, rebuses, and Dadaism itself. All told this book is a marvelous anarchic celebration of “re-telling, re-illustrating, and re-mixing.”

*Stand aside, fractured fairy tales; neoist nursery rhymes are the new name of the game. Creativity incarnate. (bibliography)* *(Poetry. 9-12)*
“A hauntingly memorable mixture of humor and honest emotion.”

STORM
Skinner, Nicola
Harper/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$16.99 | March 29, 2022
978-0-06-307168-1

A girl becomes a ghost who is tethered to her family home.

Twelve-year-old Frances Frida Ripley—ruddy-cheeked, with a mass of curly hair and strong, black eyebrows—just wants to have lunch with her best friend at the new seaside restaurant in town. It isn’t her fault she was, as her parents say, “born raging” like the winter storm that welcomed her arrival. After she loses her temper yet again, her parents, who recognize that she’s trying to do better, take her there as an early birthday present. Unfortunately, an earthquake in France causes a devastating tsunami that is heading their way across the English Channel. Coming to soaking wet with sand in her mouth, Frankie realizes she’s dead, well, “dead-isb” and that she’s alone. After a death chaperone gives her a sleeping potion, Frankie awakens 102 years later to find her home restored and opened as a tourist attraction. Annoyed by the tourists, poltergeist Frankie wreaks havoc only to grab the attention of someone sinister. Using her intense emotions, Frankie must kick up a storm to save herself and move on. Told from Frankie’s first-person point of view, this is an entertaining read full of wit mixed with honest, intense feelings. Centered around the theme of allowing oneself to feel and experience anger, sadness, and pain rather than shoving them down, it challenges societal norms of adults “tidying up” kids’ feelings.

A hauntingly memorable mixture of humor and honest emotion. (Paranormal. 10-14)

THE LAST MAPMAKER
Soontornvat, Christina
Candlewick (368 pp.)
$17.99 | April 12, 2022
978-1-5362-0495-7

Sodsai Mudawan has worked her way onto a ship sailing toward the unknown—as long as no one discovers the truth about her past.

Twelve-year-old Sai is from the marshy Fens, an area whose residents are looked down upon. But with the right clothing and some quick thinking, she’s earned an Assistantship with Paiyoon, the Mangkon Royal Navy’s Master Mapmaker, at least until her 13th birthday, at which point, when she does not receive a lineal, or golden bracelet whose links represent the recipient’s noble ancestors, her lowly status will be clear to everyone, including Paiyoon. Luckily for Sai, before her birthday Paiyoon secures a spot on a royal ship bound for the south—the direction of a mysterious, shadowy continent and rumored dragons—that is tasked with claiming treasure for the kingdom. Paiyoon takes Sai with him on a voyage that could finally allow her to move beyond the Fens, but as she sails farther from home, she will have to decide whom to trust and what sacrifices she is willing to make for her future. Mangkon is inspired by Thailand, and most characters are implied to be Asian. One supporting character has a parent from a foreign land that is allied with Mangkon, allowing room to address questions of exploration and colonization. Exploits on the high seas and complex characters combine in a tale full of both excitement and heart.

An engrossing adventure with the feeling of a whole world to be explored. (map) (Fantasy. 9-13)
**THE TRYOUT**  
Soontornvat, Christina  
Illus. by Joanne Caccio  
Colors by Amanda Laffrenais  
Graphix/Scholastic (372 pp.)  
$24.99 | $12.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022  
978-1-338-74130-8  
978-1-338-74126-8 paper

Christina tries to become a cheerleader in hopes of being popular. Christina and her best friend, Megan, love the Lord of the Rings and playing pretend, but now that they’re starting middle school, there are more important things to worry about, like homework, sports, and popularity. Fitting in in their small Texas town isn’t easy, especially when Christina has a Thai dad and White American mom, and Megan is Iranian American; both girls experience constant racist comments. Admiring the confidence and popularity of the cheerleaders, they try out for the squad. The cheers, moves, stunts, and training are challenging, but Christina finds it all fun until the final tryout: This one will take place in front of the whole seventh grade, and their classmates’ votes will determine who makes the squad, a system designed to bring about humiliation and embarrassment. Determined Christina gives it everything she’s got, but Megan’s decision not to be her partner for tryouts causes a rift as they confront difficult truths about being outsiders. This superlative graphic memoir is a funny, relatable, and genuine story of friendship and belonging. Christina struggles with identity in many areas of her life, for example, can she be both Buddhist and Presbyterian? The jokes, daydreams, and quips are delightful without overshadowing or diminishing the impact of her experiences with racism and exclusion. The attractive, expressive illustrations feature clean lines and bright colors.

A funny, painfully honest look at a middle schooler finding her way. (author’s note, photos)  
(Graphic memoir. 8-12)

**ALWAYS, CLEMNETINE**  
Sorosiak, Carlie  
Walker US/Candlewick (304 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022  
978-1-5362-2884-7

Letters from a super-intelligent mouse to the beloved chimpanzee she leaves behind when she escapes a research lab. Poignant, loving, and threaded through with the joy of discovery, the letters that Clementine mentally composes to her gentle simian friend tell a tale that takes suspenseful turns while affirming tolerance and self-expression. Thanks to tweaked DNA, she’s thinking about prime numbers the day she is born, helps other mice navigate mazes, and figures out how to escape her cage at night and sign with the lab’s sad, affectionate chimp, Rosie. When a guilt-ridden research assistant spirits her and another mouse subject out of the lab, leaving them in a nearby mailbox, she begins a series of reports to Rosie about the wonders of the outside world. Eleven-year-old Gus and his grandfather welcome the fugitives rather than turn them in for the large reward offered by the lab when the mousenapping is discovered. They create a storm of public protest against animal experimentation by televising a chess match in which Clementine beats five experienced human players simultaneously. Along with offering an optimistic, aspirational view of human nature as she winds the story to a joyous conclusion, Sorosiak tucks in a subplot around nonverbal Hamlet, the other mouse escapee, who constructs a model of Notre Dame out of wood chips, as food for further thought about different intelligences. The human cast seems to be mostly White.

Serious themes lightened by comedic touches; the strong emotional attachments will linger with readers. (Fiction. 8-12)

**YONDER**  
Standish, Ali  
Harper/HarperCollins (368 pp.)  
$16.99 | May 10, 2022  
978-0-06-298568-2

Three years ago, Danny Timmons witnessed young Jack Bailey rescue two little girls from floodwaters while adults stood by, too afraid to help. Now it’s 1943, and Danny is describing his sharp observations of wartime life in the Appalachian town of Foggy Gap. Unlike his hero, Jack, Danny, almost 13 and a victim of persistent, merciless bullying, sees himself as weak and helpless. But Jack has a difficult home life with a damaged, abusive father. Danny’s parents offer Jack, now nearly 16, help and comfort, and he becomes Danny’s friend, mentor, and protector, especially after Danny’s dad goes to war. Jack helps him gain confidence and wistfully shares stories his mother told him about a perfect, peaceful place called Yonder. Danny is devastated when Jack suddenly disappears, and, in trying to find answers, he discovers that Jack has deep-seated fears that cause him to make an irrevocable, life-changing decision. Danny’s perceptions change as he recalls his mother’s insights and wisdom concerning ugly cruelties perpetuated in his town: People are ostracized, tormented, and even driven away through prejudice, hatred, and war-related distortions. Danny carefully guides readers through nonlinear developments utilizing flashbacks, each time viewing events more clearly and deeply. Danny’s narration is direct, with unassuming humility as he matures. His voice is true, strong, loving, and hopeful, and readers will recognize him as a hero in his own right. Most main characters are White.

Multilayered, moving, and tremendously powerful. (author’s note, historical notes, discussion questions)  
(Historical fiction. 10-16)
The practice of repopulating nearly extinct animals and plant life is explained and illustrated in great detail.

What do the Arabian onyx, the Iberian lynx, and the peregrine falcon have in common? Each of these animals was in danger of becoming extinct or of disappearing from a home habitat, at least until researchers stepped in to protect them. This exhaustive volume tells the stories of several dozen animals and plants that were brought back from the brink. The book explains the concept of rewilding up front, showing how biologists are able to help these creatures gain numbers and then reenter nature. But far from a glossing over of what happens then, Steen also explains why some of these efforts fail, arguments against the practice (for instance, introducing predators near populated areas is potentially risky), and, most importantly, how to help these efforts. In detailing why environmental changes caused by humans can cause a chain reaction leading to the decimation of, say, the Kihansi spray toad, the team offers a nuanced view of why bad things can happen to ecosystems even unintentionally. Most interesting is that each species and habitat is a whole new challenge; there’s no one-size-fits-all cure-all that can restore a balance in nature, and sometimes achieving balance isn’t possible. This nuanced view holds throughout the book’s 80 finely illustrated pages, where the animals are presented not as cutesy anthropomorphized creatures but in a realistic, no-less-endearing style. For younger readers, it may not be a volume that’s consumed in one sitting, but there’s enough variety of stories and helpful additions, such as a glossary and a “What Can You Do?” page, that it’s a book worth returning to multiple times. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fascinating primer on the intricacies of ecosystems. (index) (Informational picture book. 8-10)

THE LANGUAGE OF SEABIRDS
Taylor, Will
Scholastic (356 pp.)
$17.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-338-75373-8

Jeremy and Evan, 12-year-old boys, find each other during a summer vacation in a tourist town in Oregon. Irish American Jeremy is gearing up to come out to his parents, but he just can’t do it. With his parents separating, he now has to spend two weeks in a rental house with his dad while his mom moves out. His dad was always the easygoing parent, but he suddenly has picky new rules and a short temper and is drinking more than usual. Luckily Jeremy finds an escape in his new friendship with Evan, a beautiful boy cued as White who runs on the beach. Together they explore the beach and make up their own secret code using the names of seabirds as they develop feelings for each other. Taylor beautifully evokes the strange, liminal feelings of an early summer vacation that lasts forever and is over too quickly, parents in the process of going from marriage to divorce, and the confusing time between childhood and adolescence, when boys might want to play with toy dinosaurs one moment and hold hands the next. Jeremy and Evan’s developing relationship is heartwarming and innocently romantic. The author also captures the difficulty and fear of dealing with a parent whose high-functioning alcoholism is deteriorating. Jeremy’s entry into adolescence is warm and triumphant without offering pat solutions or platitudes. A wonderful, tender story about changing relationships. (glossary, note about birds, author’s note) (Fiction. 8-13)

FULL OF LIFE
Exploring Earth’s Biodiversity
Thomas, Isabel
Illus. by Sara Gillingham
Phaidon (224 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 5, 2022
978-1-83866-536-4

A journey through the world of all life on Earth. Sure, it sounds like a lot—and it is. But by linking all of existence into “Earth’s tree of life”—a concept that borrows from genealogy—readers will find an accessible organization that breaks down the world of living beings into a clear and fascinating read. Starting with true bacteria, the organization moves through archaea (tiny microbes) to eukaryotes (plants, algae, fungi, and animals) and ends with infectious particles (with a note clarifying that scientists don’t agree about whether they are alive). Particularly noteworthy—if one aspect in this exceptional book could be said to be more successful than another—is the overall visual presentation. The graphics are clean, colorful, sophisticated, and eye-catching. Each double-page spread follows the same format: A clade (“a group of living things that share a common ancestor”) is highlighted and described. Common traits, where it fits in the tree of life, its scientific name, more unusual aspects of some members, as well as any benefits or detriments the clade may have to humankind (for example, many bacteria are used to develop medicines) are presented in an organized, easy-to-understand manner. Humans are given the same treatment as the rest of the living creatures, and from this, readers will understand we are just one life form out of billions, and our survival depends on the health of every other living thing. Absolutely stunning. (resources, glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 10-16)
**SIR FIG NEWTON AND THE SCIENCE OF PERSISTENCE**

Thomas, Sonja
Aladdin (368 pp.)
$17.99 | March 22, 2022
978-1-62354-250-4

A precocious 12-year-old spends the summer trying to save her furry companion.

Mira “Miranium” Williams, future astronaut and astrophysicist, already felt like her family was living on the edge of a black hole after her father became unemployed, causing her mom to spend less time doing community theater and more time at her accountant job. Worse, her best friend, Thomas, moved from Orlando to Washington, D.C., and her nemesis, Tamika, has moved into his old house. Luckily, she still has Sir Fig Newton, her best feline friend. Concerned that Fig has become lethargic, is eating less, and has sweet-smelling breath, Mira researches and concludes that he has diabetes, known as the silent cat killer. Unfortunately, they can’t afford to treat Fig, and the only way to avoid her parents’ plan to give him up for adoption is to raise $2,000 for treatments within a month. With help from an unlikely source, Mira finds a way to save her cat and keep everyone’s spirits up. Thomas’ debut will pull at readers’ heartstrings. Mira displays tremendous spirit as she continually advocates for her beloved cat. As well as being heartwarming, this well-paced novel also contains numerous interesting facts about famous scientists that will make readers just as excited about science as Mira. Mira is biracial, with a Black father and White mother; Thomas is White, and Tamika is Black.

A noteworthy debut. (Fiction. 8-12)

**HOW TO BUILD A HUMAN**

*In Seven Evolutionary Steps*

Turner, Pamela S.
Illus. by John Gurche
Charlesbridge (112 pp.)
$21.99 | April 12, 2022
978-1-62354-250-4

A probing look into what fossil evidence and other scientific discoveries tell us about our hominin predecessors.

Turner kicks off this overview of human evolutionary history with an amusing quip: “If evolution had a motto it would be _Yeath. Good enough._” She then goes on to detail seven watershed moments, beginning with “Step One: We Stand Up.” Also covered are: the emergence of toolmaking; the development of larger and more complex brains; the migration of _Homo erectus_ out of Africa; the shift from raw to cooked foods; the evolution of human language; and the advent of storytelling. Using a disarming narrative nonfiction style, the text clearly explains the significance of each anatomical or behavioral change and paints a fascinating picture of life on Earth during geological eras when big predators like _Genyornis newtoni_, the “Demon Ducks of Doom,” roamed the planet. Turner also presents scientifically grounded theories for why other ancient species of hominids died out. Gurche fleshes out the fossil record with uncommonly lifelike sketches and paintings of hominid faces and full-body figures in discreet poses. Also dispersed throughout the book are thought-provoking color photos of ancient human artifacts. Of particular note is a goose bumps–inducing gallery of prehistoric handprints on cave walls around the world, an image that powerfully brings vanished species into the human fold. The copious backmatter includes a dense, scholarly bibliography; notes on the “myth” of racial or even species “purity”; and a brief run-through of forces other than natural selection that drive evolution.

Glints of fun light up a rock-solid dig into our Stone Age ancestry. (author’s note, bibliography, glossary, timeline, source notes, resource lists, index) (Nonfiction. 10-adult)

**THE POLTER- GHOST PROBLEM**

Ubrig, Betsy
McElderry (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-66591-610-3

Three schoolmates recount their eerie encounters at a long-abandoned orphanage, making for a peculiar “what we did this summer” school project.

Aldo Pfefferkuchen, Pen Q. Blaisewell, and Jasper Yi struggle to find interesting things to include in their collective summer journal until a suspiciously pale boy leads them to a moldering building that once housed an orphanage. The trio should be terrified, but the ghost children—yes, there’s a group—need help. It’s weird that they appear young since most are the spirits of orphans who had moved away and died at ripe old ages. However, they were recently drawn back and trapped there by a poltergeist. Even stranger, the boys discover that the poltergeist is the toddler ghost of a bitter woman who died at over 100 years of age. A diarist and sufferer of verbal diarrhea, Aldo is the designated typist for their group project. His wit shines through as he faithfully describes his friends’ personalities and their wildly funny disagreements and dilemmas. It all makes for a laugh-out-loud, high-action read, complete with shrieking and notes in crayon from a frustrated entity trying to communicate about a mystery involving an inheritance and warped family history. Pen’s “Useful Index” appears at the end—a humorous nod to a running joke about his fondness for indexes. Oddities abound, as do astute observations about family dynamics and friendships, especially between the boys. Jasper’s surname cues him as Korean American; the other boys are minimally described.

A-plus entertainment. (Paranormal. 8-12)
“A heartwarming and inspiring tale of a friendship that surpasses class differences and social stigma.”

THE KAYA GIRL
Wolo, Mamle
Little, Brown (336 pp.)
$16.99 | June 28, 2022
978-0-316-70393-2

Two Ghanaian girls from different backgrounds form an unlikely bond.

Fourteen-year-old Abena was born to rich parents. Her father is a doctor, and she has lived a sheltered life: Her family has a personal chef and she attends the American international school. When Abena goes to spend the summer holidays with her Auntie Lydia, who has a fabric shop in Accra’s crowded and colorful Makola Market, she meets Faiza, also 14, who is a kayayoo, or porter girl. Despite their stark difference in social class and initial inability to speak each other’s languages, Abena and Faiza form a quick and solid bond. The girls learn about each other’s lives, and both begin to see the world through new eyes. Through Abena’s first-person narration, readers observe Faiza’s journey as she dreams of academic success and works in pursuit of it despite the odds against her as a girl from a village in the rural north. Wolo’s prose has an ease that draws readers in and keeps them engaged. Through the skillful descriptions of shared moments both momentous and trivial, they witness the blossoming of a beautiful connection between the two girls. Abena’s voice reads as realistic for someone of her age, status, and experience—or lack thereof—as she grows in her understanding of societal prejudice, the ways it affects her friend’s life, and the power of her own voice.

A heartwarming and inspiring tale of a friendship that surpasses class differences and social stigma. (Fiction. 9-14)

SKY WOLF’S CALL
The Gift of Indigenous Knowledge
Yellowhorn, Eldon & Kathy Lowinger
Annick Press (120 pp.)
$14.95 paper | April 5, 2022
978-1-77321-629-4

Indigenous knowledge and modern science are braided together in this fascinating book.

Yellowhorn and Lowinger capably demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge systems developed over the course of history on the basis of practical application and Indigenous peoples’ lived experiences. Through oral transmission, knowledge has been passed down through the generations by ancestors who had a vast understanding of the natural world. “Everything is connected. The world is a gift. The sacred is a vital part of knowing. We are always learning.” Earth science and Native lore come together to explain how human beings looked to the land, the sky, animals, and plants as a means to survive and understand our existence. Some of the book’s subsections describe pivotal historical events, while others look at celebrations and ceremonies, such as the Navajo fire dance, to show how Indigenous peoples share traditional knowledge. Today, Indigenous peoples keep this knowledge alive by using it to inform modern approaches in fields such as water conservation, medicine, astronomy, food science, and more. This rich and informative text is interspersed with engaging traditional stories that underscore the expository nonfiction material. Sidebars highlight influential Indigenous figures and important concepts. With beautiful photography and illustrations, this browsable book drives home the importance of caring for the natural environment and suggests the best methods to do so.

An authoritative tribute to Indigenous knowledge systems that’s a must-have for every library and classroom. (glossary, selected reading, sources, index) (Nonfiction. 11-adult)
“A lexical story of emotional evolution.”

**WORSER**

Ziegler, Jennifer
Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House
(256 pp.)
$17.99 | March 15, 2022
978-0-8234-4956-9

A standoffish human thesaurus learns lessons beyond his hallowed knowledge of words.

Following his widowed mother’s stroke, bookish seventh grader William “Worser” Orser is obligated to endure his artistic, emotional aunt as caretaker for them both. If life at home before was sensibly beige, now it’s obnoxiously purple. His one haven is the school library, where he avoids people and develops his Masterwork, an over-300-page lexicon (he is truly the child of professors). When the library hours are restricted by budget cuts, he relocates to a secondhand bookshop. Happily, his new refuge allows him to help his crush, Donya Khoury, who hangs with suspicious fifth grader Spence, who hangs with untreated trauma. Worser reads as White; Donya is presumably of Middle Eastern heritage, and the literary club seamlessly includes racial diversity and queer representation. The author has developed her main character so well it’s hard to believe it’s not biography—but it can certainly pass as the most entertaining New York Times crossword artillery you’ll ever read.

*A lexical story of emotional evolution.* (Fiction. 9-12)

**TWIG**

Young, Skottie
Illus. by Kyle Strahm
Image Comics (128 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Nov 15, 2022
978-1-5343-2346-9
Series: Twig, 1

Twig nearly dooms the world on his first day as Placeling.

After his father dies without taking on an apprentice, Twig—an appealing, large-eyed, blue creature who bears a whimsical little branch with a sprouting leaf on his head—is chosen to become the new Placeling. Tasked with retrieving magical items and placing them for future heroes to find, Twig’s new role is of utmost importance. Unfortunately, not only is Twig late on his first day, he finds the Pathsayer dead. With no one to tell him where the gem he’s carrying must be placed, Twig attempts to use the Pathsayer’s equipment himself. This results in the gem losing all its nektar, becoming useless. The expert Nektarmancer sends Twig on his own heroic quest to find the ingredients necessary to restore the gem—which turns out to be the very last one—so it can be properly placed. If Twig fails, the world will be in terrible danger. The fantastical setting is brought to life by a vivid, enchanting art style with exquisite colors by Jean-François Beaulieu and clean, easy-to-read lettering by Nate Piekos. Twig explores the impact of following in someone else’s footsteps while being dogged by the fear of not being good enough. Despite not learning much about the hero Twig is placing his gem for, readers will be satisfied, as Twig’s journey provides plenty of daring escapades to please the adventurer at heart.

*A charming romp through a visually stunning world.* (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)

**BRIDGES**

Engineering Masterpieces
Zettwoch, Dan
First Second (128 pp.)
$12.99 paper | July 19, 2022
978-1-250-21690-8
Series: Science Comics

To unpack the equation “engineering = science + art,” a quartet of pontists survey and explain bridge design.

Taking a worldwide tour that goes from a fallen log across a stream in Kenya’s Aberdare National Park to the 164.8-kilometer-long Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge, the four guides point out salient features of dozens of bridges ancient and modern while pausing to explain loads and forces, analyze materials, give the nod to historical disasters like the Tay Bridge collapse (inviting young experimenters to test model bridges of their own), and, importantly, marvel at the beauty as well as the utility of well-designed, well-placed bridges. The cast is a diverse lot—ranging from Trudy, a light-skinned retired science teacher who zooms through the chapter on truss bridges on a tricycle, to Black-presenting fifth grader Spence, who hangs with suspension bridges—and their enthusiasm is so contagious that by the end readers willing to linger over Zettwoch’s exactly drawn structures will not only view bridges in their own locales with fresh appreciation, but have no trouble distinguishing a corbel arch from a Warren pony truss.

*A solid, soaring survey. (glossary, bibliography) (Graphic nonfiction. 11-14)*
STAR CHILD
A Biographical Constellation of Octavia Estelle Butler
Zoboi, Ibi
Dutton (128 pp.)
$14.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
978-0-399-18738-4

By the time she was 10 years old, Octavia Butler knew that she wanted to be a writer.

Weaving together quotes from Butler, prose passages of historical and biographical information, and her own original poetry, Zoboi explores the visionary speculative fiction author’s early life. This ambitious experimental biography is at once a tribute from an adoring fan and an introduction to Butler’s juvenilia and her childhood growing up as a shy Black child in postwar 1950s America. Each chapter covers a different aspect of, or key moment in, Butler’s girlhood and adolescence, showing the challenges she overcame and the sustaining force of her imagination. Included are black-and-white childhood photos and a facsimile of a handwritten story about wild horses that Butler worked on as a child and illustrated herself. Young readers familiar with the Butler oeuvre will note the allusions to her famous and groundbreaking works. Zoboi’s powerful poems vary in style and form; particularly interesting are several concrete poems, including the titular “Star Child,” “Moon Child,” and “Moon Child II,” with the words arranged on the page to reveal an image of a star, quarter moon, and full moon respectively. Readers will come away with an understanding of Butler’s early influences and an interest in her writing.

An inspiring look at the formative years and work of a literary giant that’s sure to capture young readers’ attention. (author’s note, bibliography, endnotes, photo credits) (Biography. 12-adult)
INHERITANCE
A Visual Poem
Acevedo, Elizabeth
Illus. by Andrea Pippins
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
$16.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-06-293194-8

An illustrated poem that acknowledges prejudice and celebrates Black hair. Award-winning author and poet Acevedo opens with an insult that will resonate with Black girls and women: “Some people tell me to ‘fix’ my hair.” Her powerful response comes at the very end: “You can’t fix what was never broken.” In between, many themes are explored, some of which apply to Black people broadly, while others specifically reference Dominican culture. Throughout, Pippins’ hand-drawn and digital illustrations showcase an incredible array of natural hairstyles and details, such as the image of a ship within the braided pattern of one character’s hair. Impressively, the poem goes beyond typical dialogues about Black hair, acknowledging Black people’s internalized racism that comes from beauty standards grounded in White supremacy. The poem highlights the reputation that Dominicans have for being able to “flatten the spring in any lock,” following that line with a powerful reframing. From there, Acevedo moves into discussing colorism—in particular, the prejudice against lighter-skinned people partnering with darker-skinned people—and more. Pippins’ bright, colorful, and evocative art covers full pages, lovingly portraying the all-Black cast with a diverse range of skin tones and hair textures. The text varies in size, seamlessly incorporated into the art. An incredible amount of reflection appears in this slim volume, making this a wonderful choice for group discussions.
Brave, sharp, and powerful. (Poetry. 12-adult)

THIS IS WHY THEY HATE US
Aceves, Aaron H.
Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
$19.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-5344-8565-5

A young bisexual man in East LA attempts to get over a long-term crush by pursuing other options. High school junior Enrique “Quique” Luna has had feelings for Saleem Kanazi for quite some time, but Mexican American Quique is pretty sure that Saleem is straight, and this crush isn’t doing him any favors. In order to move on with his life and finally get some experience with guys, he enlists the help of Fabiola, his Afro-Latina bisexual best friend, to make moves on some quality prospects who might become something more. There’s dynamic, wild Manny Zuniga; chilled-out (and well-endowed) Tyler Montana; and even sweet, confident class president Ziggy Jackson. But although Saleem is away with his family for the first part of the summer, he still preoccupies Quique’s thoughts. Complicating matters, Quique is dealing with the suicidal ideation that has been plaguing him; he’s grappled with his mental health since the end of eighth grade. Tight, fast-paced prose guides readers through Quique’s attempts to unpack complicated tangles of desire, sexuality, and depression while laugh-out-loud punchlines pop up on every page. Aceves’ debut novel honors queer kids of color with earnest, honest depictions of messy teenage life. The tender portrayal of Palestinian American Saleem and his struggles with his family’s displacement in the Nakba is particularly bold and notable.
An outstanding portrait of teenage longing, angst, and self-discovery. (Fiction. 14-18)

HOLLOW FIRES
Ahmed, Samira
Little, Brown (416 pp.)
$18.99 | May 10, 2022
978-0-316-28264-2

An unconventional murder mystery takes a sharp look at racism and Islamophobia in America.
Aspiring journalist Safiya Mirza, a high school senior in Chicago, has always wanted to tell the full story of DuSable Prep, the exclusive private school she attends on scholarship. But when 17-year-old Safiya starts reporting on White supremacist sympathies among members of the student body, she runs afoul of the administration. Chicago public school ninth grader Jawad Ali first received media attention after his teacher believed the jet pack he created for a school project was a bomb. Jawad’s suspension leads people from local police to a right-wing talk show host to wonder if the Iraqi American child of refugees deliberately orchestrated a bomb hoax. When Jawad goes missing, the tightknit Muslim community in the area is shaken and wonders why the case isn’t a police priority. After Indian American Safiya, whose family has roots in Hyderabad, starts investigating what happened, she begins hearing messages from Jawad’s ghost, who leads her to his body.
When, in a breathtaking twist, Safiya realizes that Jawad’s killer is closer than anyone had ever imagined, she is both terrified and determined to bring about justice. Ahmed’s gripping story details how racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and other forms of extremism are normalized on the internet and in the media. The book’s skillful construction combined with its sharp observations makes it a must-read with strong reader appeal.

A deeply chilling, inventive, and timely page-turner. *(Thriller. 14+)*

**OUR CROOKED HEARTS**

*Albert, Melissa*

Flatiron Books (352 pp.)

$18.99 | June 28, 2022

978-1-250-82636-7

A complicated history of witchcraft binds a mother and daughter.

One night, on their way home after a tempestuous breakup, 17-year-old Ivy and her wannabe-hipster ex, Nate, nearly run over a naked woman standing in the middle of a deserted road. This catalyzing moment propels Ivy down a semiliteral rabbit hole after she begins stumbling across the bodies of dead, mutilated rabbits and cannot seem to shake the feeling of being watched. In alternating chapters, readers meet tough-as-nails Dana and her best friend, Fee. The pair welcome into their circle Marion, a beguiling rich girl who entices them with promises of magic from a mysterious grimoire. Dana’s and Ivy’s narratives intertwine, rocketing toward a nail-biting conclusion guaranteed to keep readers up all night.

Typical Ladybird Scout activities: knitting, baking, white-gloved tea parties—and slaying invisible monsters.

Anderson pits a squad of preteen Northern California trainees and their 16-year-old instructor, Prudence, against mulligrubs—gross, sometimes-dangerous creatures only Ladybirds or, sometimes, their descendants can see that are drawn to this dimension to intensify and feed on anger, sadness, fear, and other feelings. Pru, who has PTSD and quit the Scouts three years ago after her closest circle mate was eaten, has been railroaded by her Ladybird Dame mom into filling in the latest batch of bright-eyed recruits on the basics of martial arts and proper deportment. As she leads them through projects ranging from rooting out a toxic Nock Jaw out of a working fun house to setting up a free car wash, she reluctantly finds herself bonding with them. A climactic nighttime graveyard battle with a huge mulligrub eager to feast on her terror and anxieties brings her to the cusp of a decision. The metaphorical level is there for readers inclined to dig for it, but they, particularly the Buffy fans among them, will be better off reveling in the whirl of teen angst and ichor-splattered fun. Led by Pru, who is White and Puerto Rican, and her BFF Sasha “the Beast” Nezhad, cued as Persian, the cast displays an effervescent mix of charisma and banter.

**LOVE FROM MECCA TO MEDINA**

*Ali, S.K.*

Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)

$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-66591-607-3

Though intending to grow closer in their devotions, Adam Chen’s and Zayneb Malik’s insecurities and the fractures in their relationship are amplified in this follow-up to *Love From A to Z* (2019).

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**SCOUT’S HONOR**

*Anderson, Lily*

Henry Holt (416 pp.)

$17.99 | April 5, 2022

978-1-250-24673-8

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Every year I face the daunting task of looking back on a year’s worth of exceptional books—each of them undoubtedly destined to find that special reader who will consider it a personal favorite—and selecting just a few to highlight for our best of the year list. Many 2022 releases are worthy of inclusion here, but I am focusing on 10 titles that are particularly memorable, the sorts of works that linger in readers’ minds because of the emotions they evoke and the connections they inspire.

_The Gaps_ by Leanne Hall (Text, Feb. 8): This complex, thoughtful novel from Australia scrutinizes society’s fascination with—and exploitation of—violence against women. The students at a girls school react to their classmate’s disappearance as they navigate their vulnerability in an often dangerous world.

_The Color of the Sky Is the Shape of the Heart_ by Chesil, translated by Takami Nieda (Soho Teen, April 5): Ginny, a high school student of Korean descent from Japan, struggles to find her place in the world in this highly original story translated from Japanese. Ginny’s figurative and literal journeys between schools and countries highlight themes of alienation and yearning to belong.

_Amazona_, written and illustrated by Canizales, translated by Sofía Huitrón Martínez (Graphic Universe, May 3): The ongoing struggles of Indigenous people in Colombia who have lost their land and lives to violent, illegal mining ventures are explored in this fictional graphic novel translated from Spanish. It follows Andrea, a young survivor determined to expose the truth.

_Confessions of an Alleged Good Girl_ by Joya Goffney (HarperTeen, May 3): The toxicity of purity culture is at the center of this novel that confronts sensitive topics with a light and inviting touch, drawing readers in as they root for and laugh with Monique, the daughter of a Black Baptist preacher, and her entertainingly unlikely friend group.

_See You Yesterday_ by Rachel Lynn Solomon (Simon & Schuster, May 17): When Jewish college students Barrett Bloom and Miles Kasher-Okamoto cross paths at the University of Washington, it’s not exactly love at first sight—but it is the beginning of a richly developed, heartfelt time-loop romance.

_Baby Teeth_ by Meg Grehan (Little Island, May 31): This beautifully crafted verse novel from Ireland follows Freddie, Henry, and Immy, three vampires unmoored from their individual histories as they are continually reborn, each time reforming their chosen family. Then Immy falls for mortal girl Claudia, changing everything.

_The Getaway_ by Lamar Giles (Scholastic, Sept. 20): This thrilling, un-put-down-able page-turner uses an all-too-easily-imagined near-future setting—an upscale amusement park and resort in Virginia during a time when climate change and socio-economic inequality have wreaked havoc globally—to explore the hazards of technological intrusion and rampant inequity.

_The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee_ (Young Readers Adaptation): _Life in Native America_ by David Treuer, adapted by Sheila Keenan (Viking, Oct. 18): Ojibwe scholar Treuer offers an essential volume that profoundly shifts the ways that Native lives are commonly framed. The book highlights continuity and survival, adds nuance and context to the historical narrative, and charts a path for a better future.

_Torch_ by Lyn Miller-Lachmann (Carolrhoda, Nov. 1): This gut-wrenching novel set in 1969 Czechoslovakia focuses on three teens, each outside the norm and vulnerable for different reasons and each closely connected to Pavol, a boy who dies after setting himself on fire in a protest against harsh government oppression.

_We Deserve Monuments_ by Jas Hammonds (Roaring Brook Press, Nov. 29): This atmospheric, unforgettable story is set in a rural Georgia town where echoes from the past ripple through the generations. It delves into a family’s unraveling and healing, a queer biracial girl’s coming-of-age, and a community’s reckoning with justice.
of racial and ethnic identities and character types from meek to (truly) mean girl.

Anyone with a yen for community service, particularly the martial sort, will be hot to sign up. *(Fantasy. 13-17)*

**THE DEEP BLUE BETWEEN**

*Attah, Ayesha Harruna*

*Carolrhoda (256 pp.)*

$18.99 | March 1, 2022

978-1-72844-288-4

Twin sisters in 1892 West Africa are abruptly separated during a raid of their home by enslavers. Slavery has been outlawed in the Gold Coast, but some hold on to old practices. Hassana and Husseina have the special bond of twins, and forcible separation severely affects them. Hassana escapes to a village where she is adopted by Englishman Richard Burtt and learns to help with his research into medicinal plants. Meanwhile, Husseina is purchased and taken to Lagos, where she is rescued by religious woman Yaya Silvina, given the name Vitória, taught to sew, and brought into the new Candomblé faith. Eventually, Husseina endures an ocean voyage to Brazil with Yaya, where they engage in spiritual pursuits, while Hassana makes it to Accra and becomes active in the movement for independence from the British. Hassana continues to dream of her sister and longs to find her. Religion gives Husseina a strong sense of herself apart from her role as a twin, but Yaya’s death sends her back to Lagos with a chance of finding Hassana. This sweeping story is rich in detail, and the settings are vividly evoked. The sisters’ connection is complex, and their diverging experiences make their eventual reunion more difficult than expected. The distinctions between various cultural groups are clear, as are the impacts of slavery and colonialism, however, the two young women remain the center of this memorable story.

A successful exploration of rich cultural experiences and enduring familial connections. *(Historical fiction. 12-18)*

**THE DRAGONS CLUB**

*Bermudez, Cyn*

*West 44 Books (200 pp.)*

$25.80 | Aug. 1, 2022

978-1-978596-03-0

As her sister’s addiction worsens, Faith learns hard lessons about boundaries while finding strength and companionship through talk therapy. When cancer took their father, Faith and Emma Navarro’s mother started working a lot more. Faith is a talented violinist attending a special arts school on a scholarship, but while she was practicing, older sister Emma was partying and is now struggling with a meth addiction. Faith tries to take care of Emma, but missing too much school lands her in the Dragons Club Teen-Speak Support Group. Participation is mandatory for her to remain enrolled. Though Emma is worsening, Faith begins to feel less alone and invisible as she develops the detachment and boundaries she needs. The sessions are therapeutic even for readers; calm, wise teacher Mr. Padilla, or Boots to the kids, threads coping mechanisms, comfort, and advice organically into the dialogue. Razor-thin verse spotlights a quick chain of moments, never landing too long in one place or lingering on the pain, though Emma’s situation is portrayed realistically and with clarity. Faith’s on-page struggles with anxiety are also no less powerful for their brevity. Any reader who loves a person with an addiction will feel seen, and others will gain much in terms of insight and perspective. Faith’s family and Boots read Latine.

Sharp, tender, carefully crafted; highly recommended for both strong and striving readers. *(Verse novel. 12-18)*

**THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF HOODIE ROSEN**

*Blum, Isaac*

*Philomel (224 pp.)*

$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-0-593-52582-1

In a town seething over an influx of Orthodox Jews, a yeshiva boy falls in love with the mayor’s daughter. Yehuda “Hoodie” Rosen tells us on Page 1 that his horrible crime ruined his life, humiliated his family, and put him in the ICU—but in some ways, he also thought it was pretty funny. Once you get to know this jokester, you’ll believe it; his sharp awareness of the ironies of life and language illuminate every page of this first-person narrative. Hoodie, his parents, and his “numerous and various” sisters have just moved to Tregaron, a fictional town (cued as being near Philadelphia) where his father is involved with building a high-rise intended to house many more Orthodox families. The community’s outraged opposition to this is spearheaded by the mayor, Monica Diaz-O’Leary, so it’s particularly inconvenient that the first love of Hoodie’s 15-year-old life is her daughter, Anna-Marie—who seems to like him back. But after the two attempt to remove the swastikas that have been spray-painted on Jewish gravestones, Hoodie is ostracized by his community and harshly punished for consorting with a non-Jew. Then antisemitism explodes in a violent, ripped-from-the-headlines incident. Blum’s engrossing debut explains myriad details of Orthodox Jewish faith and includes Hoodie’s questioning of his Orthodox Jewish background.

Funny, smart, moving, courageous, and so timely it almost hurts. *(Fiction. 12-adult)*

“This sweeping story is rich in detail, and the settings are vividly evoked.”
ice agents have arrived to arrest her mother. It’s 2019, and she, me, Brunton is forced to take to her couch, miserable and in pain. The vignettes take place over several years, as readers see Brunton, who reads White, go through multiple hair colors and styles. Some episodes are fully realistic depictions of a creative young woman learning to live with a life-altering illness, and others are fantastical visions of her imagined worlds. Lovingly detailed, black-and-white cartoons of idealized mobile beds and homes include a snail shell, a giant cake, and a multipage room dedicated to Halloween costumes. Brunton rarely offers medicalizing details about the symptoms she experiences, with only brief mentions of headaches, fevers, and brain fog. Instead, she focuses on some of the infuriating aspects of ME, including its unpredictability, post-exertional malaise, and the exhausting grind of despair and grief. She falls for a few wellness scams and is gaslit by labor-intensive diets that can’t possibly be implemented by anyone who needs their claimed benefits. The final comic ends with Brunton, in bed long enough for her hair to grow, pondering the fantasy and science-fiction comics she wants the energy to write. This honest work depicts a bleak but not comfortless world familiar to many readers with chronic illness and disability.

Painfully real. (Graphic memoir. 13-18)

We are all we have.

Budhos, Marina
Wendy Lamb/Random (256 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-593-12020-0 | 978-0-593-12021-7 PLB

An undocumented Pakistani teen has to grow up very quickly after her mother is suddenly detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. High school senior Rania’s life changes forever when she abruptly wakes up to the news that ICE agents have arrived to arrest her mother. It’s 2019, and she, her mother, and her brother, Kamal, are living in Brooklyn as they wait to see if they will be granted asylum due to the fact that Rania’s father—a journalist in Pakistan—has gone missing. Ammi brought them to America on her own, and they’ve lived as if they might have to take off at any time. Still, gifted writer Rania has done well in school. After Kamal and Rania are taken to a shelter for unaccompanied minors, she’s horrified by the conditions around them and decides that escaping to Connecticut and getting a long-estranged uncle to care for them is their only hope. With the vital assistance of Carlos, a fellow teen and shelter resident, the siblings sneak away for the road trip of a lifetime. Budhos vividly portrays the fear and confusion many undocumented families experienced after the implementation of Trump-era asylum and immigration policies while also unflinchingly detailing the tensions and secrets within Rania’s family. As Rania learns more about her mother’s mysterious past, she realizes that solidarity and community are both essential tools for freedom as vulnerable people seek the right to a safe haven.

“A triumphant tale about finding home.”

CRUSHING
Burrows, Sophie
Algonquin (160 pp.)
$22.95 | Jan. 11, 2022
978-1-64375-239-6

This quiet, wordless book is artist and author Burrows’ graphic-novel debut. A young woman, pale and rosy-cheeked with a straight black bob, lives alone in London—except for her cat—surrounded by lovers on Hampstead Heath and crowds on the Tube. One night she runs down to the local kebab and pizza shop in her pajamas and encounters a young man, pale and freckled with floppy red hair, also wearing pajamas. Unfortunately, they don’t notice each other surreptitiously noticing each other and head their separate ways, the young man returning to his flat—empty except for his dog and the glare of his laptop screen. The young woman tries a dating app, and a man sends her unsolicited, intimate selfies; the young man gets spattered in bird poop while working a temp job dressed as an avocado. The story conveys life as a series of small indignities, slight misses, and minor connections but ends on a hopeful note. The accomplished pencil drawings with red highlights are eloquent and emotive, drawing readers in, conveying the personalities of the characters, and capturing the poignancy, dignity, drama, and humor of the everyday. The backmatter includes mental health organizations and crisis lines and a note from Burrows referencing inspiration from missed connections columns and pandemic isolation.

Evocatively sketches a fine line between someday and happily-ever-after. (Graphic fiction. 15-adult)
THE EPIC STORY OF EVERY LIVING THING
Calettí, Deb
Labyrinth Road (416 pp.)
978-0-593-48550-7
978-0-593-48551-4 PLB

A girl and her newly found half siblings embark on a journey to find their sperm donor.

Seventeen-year-old Harper lives under pressure to academically achieve, continuously engage her Instagram followers, and think about her future, all of which worsens her anxiety—which is already at an all-time high because of the pandemic. She has always wondered about her anonymous sperm donor father and how his DNA may influence her. A chance online comment leads her to half sibling Dario, and, as they become closer, they connect with two others who share half their DNA: Simone and Wyatt. The four eventually find their biological father, and they embark on a summer trip of self-discovery. Harper, who is nursing a broken heart after a breakup, is both excited and terrified about what will become of her after this experience. This gorgeous coming-of-age novel thoughtfully examines questions of identity, family, kindness, and a longing for connection. Framed by Harper’s narrative voice, presented in what is often a whirlwind of nonstop thoughts, the story also deftly and empathetically engages head-on with anxiety. Each chapter begins with excerpts from 19th-century letters and journal entries whose relevance becomes clear as the novel progresses, adding an extra, significant layer to an already rich narrative. Most characters are White; Simone has a dark-skinned Israeli and French mother, and the cast is diverse in sexual orientation.

An epic tale of life, love, and identity. (Fiction. 14-18)

AMAZONA
Canizales
Trans. by Sofía Huitrón Martínez
Graphic Universe (96 pp.)
$12.99 paper | May 3, 2022
978-1-72844-867-1

To reclaim her village, a young Indigenous Colombian woman returns to confront the violent forces behind an illegal mining operation.

Armed men crept into the village during the night, and the villagers fled into the jungle for safety. Displaced from their land, they traveled for miles, seeking refuge from the indifferent local government in Cali, which relocates Andrea and the rest of her community into a single, small, unlivable house. Inside this suffocating 600-square-foot dwelling, Andrea’s baby daughter dies. Andrea undertakes the long voyage from the city of Cali back to the Amazonia region with a small casket in her arms, on a mission to bury her daughter in the land where her village previously stood. She also secretly carries a camera, her tool in gathering photographic evidence in the fight to reclaim her land. Arriving at the wire fence surrounding the destructive mining operation, Andrea contends with two armed guards: One offers little sympathy; the other comes from her distant past. Simply powerful, Colombian artist Canizales’ illuminating, expressively rendered graphic novel translated from the Spanish contains moments of great beauty (particularly Andrea’s memories of her husband and father) among numerous scenes of deep anguish, including instances when the threat of sexual assault arises. Stark flashbacks and revealing backstories lead to an overall sense of temporal unsteadiness, creating unease in a way that invites readers to stop and consider.

A brutal, vital text. (author’s note, bibliography) (Graphic fiction. 14-adult)

TASTING LIGHT
Ten Science Fiction Stories To Rewire Your Perceptions
Ed. by Capetta, A.R. & Wade Roush
MIT Teen Press/Candlewick (272 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5362-1938-8

A diverse anthology showing hopeful futures imagined through the lens of technology.

Capetta and Roush introduce engaging, thoughtful, beautifully written entries about identity and agency, all unfolding within the bounds of real science. The 10 fully realized stories, many by popular young adult authors, cover a range of topics and include Junauda Petrus-Nasah’s satirical look at White privilege, William Alexander’s romantic interlude in a decrepit space station, and E.C. Myers’ fun take on true crime and the human connection play a role in Elizabeth Bear’s thought-provoking take on avatars, K. Ancrum’s moving story about the relationship between a young teen and an older woman hacker, and Nasu Raq Rainey Hopson’s skillful weaving of elders into a work of Inuit futurism. The anthology celebrates queerness, a variety of gender identities, and the freedom to be oneself, delving into how technology can influence and transform reality as well as be used for the greater good—or to oppress. The modification industry helps a nonbinary teen find their voice in Charlotte Nicole Davis’ poignant opening act, but the same industry is used to subjugate women into losing their voices in A.S. King’s ultimately empowering closing story.

A top-notch hard science fiction collection. (Science fiction. 14-adult)
Isaac Blum’s debut novel, *The Life and Crimes of Hoodie Rosen* (Philomel Books, Sept. 13), follows Yeheuda “Hoodie” Rosen as he navigates the expectations of his Orthodox Jewish community alongside the antisemitism of their new town. Our starred review called it “funny, smart, moving, courageous, and so timely it almost hurts.” The book appears on Kirkus’ list of the best books of 2022, and Blum answered some questions by email.

**What was the original idea that started you working on the book?**

I started writing the book after a dramatic rise in antisemitic violence. I was particularly horrified and moved by a December 2019 shooting at a kosher grocery store in Jersey City, New Jersey.

But I didn’t start with scenes of violence. The first scene that came into my head was the one that starts the book. A yeshiva student sits in class. He sees a girl walking by, one who’s totally different from everybody he knows. He walks out of the school to go talk to her, starting a worlds-colliding friendship that changes their lives.

**The love Hoodie feels for the people in his life is so palpable even as he struggles with the expectations of his community. How did you achieve that nuance?**

I’m thrilled to hear that I did achieve that nuance. It’s really hard to judge your own writing. I know what I want to get across—that you can fiercely love your family and community and still feel angry or betrayed; that it’s totally normal to experience those opposite feelings at the same time. But I don’t know if that’s on the page or just in my head until I get feedback from others who can see the book with clearer eyes.

**You write with a witty voice that leavens a sometimes-heavy story. Are there specific influences that have shaped your humor?**

As a kid I found Daniel Pinkwater and Louis Sachar hilarious. I must have read the *Wayside School* books a dozen times each. When I was older, I started reading P.G. Wodehouse, which I loved because his novels seemed to exist only to be funny, and that’s gotta be so hard to pull off: being so hysterically funny that you can hold a reader’s interest through humor alone.

**Who is the ideal reader for your book?**

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think it’s entertaining and engaging and also has a lot to offer as a teaching tool.

Were you able to do live events for the book this year? Any memorable highlights?

When I was a kid, I dreamed of having my book at my local bookstore, Children’s Book World in Haverford, Pennsylvania. The owner used to give me advance copies to read, especially over the summer, and it made me feel so special. This September, I got to have an in-person launch event there, and it was a real childhood dream come true. They had a display of my book in the window and everything.

What books published in 2022 were among your favorites?

I adored Rimma Onoseta’s *How You Grow Wings*, about a pair of Nigerian sisters charting their own paths through the world. I also loved Katherine Locke’s *This Rebel Heart*, which is smart and magical and highlights a fascinating moment in history I knew nothing about.

*Interview by Ilana Bensussen Epstein.*

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**SALT AND SUGAR**

Carvalho, Rebecca

Inkyard Press (368 pp.)

$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-335-45433-1

Two bakeries in the fair city of Olinda, Brazil, are rivals—and two teens fall in love while fighting for their livelihoods.

Lari Ramires grieves the recent passing of her beloved grandmother, her absence deeply felt everywhere, especially in the now-empty spot she occupied in Salt, their family’s bakery. Already struggling to make ends meet thanks to fierce competition with Sugar, the bakery across the street owned by the Molinas, their longtime enemies, the family business takes an even bigger hit when supermarket chain Deals Deals starts driving small businesses to close. Lari finds herself at a crossroads, wanting to help with the bakery but under strict guidance from her mother to concentrate on her studies so that she can be the first Ramires to go to university. To protect Salt, she may do the unthinkable: reach out to Pedro, the Molinas’ teen son, to see if they can work together to save their bakeries. Can Pedro and Lari overcome decades of familial mistrust to work together? Brazilian author Carvalho’s novel is a sweet, charming story that sets its perfectly seasoned enemy-to-lovers tale in the diverse region of northeastern Brazil. As Pedro and Lari’s connection develops, their romance is enriched by the ways they find their own voices despite the weight of family expectations, grief, and financial distress.

A delectable rom-com debut. *(Romance. 14-18)*

**A THOUSAND STEPS INTO NIGHT**

Chee, Traci

Clarion/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$18.99 | March 1, 2022

978-0-358-46998-8

A terrifying encounter leads a young woman down a path of discovery, adventure, and looming destruction: Is this a curse, and will it bring a change in perspective?

Set in a Japanese-inspired fantasy world with a pantheon of gods, spirits, and demons that are explained in detail in the plentiful footnotes, this novel follows protagonist Otori Miuko, who is a misfit in her small village. Part of the serving class, Miuko is ordinary in every way—except for being unusually clumsy, loud, and stubborn. A run-in with a demon changes everything (except her clumsiness). Cast out by her father and the priests, she searches for a cure for the violent and bloodthirsty urges taking over her body and mind. On her journey, she uncovers horrors and abuses perpetrated by both humans and demons and develops friendships in unlikely places. Midway through, the story turns in on itself with intricacy and
complexity, expanding on the character development and world-building as readers view a past scene from a different perspective. Empowered at times, powerless at others, Miuko comes across other women in dire situations, requiring her to question the cultural norms of what it means to be a female in an oppressive patriarchal society. Chee introduces a nonbinary gender designation, hei, through side characters and short historical references. A dark fantasy with welcome moments of levity, this story will charm fans of Studio Ghibli's *Spirited Away.*

A captivating read rich in atmosphere. (Fantasy. 14+)

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**THE COLOR OF THE SKY IS THE SHAPE OF THE HEART**

*Cheil*

Trans. by Takami Nieda

Soho Teen (168 pp.)

$18.99 | April 5, 2022

978-1-64129-229-0

A young woman caught in between worlds reconciles with her history.

“The sky is about to fall. Where do you go?” It’s 2003, and first-person narrator Pak “Ginny” Jinhee considers high school—along with the world at large—“a cruel place.” Descriptions of a sensitive “invisible boy in class” and her sole friend, Maggie, who is deaf, along with Ginny’s poignant observations of people’s shoes (her own “the most worthless”) echo her earlier life and experiences. As a marginalized, mistreated Zainichi Korean from Tokyo, she “bounced around” between schools, moving from Japan to Hawaii before landing with an American host mother in Oregon. Ginny’s existential troubles stem from her visceral intolerance of injustice and self-proclaimed revolutionary tactics. Compact chapters set a brisk pace, punctuated by family letters from North Korea and a scene in the format of a play that flesh out memories and her current dilemma in the U.S.: whether to exert academic effort or embrace expulsion. Flashbacks to junior high Korean school where she discovered “an unshakable freedom,” despite not entirely fitting in or knowing much Korean, detail events compelling Ginny to leave and show how “an invisible thirty-eighth parallel line was drawn in Japan too.” This complex, layered story, originally published in Japanese, reaches a cathartic conclusion once Ginny resolves to catch the proverbial sky as it falls, thereby forgiving herself and claiming her agency.

Enigmatic and powerful. (translator’s note) (Fiction. 13-adult)

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**ALL RISE**

*Resistance and Rebellion in South Africa 1910-1948: A Graphic History*

Conyngham, Richard

Illus. by Saedid Rabbeeni, *The Transtraal Brothers,* Liz Clarke, et. al

Catalyst Press (220 pp.)

$21.95 paper | May 17, 2022

978-1-946395-63-4

What does it look like when ordinary citizens resist government oppression?

This graphic novel examines several decades of pre-apartheid resistance and rebellion in South Africa, beginning with early-20th-century discriminatory laws intended to restrict Asian immigration and ending with the miners’ strike of 1946. With the exception of the final chapter, the work explores social change and resistance through legal cases, many of them forgotten in dusty files in the basement of the Supreme Court of Appeal in Bloemfontein, in the process amplifying many voices that were largely unknown to history. Each chapter highlights a different act of resistance, telling hard stories honestly and without sensationalism. Zeroing in tightly on a 40-year span allows the book to examine complex historical nuances and feature the voices of ordinary, working-class people and long-standing communities like the Royal Bafokeng Nation who were activists for change. The source material dictated a different approach to the final chapter on the miners’ strike, which is enhanced with striking photographs and features composite characters based on knowledge of life at the time. The illustrators’ rich, evocative artwork in a variety of styles and color palettes adds layers of texture and context to the primary source documents, bringing life to the people and places in a reverential way. The text breathes life into stories of courage that need to be heard.

A robust examination of South Africa’s complex, storied history highlighting faces of radical justice. (glossary, bibliography, photo credits) (Graphic nonfiction. 14-adult)

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**BITTER**

*Emezi, Akwaeke*

Knopf (272 pp.)

$17.99 | Feb. 15, 2022

978-0-593-30903-2

A teenager wrestles with hope and revolution at a boarding school for gifted artists.

Seventeen-year-old Bitter has finally found a home at Eucalyptus, which is run by the enigmatic Miss Virtue. Her best friend, Blessing, helps keep Bitter’s dark, curly hair shaved. Behind the brick walls of Eucalyptus they are safe from the bullets and anxiety-inducing protests ringing through the air in the trouble-torn city of Lucille. But the walls aren’t enough when...
Bitter starts to engage with the community of activists and citizens whose lives are ravaged by monsters. Eventually, her righteous anger births art that threatens to consume everyone with a fire that must be quelled or embraced. Emezi packs this novel with timely tension as characters struggle with knowing when and how to act in the face of unjustifiable state violence, among other societal atrocities. They acknowledge the reality of burnout for even the most stalwart resistance fighters and affirm that rest and physical nourishment are critical. Conversations about the impact of figurehead leadership show the importance of the collective as a driving force: “Leaders are dangerous. One person is weak; the people are strong.” The story introduces a space where queer characters from myriad faith traditions receive love and support from peers and adults in a world that is not perfect but in which the people strive to create space for radical inclusion.

A compact, urgent, and divine novel. (Fiction. 14-18)

CLOSE-UP ON WAR
The Story of Pioneering Photojournalist Catherine Leroy in Vietnam
Farrell, Mary Cronk
Amulet/Abrams (320 pp.)
$22.99 | March 22, 2022
978-1-4197-4661-1

The story of a young Parisian woman who overcame gender barriers to take groundbreaking battlefront photographs during the Vietnam War.

Following the advice of famous combat photographer Robert Capa, Catherine Leroy was determined to get close to the action in Vietnam after being inspired by photos in French newspapers. In February 1966, at the age of 21, she arrived in Saigon as a freelancer, forging ahead despite her lack of experience. As she proved herself, Leroy was able to travel with and document troops as they moved through the harsh jungle conditions, staying alert for mines and booby traps. She received exclusive access to the first paratroop mission in Vietnam, parachuting with the troops and taking pictures all the way down. Her intimate photographs resonated around the world as they showed the vulnerability and sacrifice of young soldiers as well as the suffering of Vietnamese civilians. Farrell offers an insightful, well-researched, and detailed account of Leroy’s achievements as well as an overview of the history of Vietnam, the impact of the military conflict on Vietnamese people, and Americans’ changing perceptions of the war. Leroy’s letters and vivid examples of her photography enrich the work. This excellently written account will leave readers marveling at Leroy’s determination, bravery, and disregard for her own safety as she documented what was happening in Vietnam.

A riveting biography that puts an overlooked, award-winning female photojournalist into historical context. (map, epilogue, author’s note, camera information, glossary, timeline, endnotes, bibliography, image credits, index) (Biography. 12-18)

THE SUMMER OF BITTER AND SWEET
Ferguson, Jen
Heartdrum (384 pp.)
$17.99 | May 10, 2022
978-0-06-308616-6

An Indigenous teen’s journey to self-discovery, community, and acceptance.

Change is coming for Métis 18-year-old Lou whether she likes it or not. Her mom is away selling her beadwork at powwows, and her uncles are arguing about their ice cream business. She’ll be spending her summer running the Michif Creamery alongside her best friend, Florence, and her coercive newly ex-boyfriend (both White). Former friend King returns to town three years after their falling out, but she can’t decide if she’s ready to rebuild their relationship. When her White biological father is released following his prison sentence for the violent sexual assault of Lou’s mother when she was 16, he begins harassing her and threatening the family business. Lou must decide if she will keep this to herself or seek support in her community. Bisexual Jamaican Canadian King gently helps Lou navigate the intersections of her trauma and her sex repulsion, introducing her to the concepts of asexuality and demisexual identity, in which she finds clarity and hope. Their tender romance is just one of several kinds of connection and care that are given equal weight by Lou’s compelling first-person narration. Debut author Ferguson, who is Métis and White, touches on intergenerational family suffering at the hands of the state, mental health, substance abuse, racism, sexual harassment and assault, and missing and murdered Indigenous women—all with nuance and care.

Heart-rending and healing; a winning blend that will leave readers satisfied. (content warning, author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)

THE OBSIDIAN BUTTERFLY
Forbes, Lani
Blackstone (320 pp.)
$20.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-983546-11-3
Series: The Age of the Seventh Sun, 3

The next generation of Chicome leaders must unite to determine the fate of the empire in the epic climax of The Age of the Seventh Sun trilogy. If Mayana and Ahkin had hoped their mere survival of the harrowing journey through Xibalba would be enough to guarantee their happily-ever-after, they were sadly mistaken. From the moment they leave the horrors of the underworld, they are thrust into an empire and a world in turmoil. Old friends and new allies from across the kingdoms must lay aside old rivalries and unite against their common foe. Amid
I always have a scene in mind when I start a novel—it’s the scene I’m writing toward, and for this book, I always knew that I would have Lou in a purple tent somewhere out on her family’s property, and she wouldn’t have a rain fly on the tent, and eventually King [her best friend] would show up. Even before Lou had a name, this was the image living in my head: a Métis teen girl in a purple tent out on the Alberta prairies.

Who is the ideal reader for your book?
I don’t think too much about ideal readers; I think more about ideal books for specific readers. Some of us come to books to escape, and some of us come to books to go through the hard things life has to offer, with the book acting as guide or friend. I’m pretty sure I write for that second group.

Were you able to do live events for the book this year? Any memorable highlights?
Oh, yes! I’ve been to Canada twice (Niagara Falls, Ontario, and Whistler, British Columbia), and I’ve done some cool things in the U.S. as well. I’ll tell you about one of them: DivBookFest, a diverse kid-lit festival that was held for the first time this September. It was so much fun! Co-founders Jennie Magiera and Kat Cho did an amazing job bringing a star-studded list of MG and YA authors to Chicago. I was the least famous person there and spent the day in total and complete fangirl mode! It was delightful.

What book (or books) published in 2022 were among your favorites?
Can I tell you a secret? Reading is the only thing keeping me alive during these long pandemic years, but all I’m reading these days are Kindle Unlimited romance novels. Really, truly. It’s all my brain will process. If that’s your jam, I have recs. But if your reading tastes are wider, may I introduce you to my TBR list. The #22Debuts are a group of super tal-
ented humans—and I bet you’ll find your next favorite read among these authors.

Community plays a large role in the story. How does your community influence your writing?

I think it’s a lie we’ve been told that writers write alone. I also think that there’s something about modern life, especially modern life in the U.S., and increasingly in Canada, too, where we focus on individuals too much and where we forget that we are always in community, always in many communities.

The other thing about community: It’s about reciprocal relations. So your communities should affect everything.

Maybe the easiest way to answer your question is that I’m always thinking about my many communities when I write, and I’m always writing for them, but also, when writing, I write knowing that I am responsible to them. It’s a lot to be responsible to your communities in everything that you do, to balance competing needs of your many communities, because their needs don’t always align perfectly. But it’s very important to remember this responsibility and to keep it at the heart of your actions.

Interview by Costa B. Pappas.

the fast-paced adventures, frequent narrow escapes, and heated skirmishes. Forbes takes the time to dive more deeply into the motivations behind each character’s choices. She even turns a sympathetic lens on Metzi, Ahkin’s traitorous twin, whose decisions have been motivated by her own feelings of entrapment by the traditions and expectations of the regime even as she ascends to claim the throne of the Chicome Empire. While an epic battle worthy of the high-fantasy tradition provides the climactic moment, the intergenerational traumas, secrets, and efforts to control through fear that are broken down in the more intimate spaces between the action provide the catalyst for change upon which the fates of the empire and humanity hinge. This is a page-turner from start to finish, with something for all devoted readers of the series to enjoy in its conclusion.

A pulse-quenching, soul-aching, and truly satisfying end to the cycle. (map, royal families) (Fantasy. 13-18)

VERY BAD PEOPLE

Frick, Kit
McElderry (416 pp.)
$19.99 | April 5, 2022
978-1-5344-4973-2

A chance encounter prompts a high school junior to wonder whether her mother’s death six years before wasn’t all that accidental. Hardly has Calliope Bolan arrived as a transfer student to Tipton, the exclusive boarding school in Alyson-on-Hudson that her mom and aunt attended, than a passing glimpse of a stranger who is somehow familiar sets her on a course toward a tangle of shocking family revelations—few if any of which even attentive readers will see coming. Never one to skimp on rising suspense and extreme plot twists, though, Frick also casts her teenage protagonist into a heady series of exploits as a new member of the Haunt and Rail Society, a decades-old secret group on campus that undertakes everything from wonderfully clever “larks” designed to raise awareness of inequities like underpaid kitchen staff to a campaign to expose a popular teacher as a sexual predator that escalates in a frighteningly proactive way. Ultimately Calliope comes to realize that nearly everything she thought she had understood about her classmates, her parents, and even her own motives has been wrong, and that saddles her with some hard choices to make...including one life-changing final twist. Aside from her bisexual aunt’s wife, who is Black and Filipina, Calliope and her family are White; names and other cues identify her fellow students as diverse in race, ethnicity, and nationality.

A doozy of a ride, with thrills and chills aplenty. (campus map) (Thriller. 13-18)
“Superb storytelling and dazzling prose.”

CONFESSIONS OF AN ALLEGED GOOD GIRL

MY GOOD MAN

Gansworth, Eric
Levine Querido (384 pp.)
$21.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-64614-183-8

A Native son comes of age, tackling race, class, and masculinity.

It’s 1992, and 25-year-old Brian is the only Indigenous journalist on staff at the Niagara Cascade, a small city newspaper. After failing to successfully pitch an article on the Love Canal toxic waste dump, Brian is told to stick to his beat by writing stories about life on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation where he grew up. Pressured to report on crimes committed by Indigenous people, Brian hears via the police blotter about a man who was severely assaulted on Moon Road, the center of the Rez. Through Eee-ogg, or gossip, Brian learns that the victim was Tim, a White man who is the brother of Gihh-rhaggs, his mom’s old boyfriend. No one on the Rez could understand Brian’s relationship with Tim. Spanning over two decades, the novel flashes back to Brian as a boy navigating an article on the Love Canal toxic waste dump, Brian is told to stick to his beat by writing stories about life on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation where he grew up. Pressured to report on crimes committed by Indigenous people, Brian hears via the police blotter about a man who was severely assaulted on Moon Road, the center of the Rez. Through Eee-ogg, or gossip, Brian learns that the victim was Tim, a White man who is the brother of Gihh-rhaggs, his mom’s old boyfriend. No one on the Rez could understand Brian’s relationship with Tim. Spanning over two decades, the novel flashes back to Brian as a boy navigating a fraught adolescence in a house without heat, electricity, or gas. Enhanced with art by Gansworth (Onondaga, Eel Clan) as well as poetry and Brian’s newspaper articles, this masterwork of historical fiction asks whether peaceably straddling the realms of White and Indigenous people is possible. Rich, luxuriant, densely layered prose immerses readers in heartbreaking scenes and poignant dialogue as complex characters explore the conist, in a not-too-distant future absolutely ravaged by droughts, fires, floods, and powder-keg instability. He and his family are live-in employees of Karloff Country, a mountaintop in Virginia taken over by a billionaire family who created their own version of Disneyland as a refuge for their similarly wealthy peers to cavort away from the destruction they helped create. But when the end times loom, Jay realizes that the new guests, the Trustees, are privileged to the point of sociopathy, torturing staff over perceived slights with impunity. Jay rebels along with fellow Karloff Academy seniors Zeke and Connie and Seychelle, his crush and an heir to the Karloff fortune (Chelle’s racist grandfather, Franklin Karloff, hasn’t gotten over her White mom’s having had a biracial Black baby). They’re all fast friends; the Black kids always find each other.” Narrated through multiple points of view, the novel features Jay’s perspective most prominently, with some interludes from his friends, all presented in Giles’ signature strong, accessible voice. With hints of Cory Doctorow, Jordan Peele, and Richard Matheson, this book stands on its own as a dystopian adventure, but the deeper metaphors around servitude, privilege, class, and solidarity mean that there’s a lot to think about as the characters reckon with their proximity to and complicity in violence both local and far-flung.

Hold tight: You’ll want to stay on this nightmarish roller coaster till the end. (Horror. 13+)

THE GETAWAY

Giles, Lamar
Scholastic (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-338-75201-4

Trapped in an apocalyptic theme park, teens fight back.

Jay has it pretty good, all things considered, in a not-too-distant future absolutely ravaged by droughts, fires, floods, and powder-keg instability. He and his family are live-in employees of Karloff Country, a mountaintop in Virginia taken over by a billionaire family who created their own version of Disneyland as a refuge for their similarly wealthy peers to cavort away from the destruction they helped create. But when the end times loom, Jay realizes that the new guests, the Trustees, are privileged to the point of sociopathy, torturing staff over perceived slights with impunity. Jay rebels along with fellow Karloff Academy seniors Zeke and Connie and Seychelle, his crush and an heir to the Karloff fortune (Chelle’s racist grandfather, Franklin Karloff, hasn’t gotten over her White mom’s having had a biracial Black baby). They’re all fast friends;
Interrelated stories about the extended Belén family sprout from the Dominican Republic and branch out into the diaspora.

In 11 short stories, Afro-Dominican debut author Gomera-Tavarez offers slice-of-life peeks into the Belén of Hidalpa, Dominican Republic. While these stories are fictional, the author brings Hidalpa vividly to life, with a focus on the intergenerational experiences of a single family member in each story. Whether focusing on 10-year-old Cristabel, teenage Josélito, adult Gabriel, or any one of the many other family members, each displays a focused emotional intelligence. These eye-opening diasporic stories cross borders, taking place in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, New Jersey, and New York. The setting of each is strong: Unfolding in locations including Abuelo’s colmado or general store, the barber shop, beach, and a Paterson, New Jersey, high school during a lockdown drill, the everyday lives of the Belén family past and present read as authentic and immersive. Themes of belonging, social class, patriarchy, and language thread evenly throughout, with Dominican Spanish as well as African American Vernacular English infused with ease. The simple touch of a handwritten family tree at the beginning of the book conveys a diarylike quality to this collection; the inclusion of a faded picture of the author’s grandparents adds further intimacy.

Alabor of love imbued with dedication to family. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14–adult)

BEASTS OF RUIN
Gray, Ayana
Putnam (384 pp.)
$18.99 | July 26, 2022
978-0-593-40571-0

After a perilous adventure, a disgraced warrior and a newly minted daraja must face the consequences of their actions in this follow-up to Beasts of Prey (2022).

Ekon and Koffi return, each having experienced life-altering events that have caused them to reevaluate themselves and their futures. Koffi awakes in Thornkeep, a strange land belonging to Fedu, the god of death. After she freed the Shetani of her splendor, Fedu kidnapped Koffi and secreted her away with other darajas he holds captive for their skills at channeling energy from the earth. Realizing he plans to use her as his weapon, Koffi finds alllship with like-minded darajas who wish to escape: She promises to guide them through the treacherous forest, and in return, they will help her learn about her heritage. Ekon has been hiding in the city of Lkossa with Themba, Koffi’s estranged grandmother, since learning shocking truths. He and Themba search for leads as to where Fedu took Koffi, and as they leave Lkossa, they meet a group of spice merchants who agree to let them join their caravan. Ultimately, both Ekon and Koffi will need to rely on their newfound communities to overcome powerful forces. Readers will be entranced as themes of heritage, betrayal, and erasure are brought to life with vivid details in this riveting, fast-paced volume that lives up to its predecessor. All characters are Black.

An absorbing story with tantalizing hints of more to come. (map, list of orders) (Fantasy. 14–18)

BABY TEETH
Grehan, Meg
Little Island (192 pp.)
$16.99 | May 31, 2022
978-1-915071-01-9

Love, loss, and identity form the core of this sparse, free-verse vampire story from Ireland.

Immy narrates a small slice of her eternal life, a time when she experiences love like never before. In this interesting tale on vampires, Immy lives numerous consecutive lives as different people: Although she mostly doesn’t remember her past selves, she feels them all inside herself, leading to constant internal turmoil. In the present day, Immy meets human mortal Claudia at a flower shop, and the two begin a relationship. Immy believes this love is stronger than anything she’s ever felt, but as her love turns more and more into a desire for blood, she questions the kinds of relationships she’s capable of having. The main consistent thread through all Immy’s lives is her found family. Freddie and Henry are vampires like her, and the three of them have managed to find one another in each of their lives, always caring for and loving each other. This poetic tale captures so much emotion through meaningful word choices, repetition, and line breaks. It’s incredible how deep characterization comes through in so few words: Immy’s longing and grief are potent, the Sapphic love is consuming and heartbreaking, and the unconditional support among Immy, Freddie, and Henry feels pure and comforting. Readers who feel seen in these pages will pore over the feeling-laden verses again and again. Characters are assumed White.

Emotionally rich and gloriously queer. (author interview) (Verse fiction. 14–18)
THE SECRETS WE KEEP
Gustafson, Cassie
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-66590-694-4

When high schooler Emma learns that her father has been arrested, she suspects that it is connected to her best friend, but she can’t imagine how much her world is about to change.

Emma quickly learns that her dad has been accused of inappropriate sexual contact by Hannah, the girl who rescued her from an otherwise friendless existence. The accusation is a bombshell that threatens to destroy the girls’ relationship as well as Emma’s family, which consists of her mom, dad, and 6-year-old brother. The gripping story unfolds in chapters alternating between Emma’s first-person narration of the present day and second-person narration of the past. This device builds suspense and helps readers string together clues.

What was the scandal that made Emma’s family move from San Francisco to a small town in Oregon? Why does she sleep with a knife under her pillow? Vivid descriptions bring scenes to life while imaginative metaphors compassionately depict Emma’s interior struggles. In less deft hands the inclusion of fairy tales written by Emma in her diary might feel heavy-handed, but here they add to the thematic substance. Depictions of forensic interviewing and children’s advocacy centers add to the believability of the plot. A content warning foreshadows the difficult topics addressed. All main characters are White.

An exceedingly well-written, powerful, and suspenseful novel that lights the path toward truthfulness and healing. (resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

THE GAPS
Hall, Leanne
Text (368 pp.)
$11.95 paper | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-92233-048-2

An account of the aftermath of a student’s abduction.

When 16-year-old Chinese Australian Yin Mitchell is abducted, the news is devastating, especially for her fellow classmates at Balmoral Ladies College in the Melbourne area. From Chloe, a biracial (Chinese Singaporean and White Australian) scholarship student who knew Yin from fleeting encounters, to Natalia, a White girl who is a force within the high school hierarchy and Yin’s estranged childhood best friend, the abduction reverberates across the community. Each day that passes only spurs more fear and edginess. In alternating chapters switching between Chloe’s and Natalia’s perspectives, the narrative charts the 79 days of limbo that follow. Hall teases and unravels information deftly and balances the narrative tension with thought-provoking ruminations. While the mystery of Yin’s disappearance is a powerful undercurrent, at the center of the novel lies a nuanced exploration of grief, guilt, violence, and resilience. Readers discover who Yin and her classmates are beneath surface appearances and consider the impact of the threat of male violence on the world these young women live in. How do gender, race, and social class affect public interest and outcry—and the girls’ everyday realities? Questions of sensationalism, art, and censorship also arise. Characters are fully drawn and realized, and the destabilizing atmosphere of speculation and uncertainty is well developed.

Hauntingly riveting. (Fiction. 14-18)

WE DESERVE MONUMENTS
Hammonds, Jas
Roaring Brook Press (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 29, 2022
978-1-250-81655-9

Avery and her parents move to her mom’s hometown to care for her ailing grandma.

Lately 17-year-old Avery feels like she needs a change of scenery, a break from Washington, D.C., and her singular focus on early admittance to Georgetown. When Avery’s mom, Zora, learns her mother is dying from cancer, she decides to move back home. After more than a decade away, Zora is not wholeheartedly embraced by Mama Letty. As a queer, biracial teen—Avery’s mom is Black, and her dad is White—Avery’s welcome in rural Bardell County, Georgia, population 9,127, is just as cold. Avery tries to understand what caused the rift between her mom and Mama Letty and what happened to her grandfather, but both women are reluctant to share. Avery befriends the pretty Black girl next door and the rich White girl whose family runs everything, and she discovers Bardell County is full of buried secrets. As in most small towns, everything and everyone is connected, and debut author Hammonds skillfully unpeels each layer of intrigue, keeping readers engaged until the last page. The tension between Mama Letty and Zora is complex and deep-seated, and the generational trauma revealed throughout is beautifully explored. Hammonds seamlessly weaves together mystery, romance, and a town’s racist history, crafting a gripping and emotional story.

A love story—romantic and familial—that is a must-read. (Fiction. 14-18)
Energetic, clever, and absorbing.

**MY IMAGINARY MARY**

Hand, Cynthia, Brodi Ashton & Jodi Meadows
HarperTeen (496 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
Series: The Lady Janies

Ada Lovelace and Mary Godwin—better known today as Mary Shelley—combine forces to create a living automaton: a real boy.

It’s the year “18—mumble mumble,” the timeline smooshed together into an imagined year when both girls are in their late teens. Ada, the abandoned daughter of famous poet Lord Byron, is a mathematical genius who creates delicate clockwork automatons. Mary’s the daughter of the late, famed early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. She’s half in love with poet Percy Shelley, her father’s mentee, and wonders if she’ll ever succeed at writing. The girls become friends when their fate godmother arrives through a hidden door in the back of Mary’s wardrobe to school them both on powers they may have inherited. Lo and behold, with Mary’s help, Ada’s automaton becomes a living—and lovely—boy named Pan. When villains want something from the girls, they take off, along with Pan and Mary’s two half sisters, on a romp through Europe. The trio of authors responsible for this entertaining smashup series get better with every book they write. Readers don’t have to know the characters’ real-life backstories to enjoy this story; for those who do, the parallels are intriguing. The novel effortlessly and entertainingly combines “Cinderella,” *Frankenstein*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Pinocchio*, and *Hamilton*, and the ending reminds readers not to underestimate quiet women.

Energetic, clever, and absorbing. (Historical fantasy. 12-18)

**QUEEN OF THE TILES**

Hanna Alkaf
Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$18.99 | April 19, 2022
978-1-5344-9455-8

Returning to the Scrabble tournament where her best friend died a year earlier conjures up lingering trauma for a teen competitor.

Sixteen-year-old Najwa Bakri has suffered from panic attacks, memory gaps, intrusive negative thoughts, and an obsession with her late friend Trina Low’s Instagram account. At last year’s Word Warrior Weekend, Trina collapsed and died in a high-stakes game, leaving her opponent, Josh Tan, the tournament winner. Trina, a wealthy, erudite social media influencer, was dubbed the Queen of the Tiles for her Scrabble skills. Najwa, a short, chubby hijabi from Kuala Lumpur, has a passion for learning the meanings of words rather than just memorizing letter combinations like many contestants. Surrounded by their Scrabble circle—Josh; Mark, Trina’s boyfriend; nonbinary Shuba; Singaporean Ben, who had a crush on Trina; Emily, who was caught cheating during a game; Puteri, Mark’s ex-girlfriend; and Yasmine, Trina’s childhood friend—Najwa remembers her therapist’s advice and struggles to maintain emotional equilibrium. It’s bad enough when Instagram stories appear from Trina’s account containing scrambled letters spelling ominous words like REGICIDE and JANIFORM. But when Najwa starts receiving cryptic, chilling DMs supposedly from Trina, it’s even worse. Mark convinces her to join him in investigating whether Trina was actually murdered. The tense, evenly paced mystery unfolds against the fascinating backdrop of competitive Scrabble with a cast of well-rounded characters who reflect Malaysia’s ethnic diversity. Interesting game trivia and vocabulary add to the originality.

An absorbing mystery that explores friendship, grief, mental health, and wordplay. (Mystery. 12-18)

**LAWLESS SPACES**

Haydu, Corey Ann
Simon & Schuster (496 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-5344-3706-7

A girl searches for authenticity in a world that constantly judges her.

The women in the Dovewick family have a few things in common. Short and buxom with cascading blond hair, they have the kinds of bodies other people feel free to project their assumptions onto. Starting on their 16th birthdays, each woman also keeps a journal in which they write poems about things not said aloud. Mimi has plenty to write about since she doesn’t have many authentic connections in real life—she and her mother don’t connect like they used to, and Mimi’s many followers on social media only know the curated version she shares there. As Mimi reads the older generations’ journals, she encounters women she never really knew, whether it’s a different side of someone familiar, as with her mother, or untold stories, such as learning that in 1954 her great-grandmother was pressured into sex and then ditched by a manipulative boyfriend despite her unplanned pregnancy. Meanwhile, Mimi’s mom publicly accuses a famous director of sexual assault, and the first Mimi hears about it is from the news. The verse journal excerpts making up this narrative powerfully convey generations of sexism surrounding women in many areas of their lives and ask whether that history is an emotional connection or a curse that is doomed to be repeated. By turns fragile, tough as nails, halting, and determined, these characters’ voices command attention. The cast defaults to White.

A compelling feminist story. (author’s note) (Verse novel. 14-18)
“Well-informed inspiration.”
WHERE HAVE ALL THE BIRDS GONE?
Nature in Crisis
Hirsch, Rebecca E.
Twenty-First Century/Lerner (120 pp.)
$37.32 PLB | March 1, 2022
978-1-72843-177-2

This pithy book more than fulfills its promise to introduce readers to the importance of birds, the state of avian research, and how they can contribute to birds’ well-being.

The text is both graceful and accessible. It begins with how and why passenger pigeons rapidly became extinct and is unspiring in detailing the deaths of thousands of migratory birds in Philadelphia in October 2020. These sobering accounts are balanced by success stories, such as the rebounding of dwindling raptor populations thanks to wildlife protection laws, a raptor sanctuary, and the ban on DDT. However, along with mentioning how critical birds are to the ecosystem, the text clearly states that 40% of bird species worldwide are shrinking in numbers. There is also a sobering chapter about climate change and its impact on seabirds. A full chapter devoted to the threat posed by domesticated cats uses gentle humor and shows compassion in its recommendations to cat owners. Up-to-date research—including interviews with scientists—highlights the urgency of sustainable farming, bird-friendly skyscrapers, and better placement of wind farms. A cutting-edge discovery by an entomologist, further researched by an urban ecologist, shows how selecting native plants over lawns supports caterpillars, the mainstay diet of most baby birds, turning backyards into habitats. The final chapter exhorts readers to follow the recommendations for reversing the trend toward bird extinctions. The excellent layout, informative sidebars, and attractive images are noteworthy.

Well-informed inspiration. (author’s note, glossary, source notes, bibliography, further information, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

THE WEIGHT OF BLOOD
Jackson, Tiffany D.
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-302914-9

Jackson’s latest retells Stephen King’s Carrie with electric social commentary.

Springville, inspired by real towns in the United States that still have segregated proms, has a lot of learning to do.

No one knows this better than Madison Washington, a light-skinned biracial girl who has grown up with her White father and has been passing for White her entire life. At least, until a surprise rainy day during gym class exposes her hair’s natural texture and her Black ancestry and she’s outed against her will. Her White classmates react by throwing pencils at her hair, and a video of the incident goes viral. White senior Wendy, concerned about looking good to potential colleges, decides to try to reverse the negative press by advocating for Springville’s first ever integrated prom. Feeling guilty about her role in Maddy’s bullying, she also convinces Kendrick Scott, her Black boyfriend, to ask Maddy to the prom as an act of goodwill. Fans of King’s novel and its film adaptations will know this doesn’t end well for anyone. Jackson’s expert reshaping of this tale highlights the genuine horrors of both internalized and externalized anti-Blackness, as with the way she weaponizes Maddy’s father’s hot comb as a symbol of terror and subjugation. In this masterwork novel, a teen girl—mistreated from birth by a racist society—finally gets her revenge.

Horror done right. (Horror. 13-18)

A DARKNESS AT THE DOOR
Khanani, Intisar
Snowy Wings Publishing (436 pp.)
$34.99 | $19.99 paper | July 21, 2022
978-1-952667-82-4 paper
978-1-952667-81-7 paper
Series: Dauntless Path, 3

The truth behind the conspiracies Amraeya has uncovered have led to life-threatening danger in this sequel to The Theft of Sunlight (2021).

Rae has been abducted, mutilated, and imprisoned on a snatchers’ ship, at risk of being sold along with other stolen young people. Escape is seemingly impossible because of the Darkness, a curse that steals the minds of the captured if they attempt to run away. But, pulled into a botched escape plan, Rae is thrown overboard and rescued by a Fae sorceress who places life debts upon her. Nonetheless, she vows to rescue her companions and bring to justice the Circle of Mages, who protect the enslavers, and the nobles, who enrich themselves by perpetuating the enslavement of Menaiyan children. Reuniting with enigmatic thief Bren and his companions, Rae’s mind and heart are thrown into further disarray. Bren’s secrets and his thieves’ code of justice are juxtaposed against Rae’s values, and her heart breaks over their impossible romance. This latest volume in a series that improves with each entry satisfyingly and realistically portrays a fairy tale that goes beyond happily-ever-after, exploring the will and vigilance needed to achieve justice and equity. In this world, magic creates greater complexities around power rather than simply solving problems. Rae has a clubfoot and grew to self-appreciation and acceptance in the previous volume. Characters have black hair and brown skin; cultural references suggest similarities to South Asian cultures and Muslim-inspired practices.

A fulfilling addition to a fantastical series. (Fantasy. 13-18)
**KISS & TELL**  
*Khorram, Adib*  
Dial Books (384 pp.)  
$18.99 | March 22, 2022  
978-0-593-32526-1

A boy band’s gay megastar struggles under public scrutiny.  
Canadian boy band Kiss & Tell may have started out as a joke, but the five teens’ 2022 multicity tour is no laughing matter. While their first show brings feelings of euphoria, the spotlight shines a little too brightly on Hunter Drake when his ex-boyfriend posts their sexts on social media. The fans react negatively, prompting The Label to quickly revamp Hunter’s image with an updated wardrobe. The Label also plays matchmaker, suggesting a new beau: recently out Iranian American Kaivan Parvani from Kiss & Tell’s boy-band opener, PAR-K. Sparks fly, and the two boys decide to date for real. As Hunter, who is White, spends more time with Kaivan and less working on Kiss & Tell’s pivotal third album, tensions build among the band. Can they make it until the end of the tour? This is a love letter to boy bands, complete with lyrics and chord progressions that lend a sense of joyous authenticity. Combining first-person narrative with fictional interviews, think pieces, fan fiction, and more, the author effectively encapsulates the ecosystem of celebrity and fandom—and cultivates a strong, contemporary social message. Hunter’s myopic focus on his own queerness and objectification in the music industry opens the door for important conversations about the impact of identity, particularly as other members of the ethnically diverse band engage with him in ways that cleverly complicate readers’ reactions.  
An absolute bop; *Khorram’s* best yet. (Fiction. 14-18)

**WAKE THE BONES**  
*Kilcoyne, Elizabeth*  
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)  
$18.99 | July 12, 2022  
978-1-250-79082-8

Nineteen-year-old Laurel and her friends grapple with a curse on their town in this Southern gothic debut.  
In the small farming town of Dry Valley, Kentucky, Laurel faces her family legacy. Her mother had strange gifts before her mysterious death in their old well, leaving Laurel to grow up orphaned (and with a less useful gift: As a taxidermist, Laurel can read death stories from bones). When she and her best friends—turned—farm co-workers discover a grisly scene by the reopened well, it’s only the beginning of the seemingly impossible—and increasingly dangerous—happenings. While confronting the past, Laurel and her friends, all distinctly drawn, also look to the future and who they want to be—for Laurel and Ricky, it’s a charmingly bristling courtship dance. For Laurel’s best friend, Isaac, and Ricky’s brother, Garrett, it’s more complicated. Garrett, happily a country boy, loves Isaac, but Isaac can’t let himself love Garrett back as, to survive and escape Dry Valley (and an abusive situation), he knows he must leave. The characters, who default to White, are easy to get invested in as personal stakes climb so high that survival isn’t a given. Told in the third-person, the novel’s poetic language is atmospheric and evocative. Grounding depictions of the natural world are as vivid and lush as the descriptions of haunting horrors that are beautiful in their gruesomeness. These passages never slow the plot and frequently enhance the tension and suspense.  
In Kilcoyne, YA horror has found a new standard-bearer. (Horror. 13-18)

An Indigenous botanist offers powerful guidance and inspiration for a sustainable—and sustaining—future in this young readers’ adaptation of her 2015 adult bestseller.  
Sweetgrass—its planting, tending, picking, braiding, and burning—forms the organizing structure for this work in which scientific discovery and traditional wisdom form a harmonious, interconnected whole. Sweetgrass is important to many Indigenous nations as well as a potent example of the limitations of traditional Western notions of people existing in opposition to the natural world, as evidenced by the fascinating results of the graduate research project Kimmerer (Potawatomi) oversaw. Rather than humans’ presence inherently threatening nonhuman living beings, the Indigenous worldview persuasively and vividly offered is one in which we live by the guiding principles of the Honorable Harvest, enumerated here as: never take the first, ask permission, listen for the answer, take only what you need, minimize harm, use everything you take, share, be grateful, and reciprocate the gift. Smith (Cree, Lakota) skillfully adapts the original, including text boxes with definitions, thoughtful prompts for reflection and discussion, and pithy quotes featured within exquisite images of a circle of braided sweetgrass by illustrator Neidhardt (Dine). Additional art beautifully enhances teachings and tales from many nations, personal reminiscences, fascinating natural history; and other enriching content. Readers will feel as if they are in conversation with a caring, respected expert guide who offers a hopeful, nourishing vision.  
Both an urgent, essential call to action and an uplifting love letter. (author’s note, notes, bibliography, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
DESTINATION UNKNOWN
Konigsberg, Bill
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-61805-1

Two drastically different gay teens meet in New York City in 1987 at the height of the AIDS pandemic.

Introverted Micah Strauss lives a sheltered life on the Upper West Side with his liberal Jewish parents, who are clueless about his sexuality. CJ Gorman is his opposite: an openly gay, fast-talking, sometimes-compulsive liar who enraptures Micah from the first moment he sees CJ in a plexiglass bra at a dance club: “He looked to me like everything I never would be.” For Micah, unemotional hookups with closeted jocks from his school are the extent of his contact with anyone not straight. What ensues is a tour de force: an exploration of a relationship that pulls back the curtains on queer 1980s New York City to reveal a community wrestling with life and death. With care, emotional depth, and a myriad of period music references, Konigsberg expertly balances Micah’s wonder, fear, despair, and outrage at coming out during the AIDS crisis. Strong characterizations of Micah and CJ are buoyed by excellent dialogue and believable secondary characters—Micah’s doting mother, caring but passive father, hurt and jealous best friend Deena, and supportive lesbian boss—propelling this exhilarating page-turner. It’s sure to be an emotional eye-opener for those who did not live through this time and a resonant picture of resilience, community, and activism for those who did. Micah and CJ are White, as is most of the supporting cast.

Historical fiction at its finest. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)

INUUINIRA
My Story of Survival
Koonoo, Brian
Illus. by Ben Shannon
Inhabit Media (37 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-77227-430-1

A vivid firsthand account of a hunting expedition that goes disastrously wrong.

Koonoo, from Pond Inlet in Nunavut, Canada, relates a page-turning story about a near-fatal caribou-hunting trip to Naujaat, 500 km to the southwest. A Parks Canada employee, he learned Inuit hunting and survival skills from his father, using them to provide for his wife and daughters. From shooting his first murre at age 3 to hunting hare, ptarmigan, seal, and caribou, Koonoo took pride in his ability to feed those he loved on a traditional, healthy diet. In 2015, when a shortage of caribou resulted in a hunting moratorium on Baffin Island, he set off alone for the Melville Peninsula.

Despite careful preparations, a combination of bad weather, human error, and mechanical issues with his snowmobile led to his nearly perishing. This slim volume is rich in sensory details enhanced by beautiful, informative illustrations and photographs. Descriptions of family and community life, the landscape, and animal behavior are shared in straightforward but evocative prose. Even knowing that the author survives, readers will feel breathless anticipation as they follow his trek by foot through harsh conditions in search of help. He explains how to build an iglu, melt snow to create naturally filtered drinking water, shelter in a snow cave, and more. Speaking directly to Inuit readers in a way that instills pride in heritage, this work has broad appeal, especially for readers interested in wilderness survival narratives.

An unforgettable physical and emotional journey. (glossary, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

WE WEREN’T LOOKING TO BE FOUND
Kuehn, Stephanie
Disney-Hyperion (320 pp.)
$17.99 | June 21, 2022
978-1-368-06410-1

Two teenage girls’ paths intersect at a low point in their lives, but where they go from there is anything but certain.

Danielle Washington and Camila Ortiz meet at Peach Tree Hills, a suburban residential treatment facility for adolescent girls outside Atlanta, where they’re roommates as well as the only brown-skinned girls. Originally from a well-off Black political family in Dallas, Dani’s relationship to addiction and dependency is the primary focus of her recovery, but her resentment toward her mother and how that impacts her sense of self is complicated even further by learning to be honest with herself. Similarly, Cams has self-harm tendencies that her Latin American upbringing is inflicted upon young girls in particular are presented thoughtfully in the dueling narratives of these two deeply intelligent and expressive teens. Dani and Cams complement each other well as earnest storytellers and, eventually, reluctant friends, but their experiences are as raw as their struggles may feel futile. Still, the professionals in the novel provide a tremendous and optimistic amount of care.

An insightful, grounded, and compassionately messy meditation on adolescence, institutional support, and helping oneself. (content warning, resource list) (Fiction. 13-19)
“Impassioned, thorough, and brilliant.”

BIG LIES
From Socrates to Social Media
Kurlansky, Mark
Illus. by Eric Zelz
Tilbury House (320 pp.)
$22.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-88448-912-2

A book about public lies, the kind that “can destabilize the world.”

Deceit, says noted nonfiction writer Kurlansky, is practiced throughout the living world, often conferring evolutionary advantages, and certainly many social ones—consider the white lie. Three hundred years ago, the rise of the Enlightenment ushered in both a new era of scientific reason and a corresponding rise in lies and conspiracy theories promulgated by power-hungry individuals attempting to dupe the masses. Today’s social media makes this ever more prevalent but also gives those who pay attention tools they can use to broadcast the truth. From murderous clowns to lizard people in government, burning women as witches to persistent scapegoating of Jews, Kurlansky covers the types, tools, targets, tactics, and motives of liars as well as arms readers with defensive techniques such as searching for sources and the classic advice to “follow the money.” Supplemental stories are told in sidebars set off in orange type. Blocks of larger, colorful type break up the pages, as do occasional illustrations and photographs. Short comic-strip segments enliven the ends of each chapter, illustrating Soviet spies sowing anti-vaccine disinformation and showing a dishonest, bankrupt real estate investor denying climate change. This book takes on a dense and complicated subject; Kurlansky’s genius is to embrace the complexity and urge readers to question everything they read, including this book.

Impassioned, thorough, and brilliant: describes the struggle for truth that “keeps the world from descending into chaos.” (photo credits, author’s note, sources, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

LOVE RADIO
LaDelle, Ebony
Simon & Schuster (320 pp.)
$19.99 | May 31, 2022
978-1-64614-176-0

A story of Black love in its many beautiful forms.

Danielle Ford is in her senior year of high school in Detroit. She dreams of becoming an author like the Black women writers she looks up to and has spent years honing her skills. However, since experiencing a traumatic assault last year—something she has kept secret from her family and closest friends—Dani has been unable to write or socialize like before. Her sole refuge lies in writing letters to her idols—Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, bell hooks—sharing her thoughts and feelings. Meanwhile, her classmate Prince Jones has had a crush on her since middle school. He works as a radio DJ, giving out advice on love, but ironically Prince’s own life is lacking in the romance department. Most of his time is spent taking care of his younger brother and disabled mother. However, when an opportunity arises for him to date the girl of his dreams, Prince seizes it. Cynical Dani is surprised to find herself accepting Prince’s challenge to get her to fall in love with him in only three dates. LaDelle does a fantastic job of bringing the complex, dynamic personalities and relationships of her characters to life while highlighting romantic, familial, and platonic love as well as self-love. Strong pacing allows the storylines to flow organically. Readers will find themselves hooked from the first page to the last.

A sweet, charming story with both heartwarming and heart-rending moments. (Romance. 14-18)

WHEN THE ANGELS LEFT THE OLD COUNTRY
Lamb, Sacha
Levine Querido (356 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-64614-176-0

An angel and a demon immigrate to the goldene medina.

Little Ash, a lesser son of the famed demon king Ashmedai, studies Talmud all day with his counterpart, a forgetful angel, in the synagogue of a tiny Jewish town in the Pale of Settlement. But Little Ash wants to see more than their unnamed shtetl: He convinces the angel to go to America, ostensibly to find out what happened to Essie, the baker’s daughter who hasn’t written since she left Warsaw. Steeped in Ashkenazi lore, custom, and faith, this beautifully written story deftly tackles questions of identity, good and evil, obligation, and the many forms love can take. Queerness and gender fluidity thread through both the human and supernatural characters, clearly depicted without feeling anachronistic. A generous peppering of nonitalicized Yiddish and Hebrew (with a glossary in the back) combined with culturally specific dialogue and turns of phrase make this read like a classic while still feeling fresh and contemporary. The immigrants, human and B’nei Elohim, deal with medical gatekeepers at Ellis Island, assimilationist American Jews eager to denounce their greenhorn landsmen, exploitative factory owners, and religious obligations toward the beloved dead. Despite its length, this novel clips quickly along, crafting a world that proves hard to leave behind.

Gorgeous, fascinating, and fun. (Fiction. 13-18)
“This beautifully written, otherworldly fantasy packs a punch.”

THE DROWNED WOODS

SOCRATES

A Life Worth Living
Lehmann, Devra
Triangle Square Books for Young Readers (288 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-64421-136-6
Series: Philosophy for Young People

A thorough study of the brilliant, timeless, entertainingly abrasive thinker.
As in her outstanding Spinoza: The Outcast Thinker (2014), Lehmann doesn’t present an encyclopedic analysis of Socrates’ life and thought, focusing instead on themes and ideas that will (or should, anyway) provoke immediate responses from today’s readers. Here, then, she steers (more or less) clear of esoteric philosophical topics to describe her subject’s lifelong quest for clarity on ethical issues, on how to conduct a meaningful life, and on the nature of true virtue. In retracing the course of his life, she also explores his adversarial relationship with the polis of Athens as soldier, public figure, and ultimately political victim. Along with describing his trains of reason in clear, simple language, she brings him to life as a “modest but arrogant, ugly but alluring, sensuous but ascetic, mocking but earnest” force of nature who considered himself not a teacher but a sort of intellectual midwife, asking thorny questions to confound the supposedly wise but leaving it to others (us, for instance) to work out answers. This account is based on judicious use of source material and massive research and further livened throughout by frequent photos or diagrams of major Athenian buildings, sexually suggestive images on artifacts, and even an illustration of a hemlock plant. Women do get rare but occasional mentions.

A vivid, perceptive portrait aimed at spurring readers to take up the quest. (map, notes, note on sources, bibliography, glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 13-18)

THE DROWNED WOODS

Lloyd-Jones, Emily
Little, Brown (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-359-5631-7

A group of misfits comes together to perpetrate the ultimate heist in a fantasy novel imbued with Welsh folklore elements.

It is a risky plan, one with high stakes, dark magic, and a treacherous journey, but in the end, whoever survives gets a share in a mythical treasure. And if their heist also happens to help remove corrupt Prince Garanhir from power, so much the better. This is how former spymaster Renfrew manages to convince Mererid, the last water diviner, to go along with her old handler’s scheme, especially since it could mean gaining her freedom in the end. Their crew includes Fane, a cursed ironfetch; Trefor, his corgi; and Ifanna, a thief and Mer’s old flame who once betrayed her. As their dangerous journey progresses, the ragtag band realizes nothing and no one is as it seems, and their heist has much bigger consequences than they expected. Infused with Welsh folklore and mythology, this beautifully written, otherworldly stand-alone fantasy packs a punch as it examines topics relating to power, agency, and accountability. It features a twisty plot that is full of surprises, well-developed and grounded characters with fully formed backstories, funny moments as well as deeply emotional ones, a touch of romance—and an adorable dog companion (who survives in the end). Characters are assumed White; Mer is bisexual, and Ifanna is lesbian.

A gorgeous, intricate fantasy. (Fantasy. 14-adult)

FAMILY OF LIARS

Lockhart, E.
Delacorte (320 pp.)
$19.99 | May 3, 2022
978-0-593-48585-9

This prequel to We Were Liars (2014) takes place in 1987 as 17-year-old Carrie Sinclair faces her first summer at the family’s Massachusetts vacation property without her youngest sister, Rosemary.

Ten-year-old Rosemary drowned the previous summer while swimming alone. Carrie’s parents and remaining sisters, 16-year-old Penny and 14-year-old Bess, endure the loss with characteristic Sinclair stoicism, but Carrie finds it difficult to repress her sorrow, even with the aid of codeine pills to numb her pain. When Rosemary’s ghost appears to her, she is bewildered by the specter but accepts her intermittent appearances and comfortably mundane requests. Even more unexpected are the arrivals on Beechwood Island of George, Major, and Pfeff, friends of Carrie’s cousin Yardley. The boys’ presence, a deviation from the Sinclair family’s usual routine, sets into motion an unforeseen chain of events that ultimately entangles the three oldest Sinclair sisters. Lockhart’s stark, evocative prose captures the emotions of a grieving teenage girl paralyzed by the weight of her parents’ expectations and plagued by a perpetual sense of inadequacy. The novel is framed as a story that present-day Carrie tells the ghost of her deceased son, Johnny, who asks Carrie to reveal “the absolute worst thing you ever did, back then.” Her response is a haunting confession about family allegiances; the arbitrary rules of powerful, moneyed White families; and the strength required to bear witness to terrible truths.

Beautiful and devastating. (family tree, map, author’s note) (Fiction. 13-18)
READY WHEN YOU ARE
Lonesborough, Gary
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-338-74954-0

Two First Australian teens fall for each other in secret. Summer on the Mish means plenty of time for 17-year-old Jackson to spend with his two best mates and girlfriend, Tesh. But try as he might, Jackson can't perform during sex. He blames the grog. But when cute, mysterious Tomas arrives, released from juvie and visiting Jackson's family for Christmas, it's clear there might be more to the story. Forced to share a room with Tomas, Jackson connects with him over art. When the boys realize their mutual attraction, life gets sizzlingly complicated. At first, they keep things quiet; no one on the Mish can know. But the harder they fall, the harder it is to keep their relationship a secret—and the less Jackson and Tomas want to. Published in Australia in 2021 as The Boy From the Mish, Yuin author Lonesborough's YA debut is a sweet will-they, won't-they romance with welcome Indigenous Australian representation. What starts as a slow-burn love story riddled with internalized homophobia blossoms into a beautiful relationship alongside discussions of racism and classism. The first-person present-tense narration offers a sense of immediacy that makes every moment count, from raucous parties to romantic bushwalks. The sights, sounds, and inhabitants of the fictional rural Koori community, which is informed by Lonesborough's own life, are richly rendered.

An affirming, textured coming-out story. (author's note) (Fiction. 14-18)

INAUGURAL BALLERS
The True Story of the First US Women's Olympic Basketball Team
Maraniss, Andrew
Viking (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-35124-6

The underdog story of America's first women's Olympic basketball team plays out in this thoughtful exploration of social change. Soon after James Naismith invented basketball in 1891, girls and women began enthusiastically playing the sport. However, it wasn't until the passage of Title IX in 1972 that American schools were required to provide equal opportunities, allowing female athletes to compete at the same level (though not with the same funding) as their male counterparts. In 1973, the International Olympic Committee added women's basketball to the 1976 Games in Montreal. Building the squad from the 1973 World University Games team and open tryouts, basketball pioneer Mildred Barnes enabled coaches Billie Moore and Sue Gunter to assemble a scrappy team capable of medaling when no one (not even USA Basketball executive director Bill Will) thought it possible. Maraniss explores decades of misogyny and sexism, generations of systemic racism, and White feminists' shortcomings when it came to race that surrounded the humble beginnings of what became a true Olympic powerhouse: As of 2021, the U.S. women's team has won seven straight gold medals. Interviews with athletes from the 1976 Olympics enhance the invigorating narrative, enriching a book that will stick with readers long after they put it down. Weaving women's basketball into a textured account of a society in flux, Maraniss' latest will appeal to a broad audience.

A winning story full of heart, camaraderie, and power. (photo credits, source notes, bibliography, rosters, statistics, box scores, timeline) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
Tragedy and paranormal gifting seem to stalk the Torres family in this gripping paranormal family drama. In the aftermath of their mother’s murder, sisters Graciela, 18, and Mercedes, 19, have diverged from their once-shared dreams to pursue college and escape their hometown of Eagle Pass, Texas. Mercy has sought the protection and power she finds in relationships with men, while Grace has retreated into a smaller world at home, writing and drawing in her journals and getting lost in her mind, where she grapples with her family inheritance—the uninvited dreamlike echoes that invade her waking consciousness. After the tragic loss of Mercy’s young son, Alexander, the visions intensify, and memories of an earlier tumultuous time spent in Mexico come rushing back. Dark foreboding and deep love mingle, but the mystery of how they are connected to Grace drives the page-turning plot. Rich with symbolism, allusions, and haunted psyches, there is a gothic edge to McCall’s magical realism. Evoking a strong sense of place, the borderlands of the Rio Grande Valley are a character in their own right, and anyone familiar with Mexican folklore will see the echoes of La Llorona’s tale of love and loss. This is a breathtaking story of sisterhood, familia, fighting the demons of generational trauma and femicide, and moving forward with fresh dreams despite the scars.

A nouveau gothic tale with roots as deep as mesquite and a heart as wide as the Texas sky. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

Trapped in Ohio and tortured by others’ expectations of “normal,” nonbinary Irish and Lebanese American River McIntyre can no more imagine freedom than the animals at the local aquarium can imagine the ocean. That is, until an unexpected encounter propels them into the overwhelming waters of self-discovery. A man-of-war is not a jellyfish, and River McIntyre can’t be the White daughter their Lebanese mother wants or please their swim coach, but they don’t know why they are unhappy. When Indy Waits, a White, unapologetically queer former classmate, resurfaces during River’s school field trip to the marine life theme park SeaPlanet, River confronts repressed memories and feelings by diving into the shark tank. At first, Indy wants nothing to do with the charismatic and self-destructive River, but their lives keep colliding as if pulled together by the tides. Spanning a somber year of high school into adulthood, this blend of romance and coming-of-age story depicts a refreshingly messy journey of self-discovery and acceptance. Internalized racism and trauma create a fraught dynamic in River’s relationship with their mother, which McCarthy navigates with nuance. Poignant, self-reflective prose is bolstered by carefully crafted, overarching marine themes and imagery. Love plays a significant role in River’s growth, but neither dependence on a partner nor a dramatic, teen-movie coming-out moment are what carry them into a healthier life.

A beautiful and relentless current of emotion. (Fiction. 14-18)

While one cousin grapples with murder, another seeks revenge in this Edgar Allen Poe–inspired sequel to The Initial Insult (2022). Picking up where the first novel ended, this duology closer once again follows Tress Montor in mostly White, small-town Amontillado, Ohio. Still looking for answers about her parents’ mysterious disappearance 7 years ago, Tress is also haunted à la “The Tell-Tale Heart” by the murder of Felicity T urnado, whom she entombed alive in the previous entry. Alternating with her first-person narration are chapters from her often taunted cousin, Kermit “Ribbit” Usher. Reminiscent of the title character in Poe’s “Hop-Frog,” Ribbit plans for a deadly revenge against his tormentors as well as a heroic rescue of Felicity and a family-ordered killing. As before, the alternating point-of-view chapters, with taut storytelling, dark twists, and allusions to Poe, effectively play off one another. Reinforcing the converging storylines are interspersed cryptic free-verse poems by Rue, a caged orangutan who lives at the illegal exotic animal attraction owned by Tress’ grandfather. The overall effect this time ups the mystery, intensity, and horror (emphasis on the latter!), with a satisfying ending delivering answers about ongoing family questions and clashes. Readers must be familiar with the first book to fully appreciate this one.

Masterfully modernizing the gothic horror genre, McGinnis outdoes herself. (Thriller. 14-18)
LAKELORE
Mclemore, Anna-Marie
Feiwel & Friends (304 pp.)
$18.99 | March 8, 2022
978-1-250-77493-4

The rising waters of a hidden world threaten to drown Bastián and Lore, two trans nonbinary Mexican American teens, in the truths and pasts they’ve tried to cast away.

No one believes the legends about the world beneath the lake anymore. No one has seen it except Bastián Silvano and Lore García. The world wouldn’t open when Bastián tried to show it to anyone else—not until Lore needed a place to hide on a day long before they knew one another’s names. Now, a mistake Lore desperately wants to leave behind has moved their family to the lakeshore, but the underwater world is not the same quiet refuge. It’s filled with living papier-mâché alebrijes, each one a representation of Bastián’s anxieties. As the once-secluded world swells above the surface, the lake’s seiches pull Bastián and Lore together again. In characteristically majestic prose, McLemore crafts vivid magic that balances scenes of overwhelming, unregulated emotions given life by the lake with soothing, sincere moments of love, self-affirmation, and gentle humor. The primary characters, Bastián (who has ADHD), and Lore (who is dyslexic), have family and friends who truly see them even as they confront trauma and internalized shame. Affinity draws them to one another, helping them toward growth that is significant because it does not erase their neurodivergence and because it is personal, not reliant on codependence.

A beauty both bright and deep. (author’s note) (Fantasy. 14-18)

SELF-MADE BOYS
A Great Gatsby Remix
Mclemore, Anna-Marie
Feiwel & Friends (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-250-62414-7

A reimagining of The Great Gatsby that counters Fitzgerald’s tale of hegemonic power, centering people with marginalized identities.

Seventeen-year-old trans boy Nicholás Caraveo is ready to start his career as a Wall Street analyst, hoping to provide financial security for his beet-farming family in Wisconsin. He’s excited to live near his cousin Daisy in West Egg, where she’s promised to set him up for success, but is shocked to discover that Daisy has lightened her skin and hair to pass as White and hide their shared Latine heritage from her rich, racist promised fiancé, Tom. Feeling unmoored in a sea of racism, classism, and toxic masculinity, Nick is drawn to Jay Gatsby, his enigmatic neighbor whose glamorous parties are infamous. Jay, who is also gay and trans, shows Nick the ropes of stealth living and crossing class lines. Despite their undeniable chemistry, Nick agrees to help Jay win over Daisy. The duo teams up with Jay and Daisy’s friend Jordan to give Daisy a dazzling debutante season. The tightly structured plot twists are compelling and satisfying for Gatsby fans, critics, and neophytes alike, avoiding and subverting tropes and giving the main quartet the happy endings they deserve. In this absolutely stunning work, McLemore delivers their signature lyrical prose and rich symbolism. The exquisite slow-burn gay romance is surrounded by Sapphic relationships, lavender marriages, and queer community, giving authentic representation of queer lives in the 1920s.

Richly imagined, fiercely tender, and achingly beautiful. (content warning, author’s note) (Historical fiction. 13-18)

NOTHING MORE TO TELL
McManus, Karen M.
Delacorte (308 pp.)
978-0-593-17590-3 PLB
978-0-593-17592-7 PLB

A budding reporter returns to her old school and reopen a cold case murder.

Four years ago in Sturgis, Massachusetts, three Saint Ambrose eighth grade students found the murdered body of Mr. Larkin, a beloved new English teacher, in the woods behind the prep school’s campus. The culprit was never caught, and the case remained unsolved. Soon after, Brynn Gallagher’s family moved to Chicago, but her father has been transferred back to their hometown, and now she’s going to finish up her senior year at Saint Ambrose. Brynn is a promising investigative journalist, and after she nabs an internship with a true-crime podcast, she decides to look into finally solving the murder of her favorite teacher—even if it means deceiving her peers. Tripp Talbot was Brynn’s best friend in middle school, but they became estranged after Tripp humiliated her in front of their classmates. He also happens to be one of the kids who found Mr. Larkin’s body, and the lies he told the police haunt him to this day. As secrets unravel in Brynn’s pursuit of the truth, Tripp and Brynn reconcile and become closer. This thrilling novel hits all the right spots, with red herrings and twists galore. Perspective shifts between Brynn and Tripp (with a couple of flashback breaks) tell a character-driven story with family drama, plenty of buried secrets, and lovely romantic vibes. Most characters are White.

An edge-of-your-seat page-turner; the strongest yet from a master of the genre. (Thriller. 14-18)
“This bloodcurdling anthology soars.”

OUR SHADOWS HAVE CLAWS
15 Latin American Monster Stories
Ed. by Méndez, Yamile Sáied & Amparo Ortiz
Illus. by Ricardo López Ortiz
Algonquin (448 pp.)
$19.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-64375-183-2

Fifteen tales full of the macabre and creatures that roam at twilight offer plenty of chills and thrills in this anthology inspired by Latin American folklore and legends.

“Be warned, this story is both a lesson and a curse. Most stories are.” So begins Chantel Acevedo’s strong opener, “The Nightingale and the Lark,” a dreamy tale of star-crossed lovers from families who are at odds over how best to handle monsters in Cuba. Love and loss intertwine across several stories, often superbly dissected through the lenses of gender, sexuality, and, crucially, gender-based violence. In Gabriela Martins’ stellar “Bloodstained Hands Like Yours,” 18-year-old Olivia survives on the streets of Brazil, where the rotten Corpo-seco targets and kills other unhoused people. To save the girl she loves, Olivia must brave her fears and traumas. In Racquel Marie’s “La Patasola,” a queer girl’s coming out turns deadly when her boyfriend’s aggression leads to the appearance of La Patasola, a blood-soaked spirit from Colombia. Colorism and racism thread through numerous tales. The horrors of modern U.S.–led capitalism and the consequences of environmental destruction—see Julia Alvarez’s poignant “Leave No Tracks,” featuring a more-than-human family of ciguapas in the Dominican Republic—round out a few more emergent themes. Dramatic black-and-white art enhances the suspense. The combination of recognizable names from young adult literature and superlative stories on a range of themes makes this collection a winner.

This bloodcurdling anthology soars. (Horror anthology. 14-18)

WIND DAUGHTER
Meyer, Joanna Ruth
Page Street (352 pp.)
$17.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-64567-436-8

Old, wild magic is tearing the world apart, and a 17-year-old girl is the only one who can bind it.

The child of a weaver and a storyteller who used to be the North Wind, Satu North is a girl who appreciates her solitary life in a remote mountain house alongside her beloved parents and the bees she keeps. But Satu’s family’s story is still unfolding: When the bargain her father once made to become a mortal finally catches up to them, the Unraveling begins, and everything she knows and loves is gone. However, the daughter of the North Wind has a power of her own, and if she claims it, she may be able to rebuild the world. But where she goes, the Winter Lord—menacing yet strangely familiar—follows, yearning to take the power of the North Wind for himself. This stand-alone companion to Meyer’s Echo North (2019) weaves a powerful, beautiful spell in a storyline threaded with fairy-tale magic and heartwarming romance. Satu’s debilitating anxiety and her uncertainty about being worthy of calling herself the hero of her own story are well written and, combined with a kindness that becomes her most powerful weapon, contribute to her refreshing characterization. Satu has dark hair and brown skin like her mother; other characters read as White.

A rich, romantic tale of identity, agency, and love. (Fantasy. 14-18)

TORCH
Miller-Lachmann, Lyn
Carolrhoda (328 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-72841-568-0

The brightest torches burn quickly.

Readers barely have a chance to get to know 17-year-old Pavol Bartoš, a young man whose bright future was extinguished when the oppressive Czechoslovak Communist Party, or KSC, government denied his application to attend university and instead directed him to report for duty as a miner. Fueled by a desire to confront the unfair, authoritarian regime and guided by altruistic (if innocent) ideals, Pavol and his friends draft a letter that they plan to present to the government office in Prague Castle. When this plan falls apart, Pavol is resigned to what he believes is his last, terrible option: death. Pavol follows the example of real-life activist Jan Palach, a student who set himself ablaze in 1969 as an act of political protest against the KSC. Pavol’s untimely death has unforeseen consequences for his friends—gay former school bully Štěpán; bookish neurodiverse Tomáš; and Pavol’s newly pregnant girlfriend, Lída. Readers will be on the edges of their seats with fear as they follow the social, psychological, and physical fallout for this trio as they deal with the consequences of Pavol’s actions while fighting for their own brief moments of happiness and hope. The story presents an unflinching look at the toll of authoritarianism; it’s a tale that will inspire readers to examine modern politics and the need for people to stand up for personal rights before human torches are once again lit.

Equally terrifying and captivating. (discussion questions, author’s note, historical note) (Historical fiction. 14-18)
BEATING HEART BABY
Min, Lio
Flatiron Books (352 pp.)
$18.99 | July 26, 2022
978-1-250-81909-3

Music is at the heart of this love letter to Los Angeles, anime, and art.

Santi, who describes himself as “mixed” and has a Filipino mother, mistakenly leaked a song by Memo, his online best friend, who ghosted him after it went viral. After the breakup makes him spiral out of control, he moves to LA from Florida for a fresh start with Aya, his mother’s queer best friend from childhood and the guardian who has cared for him since his mother died when he was 7. He arrives at his new high school for marching-band camp, where he is welcomed by everyone but Suwa. Suspicious yet enamored by the new kid, Suwa, who is Korean and Japanese, is a singer/songwriter whose family disapproves of his transitioning and his quest for stardom. The two boys soon move from friends to something more. Min writes with finesse and care, grappling with the complexities of navigating the music industry and growing up queer. Santi and Suwa are full-fledged characters whose posturing, developed as defenses against homophobia, racism, and transphobia, is grounded by their chosen family. Like a vinyl record, the story is divided into an A-side, narrated by Santi, and a B-side, narrated by Suwa, offering singular points of view through their tempestuous relationship and fledgling artistic careers.

A lyrical, rhythmic, and promising debut, this queer romance is a hit. (Romance. 13-18)

SHUNA’S JOURNEY
Miyazaki, Hayao
Trans. by Alex Dudok de Wit
First Second (160 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov 1, 2022
978-1-250-84652-5

A dangerous quest to feed an impoverished land leads to chance encounters and awe-inspiring sights.

Shuna, the prince of a humble, struggling country, acts on the advice of a dying traveler from an Eastern land to seek out seeds that will allow the story to move nimbly from one larger-than-life spectacle to another. The pages read right-to-left manga style, while large panels and minimal dialogue create an immediate, immersive experience for readers. The narration sits outside or along the edges of panels, allowing the lush visuals maximum room to impress. Afterwords from the author and translator describe the story’s roots in a Tibetan folktale as well as comparisons to Miyazaki’s later animated works; this story, translated from Japanese, was originally published in Japan in 1983 before Miyazaki rose to fame with Studio Ghibli. The story’s cultural origins are cued through characters’ garb and other visual elements.

A reimagined folktale as grand as its painted visuals are sublime. (Graphic fiction. 12-18)
A complicated romance unfolds in the wake of World War I. In 1916, Harry Singer, a carefree, floppy-haired boy of 19, entered the war effort. He was sent to the front and went missing one month later, just as then-16-year-old Margot Allen, the pretty blond, blue-eyed vicar’s daughter he was sweet on, learned she was pregnant and was packed off to a home for girls in her condition. Now it’s 1919, and Margot is returning from her secretarial course in the big city of Durham to her North Yorkshire village to celebrate the first Christmas since the war ended. She’ll get to see 2-year-old James, who is being raised as her brother. Harry, who had been a prisoner of war, will also be returning for the holidays. Since learning he was alive, Margot hasn’t found a way to tell him about James and has avoided communicating with Harry altogether. The novel’s strong pacing alternates between wartime and its aftermath, vividly capturing postwar life with its continuing food shortages and the devastating loss of life both in combat and to the influenza pandemic. The experiences of Margot’s older brother, Stephen, show the lasting impact of the war on someone who survived many months in the trenches. At the heart of this story lies a tale of young love interrupted by the realities of war and life’s complications.

A textured historical romance that is far more than the sum of its parts. (historical note) (Historical fiction. 13-18)

In the final installment of the Loop trilogy, the ongoing mission to take down the world’s operating system becomes a battle to save humanity. Ever unpredictable, Oliver opens this follow-up to *The Block* (2021) from the perspective of an Alt named Chester. The youngest member of the government’s science team, which is housed in a protective Arc, Chester goes rogue after questioning the government’s leader and discovering that Happy, the world’s operating system, is planning to end humanity in nine days. Following a surprising connection with the Loop rebels, the story transitions back to the Loopers’ ongoing fight to destroy Happy. With only days left to achieve this dangerous goal, the taut narration builds in intensity, with chapter headings serving as a countdown clock. The author continues with what he does best, weaving twists and turns, difficult decisions, adrenaline-fueled confrontations with Happy and its minions, and a touch of humor into a story filled with teamwork, friendship, hope, and love. This time, with the end of the world looming, the narrative becomes more existential as the characters consider what it means to be human. Issues of privilege, addiction, fear, and PTSD will resonate with today’s post-pandemic readers. Equally rewarding is that this third book is not simply an extension of the overall story arc, but a culmination that ties it together with its predecessors.

A thrilling, thought-provoking, and ultimately deeply satisfying series conclusion. (Dystopian. 14-18)

Two sisters escape their toxic home lives and go on to have markedly different experiences. Growing up in rural Nigeria with an abusive Mama and a silent Papa, sisters Cheta and Zam use opposing strategies to survive. Older sister Cheta deliberately baits their mother and doesn’t hide her emotions. Zam hides in plain sight, avoiding conflict, staying quiet, and remaining dutiful. This results in the sisters having a contentious relationship that borders on hatred due to Mama’s preference for Zam. Narrated in alternating first-person points of view, the novel tells each sister’s story in ways that are moving and show how understandable the decisions they make are, even when they can’t empathize with one another. When their rich Aunty Sophie and Uncle Emeke invite Zam to move to Abuja with them, Zam suddenly experiences wealth like she never before imagined. Cheta, on the other hand, is left behind: Hurt, jealous, and exhausted, she flees to Benin City to crash with a friend and try to make ends meet. When the sisters return home for the Christmas holiday, it is clear they are on divergent paths. Onoseta explores a range of social issues, including class, colorism, intergenerational trauma, and colonization, through a masterfully crafted and diverse cast of characters. This non-linear narrative presents a universal story: girls striving to find their way in a patriarchal society.

A stunning and emotional debut. (Fiction. 14-18)
rums about a secret treasure hidden on the property resurface, and Min and her neighbor CeCe start to get ideas. Meanwhile, Min reconnects with Mary and gets romantically involved with Duke’s assistant manager, Eli, just as events start to escalate dangerously. Padilla’s debut is an impactful, no-holds-barred exploration of grief and trauma. With a main character who is smart, cynical, irrepresibly angry, and seemingly intent on self-sabotage, this book takes readers on a beautifully textured journey that combines equal parts coming-of-age novel, heist thriller, and caustic commentary on systemic social inequalities. Despite the seriousness of these themes, when the ending comes, it’s joyful, hopeful, and, above all, earned.

A powerful, genre-blending page-turner. (Fiction. 14-18)

The fall of 1969 brings more mystery, suspense, and self-knowledge to twin brothers Alastair and Peter Montague—this time involving a rock ‘n’ roll tune that may drive listeners to suicide.

Fans will be thrilled to learn that this sequel is as engaging as The Witch’s Hand (2020) while providing just enough background to draw in new readers. The twins’ friend Rachel Bradford—whose cruel father was killed in a car crash—now hangs with their circle, learning from their magic teacher, Rowan. The power of music is a recurrent thread: Former rock singer Gideon Drake watches a performance by the twins’ group, Bony Fingers, and his appearance stirs Al’s hero worship and Pete’s blossoming feelings of same-sex attraction. But why is Gideon really in Port Howl? Will the teenagers be allowed to become the newest members of a highly secret magical faction? Is new arrival Uncle Eli truly evil? Intertwining plots are set against the backdrop of an atmospheric setting that includes a decrepit plantation, a derelict hospital, and an underground club—Harry Potter meets The Hunger Games.

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seventeen-year-old Lia Sawyer has just dumped her latest short-lived boyfriend when her eccentric Grandma Matilda, who has been missing, invites her and her older sister, Emma, to compete in a summerlong contest in Mirror Lake, Wisconsin, a lakefront resort town known for its magic shows and as the headquarters of the Society of American Conjurers. Her first day there, Lia has a meet-cute with Beckett Blackwell, the handsome, college-bound grandson of Henry Blackwell, a legendary local magician who’s also Matilda’s first husband and former stage partner. Despite their instant chemistry, the two must balance their attraction with their individual desires to win. The romance sizzles with slow-burn longing. The story also explores the sexist culture of this community. Lia is a clever and delightful protagonist, and Beckett is a brooding and selfless love interest. The author crafts captivating descriptions of the various magic acts and puzzles with slow-burn longing. The story also explores the sexist culture of this community. Lia is a clever and delightful protagonist, and Beckett is a brooding and selfless love interest. The author crafts captivating descriptions of the various magic acts and ensures that even the supporting characters have fleshed-out storylines. Most characters are White; Beckett’s mother is from India.

An enchanting enemies-to-lovers romance. (Romance. 12-18)

LIA AND BECKETT’S ABRACADABRA
Parks, Amy Noelle
Amulet/Abrams (304 pp.)
$17.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-497-5344-2

Two teens from rival families fall for each other during a stage-magic competition.

Seventeen-year-old Lia Sawyer has just dumped her latest short-lived boyfriend when her eccentric Grandma Matilda, who has been missing, invites her and her older sister, Emma, to compete in a summerlong contest in Mirror Lake, Wisconsin, a lakefront resort town known for its magic shows and as the headquarters of the Society of American Conjurers. Her first day there, Lia has a meet-cute with Beckett Blackwell, the handsome, college-bound grandson of Henry Blackwell, a legendary local magician who’s also Matilda’s first husband and former stage partner. Despite their instant chemistry, the two must balance their attraction with their individual desires to win. The romance sizzles with slow-burn longing. The story also explores the sexist culture of this community. Lia is a clever and delightful protagonist, and Beckett is a brooding and selfless love interest. The author crafts captivating descriptions of the various magic acts and ensures that even the supporting characters have fleshed-out storylines. Most characters are White; Beckett’s mother is from India.

An enchanting enemies-to-lovers romance. (Romance. 12-18)

THE 9:09 PROJECT
Parsons, Mark H.
Delacorte (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov 15, 2022
978-0-593-30975-9

Photography becomes more than just a hobby to Jamison when he uses an art project to reconnect with his family and friends after his mother’s death.

Jamison Deever, a 17-year-old implied White Californian boy, has developed the habit of taking a photo on the same corner—the intersection of Fig and Gardena—at 9:09 p.m., the exact time his mother died two years ago. When he forgets her birthday and worries that means he’s forgetting her, Jamison decides to use the 9:09 photos to keep his mom close by looking more carefully at his subjects. As he learns to spot and draw out connections to the strangers he photographs, he also cultivates deeper relationships with the people in his life. In this brilliant literary portrait, Jamison’s charming adoration of his sister, Ollie; authentic (and frequent) cursing; and lively, energetic demeanor skillfully complement the more cerebral examinations of grief, art, love. The chapters open with intriguing quotes from photographer Dorothea Lange, and the technical jargon is accurate but not distracting. Gifting readers with a wryly funny, extremely intelligent, and sweetly romantic contemporary novel full of biting sarcasm and threaded through with tender yet powerful emotions, Parsons asks them to consider questions of meaning and value in their own lives.

Exquisitely drawn characters and deeply authentic emotions elevate this to something greater than the sum of its parts. (Fiction. 14-18)

FOUR FOR THE ROAD
Reilly, K.J.
Atheneum (288 pp.)
$19.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-66590-228-1

Three New Jersey teens and a semise-nile senior citizen, all grieving family losses, take a road trip to Graceland.

All four are devastated, vulnerable, and looking for ways beyond therapy groups to ease the pain. Henry seizes the chance to carry his beloved wife’s ashes to Memphis, and Sloane comes along to steal and ride a Harley down Beale Street wearing her father’s leather jacket. Will’s motives are less defined until the sight of a group of young cancer patients outside St. Jude’s helps him with the gnawing loss of his little brother to neuroblastoma. Unlikely as it seems, readers may end up rooting for 17-year-old cyberstalker Asher, who narrates in snarky, Holden Caulfield–style sentences. Asher is catfishing Grace, the daughter of the drunk driver who killed his mother—and plans to murder Grace’s dad. (Though set up to be a victim, Grace turns out to be a redoubtable scene-stealer and one of the book’s best surprises.) So overwhelming is the load of trauma they each carry that it’s hard to see how their journey could end on a buoyant note, but Reilly pulls it off by developing rich friendships while artfully slipping in comical elements on the way to a climactic whirl of laughter, tears, budding romance, and well-placed insights. Not to mention references throughout to Kierkegaard, The Little Prince, stages of grief, and coping strategies like self-forgiveness. The cast presents White.

A heady round trip, heavy baggage and all, from heartbreak to healing. (Fiction. 13-17)
A Girl’s Guide to Love & Magic
Rigaud, Debbie
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-68174-1

A sophomore with a lot on her mind must come to terms with the Vodou in her blood.

Cicely Destin turns 15 on Labor Day this year, which, as a Haitian American girl from Brooklyn, also coincides with her favorite annual event, the West Indian Day Parade. Things have been especially difficult since her Grandma Rose passed away, taking with her the last civil connection between Cicely’s mother and Tati Mimose, her beloved aunt who is a Vodouista. Cicely’s mother doesn’t appreciate the taboo magical influence her sister has had on Cicely’s life ever since a particularly scary incident when Cicely was 9. But this year Cicely has high hopes for her birthday, including time spent with her best friend soaking up the parade, meeting her favorite rapper (by way of Tati Mimose’s rising social media fame), and maybe even getting close to a cute boy from school. Tati Mimose’s getting possessed by an especially eccentric spirit during a botched tarot reading is unexpected and supernaturally stressful but doesn’t make the uniquely Brooklyn Caribbean celebrations of the day any less pleasurable for Cicely. Rigaud explores many elements of Haitian and Afro-Caribbean culture thoughtfully and with an admirable vulnerability as Cicely adventures down Eastern Parkway navigating stigma and magic, devils and allies, family legacies and shame en route to a rich, magical sort of self-discovery.

A profound visual testimony to how much changed while we all had to stay inside and how much—painfully, mournfully—stayed the same.

Reynolds’ poetry and Griffin’s art perform a captivating dance on pages of mixed-media collage and emotive reflection on the pronounced threats facing a contemporary Black family. In “Breath One,” the opening of the verse narrative, the unnamed boy protagonist struggles with the onslaught of TV news coverage of the systemic violence and death experienced by Black people—coverage that is both overwhelming and insufficient. The television then forms the backdrop of the narrator’s concerns for his bedridden father, who is struggling with an acute respiratory illness while isolated in a bedroom. The art is sometimes spare and monochrome before shifting to a bright and striking palette as Griffin deploys aesthetics that enliven the rich flow and rhythm of Reynolds’ words. The two skillfully go back and forth like rap duos of old, each with a distinct voice that enriches the other. The result is an effective critique of the ways we’ve failed as a society to care for one another. By “Breath Three,” however, a complicated optimism shines through for a family that perseveres through closeness and connection despite what is broadcast from their TV. While grounded in 2020, many of the issues touched on explicitly are very much not over and not even new, making this remarkable work both timely and timeless.

Artful, cathartic, and most needed. (conversation between creators) (Illustrated poetry. 12-18)

AIN’T BURNED ALL THE BRIGHT
Reynolds, Jason
Illus. by Jason Griffin
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (384 pp.)
$19.99 | Jan. 11, 2022
978-1-5344-3946-7

A chilling story collection following a sprawling Cherokee family through many generations.

Starting with Ama Wilson in 1839 and ending in 2039, this spooky speculative assortment features stories from times historical, present, and yet to come. Although each of Cherokee author Rogers’ stories could stand alone (and versions of some were previously published individually), placing them in chronological order and thus in dialogue with each other results in a thematically richer read and allows readers the delight of tracing the family trees in the frontmatter to situate the characters in relation to other protagonists. Ama’s opening story, set during a forcible relocation to Indian Territory, sets the tone: Ama thinks her family’s main worries are Texas Rangers and disease; she also faces a supernatural nightmare. The tight focus on families and the specificity of their experiences, along with the matter-of-fact text, directly address the way persecution of the Cherokee Nation morphs over the decades. Rogers’ grounded, smooth writing style—juggling first-, third-, and even second-person points of view—makes magical elements (from milder hauntings to monsters like vampires, werewolves, and zombies) as threatening as human villains. The stakes remain high: The short story format means any character one meets could later die. Exquisite white-on-black line art from Cherokee artist Edwards sets the eerie mood. The use of the Noto Sans Cherokee typeface and Edwards’ hand-drawn Cherokee syllabary beautifully integrates written language into the book’s design.

A creepy and artful exploration of a haunting heritage. (glossary) (Horror. 12-adult)

MAN MADE MONSTERS
Rogers, Andrea L.
Illus. by Jeff Edwards
Levine Querido (320 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-64614-179-1

AImplausible. Artful, cathartic, and most needed. (conversation between creators) (Illustrated poetry. 12-18)
**THE GHOSTS OF ROSE HILL**
Romero, R.M.
Peachtree Teen (452 pp.)
$18.99 | May 10, 2022
978-1-68263-338-0

A magical realist romance told in verse explores the many transitions of life: from homelands to new homes, from childhood to adulthood, from life to death and back again.

The daughter of two immigrant legacies, Ilana Lopez knows what it is to live with ghosts of the past. On her mother’s side, there is a 500-year-long Jewish journey from Spain to Cuba to Miami Beach, and on her father’s side, a flight from 20th-century totalitarianism in the former Czechoslovakia. It’s the phantom of her family’s struggles that sees her exiled to Prague the summer of her 16th year: Separating Ilana from her friends and her beloved violin, her parents hope she will turn her attention to preparing for a stable, successful, American future rather than dreams of music. In Prague, she stays with her wild Aunt Žofie and stumbles upon a long-abandoned Jewish cemetery on the hill behind her house. Lonely and longing for understanding, Ilana learns about the heavy Jewish history of Prague as the ghost of a blue-eyed boy with dark curls wends his way into her beating heart. The past is alive in Ilana’s Prague, and it’s alive in this story that combines modern adolescent concerns, magical realism, and religious themes in pristine verse. An ode to the Diaspora and to the many folktales and myths populating Ilana’s mixed heritage, Romero’s luscious work dives into dark, painful caverns and emerges in sprays of enthralling hope. A must-read for lost souls everywhere. (Verse novel. 13-18)

**FULL FLIGHT**
Schumacher, Ashley
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-250-77978-6

What happens when you find someone who truly sees you as you are? In her small Texas town, Anna James wears Christmas socks year-round and secretly worries she’s never going to be good enough. She’s struggling to perform her part of a marching band duet and risks having it assigned to someone else. But Weston Ryan—the other half of the duet and a social outcast accused of destroying the school’s memorial tree—reluctantly agrees to help her practice. Weston excels in music but, distracted and upset by his parents’ recent divorce, has trouble keeping his grades up. As Weston and Anna grow closer and inevitably fall for each other, Anna lies to her parents about where she’s spending time, knowing they wouldn’t approve of her seeing him. Echoing beautifully throughout the novel is Weston’s imagining of the last Kaua’i ‘ō’ō bird, the final survivor of his species who in 1987 flew toward a scientist’s recording of a bird call, searching for family who would never come. Schumacher’s gorgeous writing immerses readers in the aching emotions of close friendship and first love before delivering a gut punch of an ending. Told in alternating first-person perspectives, the narrative memorably portrays anxiety and depression without explicitly naming either, weaving these subjects into well-drawn everyday scenes. Main characters are implied White. A powerful, unforgettable story of loneliness and belonging. (Fiction. 12-18)

**I MISS YOU, I HATE THIS**
Saedi, Sara
Poppy/Little, Brown (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-316-62982-9

Two best friends navigate life and love as the world teeters on the brink of disaster.

Parisa Naficy—a well-off, Harvard-bound, Iranian American valedictorian—has a privileged life, but she’s consumed by extreme anxiety that she unsuccessfully attempts to hide. Beautiful, cool Mexican American Gabriela Gonzales leads a financially precariously existent life with her lesbian moms and is haunted by their pasts; both women are estranged from their families due to their sexuality. The girls balance parental and cultural expectations with their own dreams. Their unlikely friendship withstood years of high school drama, but when the fictional ademavirus becomes a global pandemic disproportionately affecting young people, life as they know it is put on indefinite hold. The isolation brings out the best and worst in people, forcing both girls to reexamine themselves, their relationships, and what they value most as they work toward a new normal. Saedi’s sensitive, witty writing style, both personable and deeply personal, makes this work more than yet another Covid fictionalization. The narration includes text message and email threads, reflecting the breakdowns of time and communication experienced in lockdown. The heavy subject matter is masterfully handled, juxtaposing raw episodes of sickness, loss, grief, and strained bonds with heartwarming conversations and budding relationships that shine a welcome light of hope into the darkness of uncertainty. Memorable and beautifully vulnerable. (Fiction. 14-18)
“Authentic and inspiring.”

VICTORY. STAND!

Galant
Schwab, V.E.
Illus. by Manuel Sumberac
Greenwillow Books (352 pp.)
$18.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-06-283577-2

Seeking a place to call home, Olivia uncovers long-buried secrets after arriving at Gallant.

Olivia Prior has always hoped for a place to belong and a family that cares for her. Instead, she’s isolated at Merilance School for Independent Girls, with its strict matrons, shunned by students who ostracize and torment her for being mute. Olivia uses sign language, taught to her by a now-departed matron (although nobody else signs); treasures the journal belonging to the mother she doesn’t remember; and can see ghouls. When she receives a letter from her uncle, Arthur Prior, inviting her to live at his manor, Olivia leaps at the chance. However, instead of the big, welcoming family she imagined, the opulent yet run-down Gallant only holds Matthew, her irritable cousin, and kindly caretakers Hannah and Edgar. Olivia unravels the ominous secrets of both her family and the house, where ghouls lurk around every corner and the dilapidated garden gate calls to her. The evolving relationship between Olivia and her found family shine, and themes of freedom, the self, and belonging are well depicted. The gripping writing and effective incorporation of horror elements, including haunting, inkly artwork, are satisfyingly spine-tingling. Olivia’s use of sign language and her artistic talents, part of the exploration of the importance of communication, are skillfully incorporated into the overall story Olivia and the main cast are White.

Will hook readers with its gripping worldbuilding, well-rounded characters, and fantastic horror. (Fantasy. 12-adult)

I Must Betray You
Sepetys, Ruta
Philomel (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-984836-03-8

A rare look at the youth-led rebellion that toppled Romania’s Ceausescu.

Seventeen-year-old Cristian Florescu, with his spiky hair, love of poetry and English, and crush on Liliana Pavel, is as much of a rebel as it’s possible to be in Bucharest, Romania, in 1989. Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu has been in power for 24 years, and most Romanians live in poverty, exporting what they produce to unknowingly fund Ceausescu’s obscenely extravagant lifestyle. Wild dogs attack children in the streets, and secret agents are everywhere. When an agent confronts Cristian with evidence of treason—a single dollar bill tucked inside his notebook—and also offers medicine for Bunu, his sick grandfather, Cristian agrees to spy on the American diplomat family whose son he’s become friendly with. But as young Romanians gradually become aware that other countries have gained freedom from communism, they rise up in an unconquerable wave. Sepetys brilliantly blends a staggering amount of research with heart, craft, and insight in a way very few writers can. Told from Cristian’s point of view, intercut by secret police memos and Cristian’s own poetry, the novel crackles with energy; Cristian and his friends join the groundswell of young Romanians, combining pragmatism, subterfuge, hope, and daring. While the story ends with joy on Christmas Day, the epilogue recounts the betrayals and losses that follow. The last line will leave readers gasping.

Compulsively readable and brilliant. (maps, photos, author’s note, research notes, sources) (Historical fiction. 12-18)

Victory. Stand!
Raising My Fist for Justice
Smith, Tommie & Derrick Barnes
Illus. by Dawud Anyabwile
Norton Young Readers (208 pp.)
$19.95 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-324-00390-8

“We had to be seen because we were not being heard.”

Gold medalist Smith teams up with award-winning creators Barnes and Anyabwile to vividly share the freedom dreams that inspired his iconic protest at the 1968 Olympics. Born in Texas to sharecropping parents, Smith and his large family followed the Great Migration that sent thousands of Black families out of the Deep South. Landing in California, he navigated racist misconceptions from peers and authority figures alike. Arriving at San Jose State at the height of the civil rights movement, Smith met like-minded friends who balanced athletic excellence with a commitment to justice. After achieving gold and bronze, respectively, in the 200-meter sprint, Smith and John Carlos arrived at the podium prepared to make a global statement protesting racial injustice. During the playing of the U.S. national anthem, they raised black-gloved fists in support of impassioned ideals that emerged from the Black student-led Olympic Project for Human Rights. Smith navigated post-Olympics professional repercussions and remained committed to his principled stance; decades later, reverence for his protest would return in the form of honors and awards, yet the struggle to upend racial injustice continues. The black-and-white illustrations’ realism echoes the visual influences of the Black Power period. Art and text present an unflinching look at the physical and verbal racist violence of the time. This evocative undertaking extends histories of 20th-century Black struggles for new generations, reminding us to continue to be brave, courageous, and organize for change.

Authentic and inspiring. (Graphic nonfiction. 12-18)
When she learns that Alice (diagnosed with bipolar disorder) and secrets.

Mendez, a Mexican American boy hounded by depression and intrusive thoughts. For Lily, all her extra hard work means nothing.

Kasher-Okamoto has been experiencing the time loop for months, and now they're both repeating the same day. Attempting to restart time, together they go on fun adventures, research scientific solutions (which appeal to Miles), and strive to be their best selves (which Barrett suspects is the solution). All the while, it's clear their intense bonding is a slow-burn romance in the making. Both main characters are Jewish: Barrett is White, with a single mom who is bisexual; Miles has a Japanese American mother and White father. Vividly expressing the singularity of attraction, Solomon presents another inclusive, sex-positive love story featuring Jewish teens dealing with loneliness, stress, and secrets.

A swoon-y time-travel rom-com that captures the overwhelming nature of first love. (Romance. 14-18)

Dorm-mates Barrett and Miles get stuck in a Groundhog Day–like time loop reliving their first day of college classes. University of Washington first year Barrett Bloom wakes up at 6:50 a.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 21 (a date some will recognize from its Earth, Wind & Fire fame), shocked to find out that her high school nemesis, Lucie, is her new roommate. The day grows progressively worse after a science nerd named Miles humiliates her in Physics 101, she botches her newspaper staff interview, accidentally sets a frat house on fire, and gets locked out of her dorm room and is forced to sleep in the common room. But the next morning, it's still Sept. 21. On her third time reliving the day, Barrett discovers that physics prodigy Miles Kasher-Okamoto has been experiencing the time loop for months, and now they're both repeating the same day. Attempting to restart time, together they go on fun adventures, research scientific solutions (which appeal to Miles), and strive to be their best selves (which Barrett suspects is the solution). All the while, it's clear their intense bonding is a slow-burn romance in the making. Both main characters are Jewish: Barrett is White, with a single mom who is bisexual; Miles has a Japanese American mother and White father. Vividly expressing the singularity of attraction, Solomon presents another inclusive, sex-positive love story featuring Jewish teens dealing with loneliness, stress, and secrets.

A swoon-y time-travel rom-com that captures the overwhelming nature of first love. (Romance. 14-18)

Following the discovery of her older sister, Alice, self-harming on the bathroom floor, Lily grapples with her own increasingly perilous mental health.

Burdened with an ultrarigid academic schedule and a perfectionist's mindset, Lily Larkin, a 16-year-old implied White girl, daily tends off pervasive anxiety and intrusive thoughts. For Lily, all her extra hard work means survival: "I can stop my family—and myself—from unraveling." When she learns that Alice (diagnosed with bipolar disorder) will be returning home after two months of treatment, Lily braces herself for the reappearance of a sister she might not recognize. At school, she reluctantly garners the attention of Micah Mendez, a Mexican American boy hounded by depression and a troubled past. Micah, it seems, knows all about Lily thanks to his time at the same treatment center as Alice. Paired for a school art project, Lily and Micah grow closer, drawing on the power of words to express their truths to each other—and even their peers—in anonymous art installations. Lily, meanwhile, finds it hard to reestablish a relationship with Alice even as false starts send the sisters spiraling into potential calamity. A sprawling, engrossing read, Stewart's latest succeeds in mapping out the toll of anxiety disorder with scrupulous, cleareyed detail. It's mostly a hard, messy path for Lily, laden with moments of self-violence and acute tension. Above all, however, there's an overpowering sense of hope underlined by an achingly sincere message: Speak up and get help if needed.

Indispensably candid. (author's note, resources) (Fiction. 12-18)

All 16-year-old Georgia Avis ever wanted was to be an Aspera girl. It's during the summer that Georgi's dream of working at members-only resort Aspera comes true—but at a terrible cost and against the wishes of her late mother. After she finds the body of 13-year-old Ashley James, raped and dumped by the roadside, Georgia becomes entangled with Matthew and Cleo Hayes, Aspera's impossibly beautiful and rich owners, who take her under their wing. Although her first job there seems to be run-of-the-mill admin work and not quite what Georgia knows she deserves, she believes it is only a matter of time until her beauty takes her places. But even while she navigates this world of privilege and power, glamour and deceit, trying to carve a place for herself, she joins forces with Nora, Ashley's charismatic older sister, to find the culprit. Summers' latest masterful thriller takes on the world of wealth and privilege to examine questions of power, predatory behavior, and, ultimately, complicity, and agency. Readers are witnesses to a long process of grooming and to what Georgia—a naïve, earnest kid—instead believes she is experiencing. This dissonance in perspective makes for a heartbreaking, brutal, and devastatingly realistic novel. Hopeful notes come with the budding romance between Nora and Georgia. Most characters are White.

A bold, unflinching, and utterly enthralling novel. (Thriller. 14-18)
**HEROINES, RESCUERS, RABBIS, SPIES**

*Unsung Women of the Holocaust*

Swartz, Sarah Silberstein  
Ilus. by Liz Parkes  
Second Story Press (192 pp.)  
$19.95 paper | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-77260-262-3

A collective biography of nine women who took on important roles during World War II but whose courage and contributions have been overlooked.

Regina Jonas, the first female rabbi; Faye Lazebnik Schulman, a photographer documenting Jewish resistance in White Russia; and writer and journalist Rachel Eiga Auerbach, who helped record the lives of Polish Jews under the Nazi occupation: These women and the others featured in Swartz’s book came from different backgrounds (including social class, religion, nationality), spoke different languages (though many, crucially, were multilingual), and took different paths during and after the war. However, common threads run through their stories, and many made it their life goal to preserve personal accounts of the Holocaust for future generations. Each chapter begins with an attractive, stylized portrait that effectively evokes the time period; the woman’s name and dates of birth and death; and a capsule description. These personal stories are illuminating and powerful, offering ways for readers to connect with and understand the past. Swartz writes from a feminist perspective, questioning why these heroic figures went unsung and frequently even unmentioned while male heroes received praise and recognition. With one exception, she chose to focus on women who survived the war, and her personal connection becomes poignantly clear in the final chapter about her mother Regina Jonas, the first female rabbi; Faye Lazebnik Schulman, a photographer documenting Jewish resistance in White Russia; and writer and journalist Rachel Eiga Auerbach, who helped record the lives of Polish Jews under the Nazi occupation:

Phenomenally done and more necessary than ever. (author’s note, timeline, map, glossary, suggested reading)  
(Nonfiction. 12-18)

**BREATHE AND COUNT BACK FROM TEN**

*Sylvester, Natalia*  
Clarion/HarperCollins (352 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 10, 2022  
978-0-358-53686-4

Stifled by her loving but repressive parents, a teen endeavors to take charge of her own life.

Seventeen-year-old Verónica Renteria’s parents forbid many things, especially promiscuity—which includes any romantic gesture, however innocent, leading Vero to feel ashamed of her own desires. But above all, she and her younger sister, Dani, must never attract attention; her family immigrated to Florida from Peru when Vero was small, and her parents caution that their permanent resident status is tenuous. Vero feels constant pressure to make their sacrifices worthwhile, but she can’t help standing up: Numerous surgeries for her hip dysplasia have left her with scars. And ever since her parents caught her making out with a boy, they’ve treated her like she’s “impossible to scrub clean.” Even her body is out of her control since her parents handle all of her medical decisions. Swimming is her only freedom, and Vero idolizes the aquatic performers at Mermaid Cove, a popular tourist attraction. So when Mermaid Cove advertises auditions, she wonders: Could becoming a mermaid enable her to finally tell her own story? Sylvester, who has hip dysplasia herself, poignantly braids multiple issues into Vero’s story: new, vulnerable, and lyrical narration, including disability, sexism, and biculturalism. Vero’s messy but supportive relationship with Dani compassionately acknowledges the friction that can arise between disabled and nondisabled siblings, and her romance with Mexican American Alex, who deals with depression, gently explores trust and self-discovery.

Intricate, nuanced, and empowering. (author’s note)  
(Fiction. 14-18)

**ALL MY RAGE**

*Sabaa Tahir*  
Razorbill/Penguin (384 pp.)  
$19.99 | March 1, 2022  
978-0-593-20234-0

With pervasive racism coming from everyone from classmates to police officers and doctors, Juniper is a sinkhole that the estranged best friends are desperate to leave. But instead of worrying about college and his future career prospects, Salahudin is preoccupied with his mother’s kidney failure, his father’s alcoholism, his family’s deteriorating motel, and Noor, who has spoken to him in months. Orphaned Noor’s dreams of college are slowly waning; her malicious Pakistani immigrant uncle, who hates all things Pakistani, has made it clear that Noor’s future involves working behind the counter of his liquor store. Life was easier when she had Salahudin and his kind mother, Misbah, in her life, but a fight has left her unable to forgive him, at least for now. Chapters alternate between Noor’s and Salahudin’s perspectives, with snippets of Misbah’s past sprinkled throughout. This novel confronts head on the complicated realities of life in a world that is not designed for the oppressed to thrive in. Tahir brilliantly shows how interconnected societal forces shape communities and people’s lives through the accumulated impact of circumstances beyond their control: Substance abuse, debt, racism, trauma, and poverty are intricately woven together to tell a deeply moving, intergenerational story.
Takes readers on an unforgettable emotional journey. (Fiction. 14-18)

**HOTEL MAGNIFIQUE**
*Tayler, Emily J.*
Razorbill/Penguin (400 pp.)
$18.99 | April 5, 2022
978-0-593-40451-5

Every decade or so, Hotel Magnifique appears in the port city of Durc, and a few lucky people get tickets to enter; the rest must find other ways inside.

Seventeen-year-old Jani, olive-skinned with brown hair like others in the south of Verdanniere, dreams of a better life for herself and her sister, Zosa. A magnificent newspaper ad printed in bright purple ink announces that Hotel Magnifique—which transports itself to Elsewhere each midnight—is hiring. Zosa's singing voice is sure to get them in the door—why not apply? Upon entering, the sisters quickly realize that the hotel, its owner, and the mysterious doorman, Bel, handsome with his copper skin and brown eyes, have many secrets—and not all of them are good. This is a story brimming with magic, from the suminaires, with their unique magical gifts and infinite lives, to the themed guest rooms that can grow entire meals all over again. Tayler eloquently builds an immersive, believable world of magic, heavily influenced by French culture and brimming with interesting characters readers will grow to love and care about as they solve the mysteries of the hotel and free themselves from their gilded cage. The complex characters who evolve throughout the story are diverse in skin color, body type, sexual orientation, and financial means. Even those well read in the genre will enjoy some genuine surprises.

*A wondrous read for anyone searching for a bit of magic.* (Fantasy. 12-18)

**THIS PLACE IS STILL BEAUTIFUL**
*Tian, XiXi*
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$18.99 | June 7, 2022
978-0-06-308602-9

When their home is targeted in a racist attack, two sisters must deal with the aftermath and consequences.

Nineteen-year-old Margaret and seventeen-year-old Annalie Flanagan both grew up in the same Illinois town, raised by their Chinese mother after their Irish American father left when they were young. Despite these shared experiences, it often seems like they couldn’t be more different. While Annalie wants to blend in and keep her head down, Margaret keeps finding new causes to champion and new wrongs to right. People constantly comment on how they don’t look alike, as Margaret appears more Asian. When Margaret leaves for college in New York City, Annalie finally has the chance to live outside her sister’s shadow; until a racist incident brings Margaret back to town. As the sisters grapple with what it means to be mixed race and Asian American in a largely White Midwestern town, when to speak up, and whose expectations they should meet, they also struggle to navigate their relationship with each other and the ways in which they are different—and similar. About much more than just racism toward Chinese Americans, this novel deftly tackles the precarious moments surrounding the end of high school and the beginning of college, when romantic and familial relationships are complicated, changing, and all-consuming.

*Quiet yet powerful, complex, and grounded in the reality that nothing will ever be completely resolved.* (Fiction. 14-adult)

**THE HEARTBEAT OF WOUNDED KNEE (YOUNG READERS ADAPTATION)**
*Treuer, David*
Adapt. by Sheila Keenan
Viking (286 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-20347-7

Adapted for teen readers from the 2019 original, Treuer’s seminal account offers a fresh, distinct historical reconsideration.

The author’s purpose is clear from the outset: to present a deliberate counternarrative to mainstream assumptions and push back against the constrictive specter of the framing of the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 as a turning point representing the end of Native American cultures. In seven chapters spanning prehistorical times to the present, this chronicle of Indigenous communities and peoples in North America is a scintillating version reduced in length but not breadth. Beginning with a brief overview of the pre-colonization period and the ensuing violent disruptions of the Europeans, the opening chapter also covers Indigenous resistance. The next chapter depicts the role of the U.S. government in an ever increasing, violent push for assimilation via boarding schools and the Dawes Act. The further the book goes into the 20th century and the rise of Native American social action in the 1960s and 1970s, such as through the American Indian Movement, the more Treuer includes firsthand stories from his research interviews. These accounts clearly delineate the ties between the continued impact of the past and the possibilities for a viable, hard-fought future for Native American lives. This essential work ends with a review of the Standing Rock protest and its potential and asks the fundamental, yet-to-be-answered question: “What kind of country do we want to be?”

*Utterly vital in its historical prowess, essential in its portraits of lived experiences.* (notes, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
“Masterfully captures the mood and times.”

**THE MOST DAZZLING GIRL IN BERLIN**

**HELL FOLLOWED WITH US**
White, Andrew Joseph
Peachtree Teen (416 pp.)
$18.99 | June 7, 2022
978-1-68263-324-3

In the aftermath of a plague, a furious transgender boy seeks to end the movement that plans to wield him for their genocide in the name of salvation.

On Judgment Day, the Angels, a cult of White, Evangelical Christian eco-fascists, released the Flood upon the world—a plague to purge the unfaithful—but their work remains unfinished until they unleash their final weapon. Benji, a White trans boy, couldn’t escape the Angels before they injected him with Seraph, a plague mutation engineered to transform him into an abomination in control of the Flood and all its monstrous creations. However, when he’s ambushed by nonbelievers who present him with an opportunity, Benji joins forces with their resistance, determined to fight the Angels with whatever time he has left. This cinematically gory apocalyptic horror not only delivers high stakes, fast-paced action, and fraught romantic drama, it engages critically with the intertwining impacts of colonialism, capitalism, and White supremacy. The resistance truthfully depicts diversity within queerness while also holding White queer people accountable for gatekeeping and upholding White supremacy. The narrative focuses primarily on Benji’s point of view but shifts strategically with shorter sections showing the perspectives of his two romantic interests, including Nick, a White, cisgender autistic boy who plays a significant role in the resistance. A restorative, hopeful resolution brings the story to a satisfying close without turning Benji into a savior.

A gloriously ferocious and scorching blaze. (Dystopian/horror 15+18)

**VICTORY CAMP**
Vogel, Robin
Peachtree Middle Grade (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-68263-361-6

A portrait of a pugnacious civil rights advocate who also happened to be a great athlete.

Liberally salting their narrative with racist period quotes that include frank and pejorative language, putting on unflinching display the ugliness Robinson faced, Williams and Long chronicled his spectacular athletic achievements from elementary school to the major leagues—but look beyond them to portray him as a “relentless and uncompromising Black freedom fighter” who “used his racial pride to fuel his lifelong passion for justice.” From defending himself from a rock-throwing White neighbor at age 8 to later sharp criticisms of Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali for their anti-war stances and harsh debates with Malcolm X, he comes across here as anything but the patient, controlled figure typically found in biographies for young readers. To judge from the copious endnotes and their own professional and publishing histories, the authors have plainly done their research and make a convincing case that while their subject had his bullheaded moments, he operated from consistent and worthy principles. On-field photos, family snapshots, pictures of marching protesters, and news clippings accompany side-boxed comments on historical context and questions for readers to ponder, the latter supplemented in the backmatter with a page of discussion topics. This thorough, expansive, and readable work is an essential addition to the body of literature about a well-known figure.

Adds provocative nuances to the usual portrayals of a heroic American. (additional facts, timeline, index) (Biography 12-16)

**THE MOST DAZZLING GIRL IN BERLIN**
Wilson, Kip
Versify/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$18.99 | March 29, 2022
978-0-358-44890-7

“I shiver. / How much has changed / in a week.” And we all shivered with her.

Recounting the months before Hitler’s rise to power in 1932, Catholic orphan Hilde, an 18-year-old resident of Berlin, documents her life in a series of free-verse poems. Her story begins as she leaves the orphanage and follows her through a brief period of homelessness and unemployment before she finds the Café Lila, a queer nightclub that ultimately provides employment, security, and a sense of community previously missing from Hilde’s life. It also brings her in contact with gorgeous Rosa, a Jewish performer and waitress with a vivacious attitude who quickly captures Hilde’s heart. Astute readers will understand what horrible fates await many of the characters but will be captivated by the events that Hilde observes, many of which still echo today. Book clubs will find a lot to discuss in Hilde’s story, and educators and history buffs will appreciate the thorough and informative backmatter, which includes selected sources in both English and German, a glossary of terms, and an author’s note that provides valuable context and recommends more information about the time period.

Wunderbar! (Verse historical fiction. 12-adult)

**THE STORY OF JACKIE ROBINSON**
Robinson, Black Freedom Fighter
Parrish, Mark & Parke, James (448 pp.)
$19.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-374-38956-6

A portrait of a pugnacious civil rights advocate who also happened to be a great athlete.

Liberally salting their narrative with racist period quotes that include frank and pejorative language, putting on unflinching display the ugliness Robinson faced, Williams and Long chronicled his spectacular athletic achievements from elementary school to the major leagues—but look beyond them to portray him as a “relentless and uncompromising Black freedom fighter” who “used his racial pride to fuel his lifelong passion for justice.” From defending himself from a rock-throwing White neighbor at age 8 to later sharp criticisms of Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali for their anti-war stances and harsh debates with Malcolm X, he comes across here as anything but the patient, controlled figure typically found in biographies for young readers. To judge from the copious endnotes and their own professional and publishing histories, the authors have plainly done their research and make a convincing case that while their subject had his bullheaded moments, he operated from consistent and worthy principles. On-field photos, family snapshots, pictures of marching protesters, and news clippings accompany side-boxed comments on historical context and questions for readers to ponder, the latter supplemented in the backmatter with a page of discussion topics. This thorough, expansive, and readable work is an essential addition to the body of literature about a well-known figure.

Adds provocative nuances to the usual portrayals of a heroic American. (additional facts, timeline, index) (Biography 12-16)
The summer after high school is full of uncertainty, but before Isaac and his BFF go in different directions, they make big plans that only a big crush can derail.

As a nerdy, gay, Black Mexican kid growing up in the suburbs of Alpharetta, Georgia, Isaac struggles a bit to connect with people unless they’re characters in his favorite comic books. Besides his mom and abuelito, Isaac is only truly comfortable around his bi, Puerto Rican, gamer best friend, Diego. So Diego’s decision not to attend the University of Georgia with him in the fall makes Isaac nervous about what the future holds and puts a lot of pressure on their last summer together. The plan is to attend their first Teen Pride and get tickets to a comic convention, but when the latter is interrupted by Isaac’s infatuation with bisexual Brazilian Davi, the former is almost ruined.

The two met at a coffee shop and soon became friends, partners in trouble, and each other’s everything. Through the economical and expressive poems, readers are pulled into the narrator’s deep, shifting emotions as her feelings for her friend change. The rich language describing the way the two love each other is magnificent: “we added up to a little too much. // You loved me more than I knew. // I loved you more than you could take.” Fire is a symbol throughout, and the final flames aptly represent the passion and volatility of this relationship.

A beautiful, emotionally charged novel. (Verse novel. 14-18)

Friendship evolves into a fiery, complex first love for two teen girls.

This nonlinear novel in verse begins at the end, as a queer Black couple stand on opposite sides of a bridge, their relationship crumbling. The first and last poems—both titled “After the Fire”—are the only times the story is told from the point of view of the partner, a girl only ever referred to as “you.” The unnamed narrator begins by alternating between the history of their tumultuous relationship and the day things begin to unravel, when the pair set fire to a dumpster in their high school’s parking lot. In addition to exploring queerness—the narrator is a symbol throughout, and the final flames aptly represent the passion and volatility of this relationship.

A beautiful, emotionally charged novel. (Verse novel. 14-18)
An intrepid college freshman pushes past her comfort zone to investigate an unsolved murder. Brookings University freshman Anna Xu, back home in Michigan after a whirlwind summer in Beijing with relatives, is on a mission. She hopes to discover who killed Melissa Hong, her childhood babysitter, who was a sophomore at Brookings 7 years ago. Her stealth investigation isn’t easy to carry out when she’s also making new friends, navigating the college social scene, and fielding sinister threats resulting from her sleuthing. Not to mention worrying about Sweetea, her immigrant parents’ struggling Chinese bakery, now that old family rivals the Lus have opened a bakery of their own nearby. Not only that, their son, Chris Lu, is a fellow student, and Anna isn’t sure how she feels about him: Is he a competitor, a friend, or perhaps something more? With the help of Chris and others, Anna edges closer to learning what happened to Melissa. But will she discover the truth in time to prevent more tragedies? Anna is realistically drawn—at times socially uncertain but relentless in her search for answers about Melissa’s murder. In addition to the fast-paced, well-crafted main plot, subthemes abound and are all given full play: anime geek culture, White male domination of the Asian studies field, anti-Asian hate, and the sexual fetishization of Asian women.

A complex and layered campus mystery that explores pernicious stereotypes. (Mystery. 14-18)
How many ways can a romantic triangle turn murderous? Let Adamson count, and multiply, the ways.

Mia Banner has left her teaching job in London to follow her longtime boyfriend, Richard Ellis, to the Andalusian village of Val Verde to live in La Casa de la Luz, the house his worthless mother left him in her will. She anticipates some difficulties settling into a neighborhood whose principal attraction is the volunteer organization Desert Shoots, but there's no way she could have known that Anna Fleming, the photojournalist she meets at an informal gathering, has already had a brief, lusty fling with Rich and plans to continue it under Mia's unsuspecting eyes. Assigning alternate chapters to Mia and Rich, Adamson details Rich's empty relationship with Marianne Ellis, the mother who neglected him to embrace the bottle until she drank herself to death, and hints ever more broadly at the traumatic crime in Mia's childhood from whose shadow she's struggled to emerge ever since. Rich assures Anna that he's going to leave Mia for her; when Mia discovers the affair, he assures her that he's going to send Anna away. Since each of the three leads has ample reason to kill each of the other two, the moment when Adamson finally reveals the identity of the corpse discovered in the opening chapter bids fair to diminish the rising tension. Miraculously, however, the author keeps coming up with new ways to ratchet up the suspense even further until the last line of the last chapter.

A claustrophobic, breathlessly effective tale that seems to pave the way for a choose-your-own-murder series.

Amidon's latest suburban thriller explores the nature of class privilege and equal justice under the law.

The tranquility of the wealthy Boston suburb of Emerson is shattered when the body of Eden Perry is found in...
a home on Tony Locust Lane, where the 20-year-old had been staying as a caretaker and dog walker. Police tell her estranged mother, Danielle, they believe she was murdered. The teenagers partying with Eden on the night of her death—golden-boy-with-a-dark-streak Jack Parrish, his sweet but troubled girlfriend, Hannah Holt, and shy outsider Christopher Mahoun, who had a crush on Eden—lie to their parents and the police about where they were that evening. But when scratches are found on Christopher’s neck, he becomes the prime suspect. As a grieving but tough Danielle seeks answers, the other parents take steps to protect their children, even if it comes at the expense of others. The shifting points of view alternate among Celia Parrish, who ignores troubling aspects of her son’s personality while relying on her husband to fix the problems Jack causes; successful restaurateur Michel Mahoun, whose ethnicity (Lebanese Maronite Catholic) marks him as a foreigner in the WASPy community; unhappily married Alice Holt, who is convinced her lover Michel’s son is innocent and who plies Hannah, her stepdaughter, with wine to get at the truth; local man Patrick Noone, on a downward spiral from his daughter Gabi’s fatal overdose, who may have seen the killer on Locust Lane during a late-night drive; and Danielle. Amidon writes smoothly but relies on clichés for his observations on class differences. With her dyed black hair and tattoos, Danielle is a working-class representative, while the socially prominent Parrishes are stereotypes of class entitlement. It’s easy to identify the villains early on. The flipping among perspectives slows the narrative and makes it difficult at times to keep track of the mostly unlikable characters in this plodding thriller.

The ambiguous ending may frustrate some readers who like their thrillers neatly wrapped up.
After finishing work on this year’s Kirkus Prize and the Best Fiction issue, I found myself wanting to read some older books—not recent titles that I missed, and not classics, but ones that have been sitting on my shelves for years. These are books that have been through several moves without being weeded out, books that I’d just never had time for. The first thing I found myself pulling from the shelf was a collection of Mary Wesley paperbacks I acquired sometime in the early 1990s when Penguin was promoting her backlist.

Mary Wesley

Wesley was born in England in 1912 and published her first novel at 70. Her authorized biography is called Wild Mary, which gives you some idea of her life. Her books aren’t what you’d expect from a white-haired English grandmother—there’s drug smuggling, lots of sex, quite a few accidental murders, and a surprising amount of incest, all written about in a deadpan style: “It was during the bombing in the autumn of 1940 that Helena bought two adjacent houses in Enderby Street. The price was low, the owners anxious to get away from London.” Nothing fazes Wesley or her nervy women.

In Wesley’s first novel, Jumping the Queue (1983), widowed Matilda Poliport finds herself, in her 50s, ready to end her life, not wanting to be a bother to anyone as she ages. She makes a plan: She’ll take a lovely picnic to the lake where she goes swimming and, after eating cheese, drinking a bottle of wine, and taking a bunch of sleeping pills, abandon herself painlessly to the tides. She’s interrupted by an annoying group of young people who want to plant themselves on the large, flat rock where she’s sitting: “She’ll be gone soon, don’t worry. It’s a super rock, just the job, super.” (Wesley’s dialogue is sharp as broken glass.)

Too irritated to try to wait them out, Matilda leaves and soon meets up with Hugh Warner, a man who’s been all over the tabloids recently as “the Matricide,” having killed his mother with a silver tray. He too is trying to drown himself. Naturally, she invites him to stay with her, leading to a book that’s endlessly surprising and full of black humor, some of it provided by Matilda’s pet gander, Gus.

The Camomile Lawn (1984), Wesley’s second book, is her best known, having become a popular television series in 1992. (Maybe that’s why Penguin was pushing her backlist? The books have since gone out of print, though you can get them in e-book format from Open Road.) It begins just before WWII and follows its characters—a group of young adult cousins, their older relatives, friends, and neighbors—through the war and jumps to the present as they head for the funeral of their aunt’s lover. Like all Wesley’s characters, they’re unusually frank—they like to have sex and use the word fuck, and they often want to do it with their close relations. Twin brothers? Maybe they can share a mate.

Wesley is hardly the only woman to publish for the first time at what might be thought of as retirement age. Penelope Fitzgerald was 60 when she published her first novel, and Harriet Doerr was 74. Just this year, 65-year-old Bonnie Garmus published her quirky debut, Lessons in Chemistry (Doubleday, April 5), and 80-year-old Jane Campbell published a book of stories, Cat Brushing (Grove, Aug. 9). Arlene Heyman’s Scary Old Sex (Bloomsbury, 2016), published when she was in her early 70s, brings the author’s years of experience as a psychiatrist to her characters’ relationships, and she demonstrates that, as our review said, “old (and middle-aged) people have sex, too: appointment sex and spontaneous sex, passionate sex and perfunctory sex, sex with young lovers and aging spouses.” Mary Wesley would approve.
Is Annie’s new acquaintance a needed confidante or a threat?
A dark prologue from a file on Annie Lin’s laptop describes her life as one long nightmare, mentions a plan involving the safety of her son, and alludes to her own disappearance. All this is in stark contrast to the hopeful and often sunny narrative that follows. Annie has moved to beautiful Kauai with her young son, Finn, determined to start a positive new life. Not even Kalani, her intrusive neighbor, can dampen her enthusiasm. She even gets to play good Samaritan by helping stranded motorist Serena with wine and temporary refuge. Before long, Annie’s sharing confidences with Serena as if she were an old friend. Suspense arrives courtesy of an increasingly menacing storm, the threading through of more bits from the laptop file, and selections from an ongoing text thread between Annie and her sister Sam, who’s helping her forge that new life following her separation from husband Brody. Readers will be well ahead of Annie in perceiving that Serena is not what she seems. Butler’s third novel is packed with familiar thriller tropes, like the way Annie’s dog, Marley, growls at Serena when they first encounter her. For the most part, though, the author folds these in expertly and seamlessly, grounding her tale in the themes of complex family relationships and racial identity she explored in *The Tiger Mom’s Tale* (2021). Readers can decide whether the reveal and what comes after live up to the foreshadowing.

A skillful by-the-numbers thriller with its share of nice touches.

A bloodstream of stubborn, courageous women navigates the horrors of World War II and its rippling aftereffects.

“Lilith,” Ally Keller murmurs reverently at first sight of her newborn daughter, the product of her brief but intense union with a Black German musician. “Her name means light.” And despite the fact that Ally—a freethinking, progressive German writer—must confine Lilith’s childhood within the increasingly oppressive, racist strictures of Nazi Germany, where Lilith is considered a mischling (a derogatory term for people of mixed-race ancestry), she proves an unquestionable beacon in Ally’s life. A preternaturally intelligent girl who learns the Pythagorean theorem by age 5 and begins studying Shakespeare at 6, Lilith grows up in relative stability, reading Ally’s poetry and imbuing the wisdom of Herr Professor (a Jewish literature scholar driven from his university). Lilith and her mother obsessively follow via radio the groundbreaking career of Jesse Owens, whose meteoric rise to greatness symbolizes the freedom that Lilith craves; meanwhile, in Nazi Germany, they’re able to venture outside only at night or during the rain, else risking harassment. As the Nuremberg Laws and Kristallnacht incite increasing chaos and S.S. raids worsen, Lilith appears before the German commission for racial purity, which labels her “inferior,” risking sterilization by the state. What follows is Ally’s immensely painful choice to send Lilith away on a departing ship, accompanied only by the Herzogs, a fleeing Jewish couple who become Lilith’s de facto parents. After what Lilith terms her “first death,” she must begin an entirely new life in Cuba, constantly aware of the way the past peeks through the cracks of her new reality—and unsure of her mother’s fate. In narrative sections that track the lives of Lilith’s daughter and other female descendants, the women grapple with the deep scars wrought by World War II along with motherhood, racism,
and survivor’s guilt; the novel carefully investigates factors that shape identity along with the concept of unresolved memory. Correa’s scope here is impressive—the narrative sections span Havana to Berlin and 1931 to 2015—though the breadth sometimes lends the sense of an overstretched narrative, reducing dramatic intensity. Its characters, though, are complex and singular; their interiors are richly drawn and illustrate how history unfolds in increasingly complex ways within individual psyches despite passing time and space. Readers will appreciate the emotional payoff and emerge from the novel with a satisfying sense of catharsis even if it takes a while to achieve.

A worthwhile story with some excess material.

THE MOTION PICTURE TELLER
 Cotterill, Colin
 Soho Crime (240 pp.)
 $27.95 | Jan. 17, 2023
 978-1-641-29435-5

A mysterious videotape turns a movie lover into a cinematic sleuth.

Thirty-two-year-old Supot Yongajiyut lives a quiet life in 1996 Bangkok, working as a postman for the Royal Thai Mail Service and spending the rest of his waking hours at his best friend Ali’s video rental store. The two men, who share an occasionally combative relationship and an omnivorous passion for cinema, watch movies together every night, though Supot’s pessimistic temperament prevented him from pursuing a career in the film industry. One evening, the pair is watching and bickering over The Big Sleep when a crusty homeless man called Woot disrupts their viewing with an offer to sell them a box of old videos. They reject his offer and shoo
him away, but he leaves behind a heap of tapes anyway. Among
these are several European classics and one tape enigmatically
titled *Bangkok 2010*. The film is so unexpectedly brilliant and
provocative that Supot becomes fixated on it, writing down the
names of the creative staff so that he can research and maybe
locate them. He becomes particularly obsessed with the reclusive
leading lady, Siriluk, and even begins a skittish correspondence
with her. Definitely not a whodunit, the tale still provides
ample suspense, as Supot undertakes a risky adventure that
profoundly changes him. Cinephiles will especially enjoy the wide-
ranging film trivia and commentary shared by the duo, infused
with the author’s characteristic drollery and interspersed with
chunks of the film’s screenplay. Cotterill explores with empathy
and insight the power of movies to enrich and even guide our
lives.

An offbeat, uplifting thriller every movie lover will cherish.

**BATTLE SONGS**

*Drdić, Daša*

*Trans. by Celia Hawkesworth*

New Directions (192 pp.)

$19.95 paper | Feb. 7, 2023

978-0-8112-3478-8

A pensive series of joined stories recounting war, exile, and the natural history of pigs.

“Vesna told me that someone in a Croatian bank had said that she couldn’t understand Serbian at all.” So recounts the narrator of Drdić’s opening story, a meaningful observation inasmuch as Serbian and Croatian, while mutually intelligible languages, were spoken by implacable enemies during the civil war that broke up Yugoslavia three decades ago. Those differences have many manifestations: As another story recounts in sometimes-cumbersome detail, in different parts of the former nation the raising and consumption of swine take different forms, such that in the western Balkans, “the cult of roast suckling pig did not emit the authenticity so characteristic of their eastern neighbors.” Of course, observant Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo eschew pork to begin with, and Croatia “practices Catholicism and chokes on greasy noodles”; what drives former fellow citizens apart are the most minor of variations on food, religion, language, and all the other things of daily life. Those differences also drive many of Drdić’s characters into exile in Canada, where they find plenty of reasons to be nostalgic for the old country: “My country is just a sad, hidebound and backward province of European civilization,” notes one exile, who adds, “It’s better in my country, nevertheless. They don’t understand anything here in Canada.” In the end, it’s enough to make her return to her native land. Drdić’s stories are interwoven with memories of the old Yugoslavia, with the red neckerchiefs of young Pioneers and the midnight door-pounding of the secret police, the endless genealogical obsessions that place people in one ethnic camp or another (“There are two branches of my family...both Croatian, so when...blood cells began to be counted, I didn’t have a problem”) and, in a meaningful passing metaphor, one thing guaranteed to make pigs happy, namely “associating with other pigs.”

*A searching, melancholic study of a time of terror and angst.*

**MY LAST INNOCENT YEAR**

*Florin, Daisy Alpert*

Henry Holt (304 pp.)

$26.99 | Feb. 14, 2023

978-1-250-85703-3

A young woman navigates sex and power at an elite New England college in the late 1990s in Florin’s debut.

Isabel Rosen, the daughter of an artist mother and a father who owns a Lower East Side appetizing store, is hardly the typical student at New Hampshire’s Wilder College.
(presumably based on Dartmouth). During her senior year, as she works on a thesis on Edith Wharton and tries to enjoy her last moments at the college that—despite everything—she loves, she has sexual encounters with two different men that will forever shape her memories of the time. One is a slightly older peer, a former soldier whose Israeli bravado is thoughtfully juxtaposed against her Ashkenazi ambivalence; the other is the handsome creative writing professor who takes an interest in her work. Set against the backdrop of President Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky, Isabel’s experiences teach her the hard way about the complex power dynamics in sexual relationships. Isabel’s sex life is private and secretive, while the president’s was much publicized; soon enough, however, Isabel learns that privacy doesn’t last long on a small college campus. Isabel’s intoxicating affair begins to unravel when drama ensues surrounding the family of the Wilder English department chair. Florin’s prose is gorgeous and enthralling, and her imagistic portrayal of New England campus life—from divey college town bars to Winter Carnival to English department parties to skinny-dipping in the river—is pitch-perfect. She also succeeds where many stories of dubious sexual consent fail: She avoids heavy-handed moralizing in favor of ambiguity, however uncomfortable. Even an odd final section, which spans years after Isabel graduates and detracts from the momentum of what would otherwise have been the final act, cannot dim the shine of this novel. Florin’s debut is not to be missed.

A brilliantly crafted campus novel for the generation before #MeToo.

THE LEAST AMONG US
Florio, Gwen
Crooked Lane (293 pp.)
$27.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-63910-068-2

A public defender fights to clear her favorite client of a murder charge.

Julia Geary has spent all too many days in court on behalf of Ray Belmar, charged with a never-ending assortment of low-level offenses: public disturbance, lewdness, indecent exposure. Now that he’s been charged with fatally beating a fellow resident of Duck Creek’s riverside homeless encampment, Julia is ready to test her mettle as a champion of the neediest of her fellow citizens. Since her boss is reluctant to have her go it alone, he assigns her law school intern Marie St. Clair to help with the paperwork. And just in case it’s not bad enough to see the desk that used to belong to her best friend, Claudette Greene, occupied by an eager-beaver law student, Julia learns that Chief Public Defender Bill Decker has hired pricey private defense attorney Tim Saunders to help her prep for trial. Tim’s strategy is simple: Persuade Ray to plead guilty. But Julia is pretty sure he isn’t. She has her work cut out for her: In a landscape littered with well-wishers and naysayers, she has to figure out who’s really on her side and who would just as soon see her go down in flames.

A chilling look at a legal system ill-equipped to serve the most vulnerable.
Charles stabbed, their deaths were presumed to be a murder-suicide. But Cicely told Abby and Mia that their parents died in a car accident; she took them into her home and changed their last name to Fairfax, refusing counseling for them because they were so young. They’re still close to their former nanny, Nina Phillips, who’s the school nurse at St. Catherine’s College. Now both working and on their own, they’re summoned to Cicely’s home to pick out some mementos before she moves to a residential hotel. After Mia falls from a ladder and knocks herself out, she awakens and clearly says, “Mummy, wake up!” Mia’s nightmare continues to haunt her. Instead of discussing it with Abby, she talks to Nina. When she finally opens up to her sister, Abby admits to having had a similar dream. The dreams continue, featuring a man who’s clearly not their father. When Cicely finally tells them the truth, they realize that their parents’ deaths may have been a double murder but despair of proving it after so many years.

A captivating tale, short on mystery but long on entertainment value.

MAAME
George, Jessica
St. Martin’s (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 31, 2023
978-1-2502-8252-1

After a loss, a young British woman from a Ghanaian family reassesses her responsibilities.

Her name is Maddie, but the young protagonist in George’s engaging coming-of-age novel has always been known to her family as Maame, meaning woman. On the surface, this nickname is praise for Maddie’s reliability. Though she’s only 25, she works full time at a London publishing house and cares for her father, who’s in the late stages of Parkinson’s disease. Maddie’s older brother, James, has little interest in helping out, and their mother is living in Ghana and running the business she inherited from her own father. When she needs money, she always calls Maddie, who shoulders these expectations and burdens without complaint, never telling her friends about her frustrations: “We’re Ghanaian, so we do things differently” is an idea that’s ingrained in her. Her only confidant is Google, to whom she types desperate questions and gets only moderately helpful responses. (Google does not truly understand the demands of a religious yet remote African-born mother.) But when Maddie loses her job and tragedy strikes, she begins to question the limits of family duty and wonders what sort of life she can create for herself. With a light but firm touch, George illustrates the casual racism a young Black woman can face in the British (or American) workplace and how cultural barriers can stand in the way of aspects of contemporary life such as understanding and treating depression. She examines Maddie’s awkward steps toward adulthood and its messy stew of responsibility, love, and sex with insight and compassion. The key to writing a memorable bildungsroman is creating an unforgettable character, and George has fashioned an appealing hero here. You can’t help but root for Maddie’s emancipation. Funny, awkward, and sometimes painful, her blossoming is a real delight to witness.

A fresh, often funny, always poignant take on the coming-of-age novel.

ALL HALLOWS
Golden, Christopher
St. Martin’s (336 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 24, 2023
9781250280299

Evil Halloween spirits are on the loose in a Massachusetts town, upstaging a popular neighborhood attraction dubbed the Haunted Woods.

It’s 1984. For 11 years, Tony Barbosa and his 17-year-old daughter, Chloe, have
Turned the woods behind their house into a scary theme park. Tony, who takes his fog effects, banshee screams, and apparitions very seriously, is going all out to make this year’s fright-athon—the last one he and Chloe will present—the best ever. But hours before its opening, a bunch of creepy, oddly aggressive children in costumes and melting makeup show up demanding protection from a punishing force they call the Cunning Man. Terrible things start happening, with especially sorry results for Donnie Sweeney, an adulterous charmer who counts Tony’s wife among his conquests, and a pedophilic couple who abuse children in their house. “Nothing in these woods could be more dreadful, more terrifying, than the selfish cruelty of ordinary people,” thinks Tony, but a series of bizarre killings, dismemberments, and gruesome possessions change that tune. In his attempt to liven up familiar tropes, Golden’s new book is less daring than its blood-freezing, Siberian-set predecessor, Road of Bones (2022). But it is no less nasty. Characters you may not expect to get it do. But even though Golden skillfully orchestrates a full cast of characters, including a group of plucky teenagers, the book lacks serious chills in the end—it’s better at clever phenomena (including small fires inside of which shapes and images tell stories) than bumps in the night. The Cunning Man, a 7-foot creature with flaming eyes who is mostly seen from a distance, needs to have more of an impact than a little girl in a Raggedy Ann outfit.

An enjoyable but not terribly bone-rattling addition to Halloween horror.

SAM
Goodman, Allegra
Dial Press (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Jan. 3, 2023
978-0-593-44781-9

A child’s-eye view of growing up with a single mom, a troubled dad, and very slim resources. “There is a girl, and her name is Sam. She has a mother named Courtney and a dad who is sort of around, sort of not.” Goodman’s seventh work of fiction follows her protagonist from ages 7 to 19, using very close third-person narration to limit the story to what is seen and understood by Sam herself. So, for example, what we know about her father’s addiction issues or her mother’s relationship with a violent but wealthy boyfriend is circumscribed in a way that soon begins to feel frustrating. Also, the tone of the narration seems to age very slowly, with extremely simple sentences and observations persisting as Sam starts high school and begins to get involved with boys. “Sam’s mom is a little different. She says, ‘Let’s be real here.’ She takes Sam to Planned Parenthood to get a prescription for the pill. This is because Sam was a surprise, and Courtney never finished her degree.” This almost sounds like a picture book about birth control. Sam’s main talent and interest is rock climbing, which she first encounters at a fair with her father, and from the start her will to succeed in the sport derives in large part from a craving for his difficult-to-capture attention. When she’s in ninth grade, this need will be transferred to a college-age male coach, with problematic results. The sexual aspects and emotional dangers of that relationship are skimmed over with lyrical narration that feels almost coy at this point: “It is strange but magic in his apartment. It is wrong but delicious, like all the things not good for you....They are so secret; they are almost secret from themselves, almost dreaming when they lie down together…. They steal time—not just hours, but the years between seven-teen and twenty-two. They hide those years under their coats, and when they are together they leave those years on the floor with their boots, and socks, and clothes.” By glossing over the fact that this is statutory rape and by letting its psychological implications and outcomes go unexplored, Goodman limits the reach of the novel.

There isn’t enough texture in its treatment of the many serious issues faced by its heroine to satisfy readers.
“HOW CAN YOU CUT THROUGH THE NOISE OF THE CULTURE AND GET ATTENTION FOR DESERVING WORK? HIRE WILDBOUND, FOR STARTERS.”
STEVIE WASSERMAN, PUBLISHER OF HEYDAY

“WILDBOUND TOOK THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARDS TEAM FROM VIRTUAL PRODUCTION NEWBIES TO A SUPERB VIRTUAL AWARDS EVENT. WE’LL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL TO OUR WILDBOUND ANGELS.”
JANE CIABATTARI, NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE

“WORKING WITH WILDBOUND IS A DREAM! THEY’VE TAKEN OUR BOOK FESTIVAL TO NEW HEIGHTS.”
CHERILYN PARSONS, BAY AREA BOOK FESTIVAL

“WILDBOUND” REFLECTS WHAT WE’VE COME TO LOVE ABOUT WORKING WITH TALENTED STORYTELLERS: THEIR TIRELESS DRIVE TO VENTURE INTO THE WILDERNESS OF THE MIND, ALWAYS ON THE PRECIPICE OF THE UNKNOWN, ALWAYS DARING TO MEET THEIR LIMITS IN WORLDS BOTH REAL AND IMAGINARY.
Through a series of audio recordings, a former felon recounts his attempts to solve a literary code that may lead to stolen gold—or maybe that’s all a red herring.

The novel begins with a letter written in 2021 from a police inspector to a professor, asking him to listen to a set of audio files that were found on an iPhone belonging to a man who’s gone missing. What follows is a novel made up almost entirely of recordings and letters: recordings created by Steven Smith, who has recently been released from prison, wishes to connect with a son he never knew he had, and is haunted by a strange experience from his childhood that he only semi-remembers; and letters shared between Inspector Walsco and professor Mansfield in response to them. When Steven was a child, his teacher read the class a book by an author named Edith Twyford and then took them on a field trip that seems to have ended in tragedy. Trying to figure out what happened that day, he reaches out to the other children who were there and discovers that each of them has become fascinated with the “Twyford Code” that the author seems to have threaded through her novels. Twyford may have been a secret British agent during World War II involved in Operation Fish, a secret mission to move all of Britain’s gold stores to Canada for safekeeping. As he is drawn deeper into the intrigue of the code, Steven also records the story of his life—the deaths of his parents, his rough upbringing, and how he fell in with a family of criminals and eventually went to prison for theft. In a book with this many twists and turns, of course, there’s no way of knowing what’s true and what’s not, and Hallett continues to pull the rug out from under the reader every time we think we understand what’s going on. The good: It’s complicated, in the best way, and the reveals over the last section of the book are truly gaspworthy. The bad: The recording gimmick does begin to feel a bit gimmicky, and this structure makes up 90% of the novel.

Code lovers rejoice! This one’s for you.
“A vibrant portrait of Trinidad in the 1940s.”

HUNGRY GHOSTS

Hosein, Kevin Jared
Ecco/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$27.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-06-321338-8

A vibrant portrait of Trinidad in the 1940s traces various members of a multiracial community grappling with poverty, emotional connection, and “hereditary pain.”

Starting with the disappearance of secretive landowner Dalton Changoor, the blood-brother swearing of four local lads, and a drowned dog, Hosein—a celebrated author from Trinidad and Tobago—plunges readers into the turbulent stream of Bell Village life on a not-always-paradisiacal seeming Caribbean island. His cast of characters is wide, forefronted by Hansraj “Hans” Saroop, one of Changoor’s laborers, and his family—wife Shweta, son Krishna. Their home, on an old sugar cane estate, is the barrack, a rat-infested, leaking, multifamily dwelling with a shared latrine, in contrast with the large Changoor home, a manor now occupied solely by the landowner’s wife, Marlee, left in the dark about her husband’s whereabouts or return plans. Faced with ransom notes and a second dog’s death, Marlee pays Hans to be her night watchman, arousing suspicions in both Shweta and Krishna. Meanwhile, secondary characters—other barrack dwellers, bullying teenagers, unreliable policemen, and more—impact events and shade in the “anecdotal tapestry.” Destructive histories, not just the colonial past, but also the American occupation during World War II, impinge on the present, as do racism and complex, often violent connections. There are gods—Hans and his family are Hindu; his colleague Robinson is Christian; Rookmin, the wise woman of the barrack, adheres to the old beliefs—and devils who beat their wives and worse. Sex, betrayal, feuds, nightmare pregnancies, and more dead dogs swirl through the narrative, underpinned by philosophies of survival among all classes. Hosein evokes all this in rich, visceral language dotted with obscure terms: flabellate, noctilucae, rufescent. His story, often brutal, ultimately tragic, is nevertheless lit by a wide embrace reaching beyond place and people to the bedrock.

Immersive, persuasive: an elemental “portal to the Caribbean” delivered in a distinctive voice.

THE BULLET GARDEN

Hunter, Stephen
Emily Bestler/Atria (480 pp.)
$28.99 | Jan. 24, 2023
978-1-982-16976-3

Earl Swagger’s heroics are let loose in the deadly fields of World War II France. After D-Day, Allied forces take heavy casualties from snipers in France’s rolling hills and farmland checkered with mazes of hedgerows and brush fences. The French call the area the bocage, but the troops know it as “the bullet garden.” One relatively lucky soldier takes a shot in the hip: “Man, did he go down, full of spangles and fire flashes and lightning bugs and flies’ wings.” Worse, as many as 1,500 men take slugs right beneath the helmet and behind the ear, ripping through the brain. The enemy has a marksman who is so good that it doesn’t matter what you’re doing: “If he fires you’re dead.” The Allied army and the Office of Strategic Services decide to
find their own best sharpshooter to hunt the sniper down. They pick Marine Gunnery Sgt. Earl Swagger, already a veteran of Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and Tarawa, with a hard-earned reputation as a war god, of always being right, knowing everything, fearing nothing, and having been “born so brave bullets were afraid of him.” So he becomes an army major for his stint in Europe, and he begins his hunt. At the site of one killing, a soldier sneezes, and that of all things gives Swagger a clue on the road to finding his prey. The author offers up great descriptions that invite the reader to fill in the blanks: “No one would call him handsome; no one would call him ugly. He was simply a Marine.” The hero isn’t given to chitchat or emotion, and there isn’t a maudlin molecule in his body. That’s all to the good for a man of the gun. The villain gets to show his personality, showing a flicker of humanity as he remembers a lost love—but he’s a killer at his core. If he isn’t killing, he isn’t living. Meanwhile, there’s a spy plot set in London, where the slimy Mr. Raven lurks in the nighttime with a scarf covering his deviated septum. The story is loaded with colorful characters, crisp dialogue, bullets, and blood.

Tense, smart, fast-moving action starring the future father of Hunter’s Bob Lee Swagger.

A historical saga about a motley crew of English fighters making life miserable for the French during the early days of the Hundred Years’ War.

Ten strong when they land in Normandy in 1346, the Essex Dogs, as the crew is called, are led by Loveday FitzTalbot, a faded veteran struggling with deep personal losses. A colorful and contrary mix of English, Welsh, and Scots, the Dogs range from the temperamentally Father, whose days of preaching were already long past when he suffered brain damage from a falling roof tile, to Romford, a young, cocksure archer who has a habit of getting in trouble. Their job in Normandy is to first find the enemy—not always easy considering “the ingenious French tactic of fleeing at the first sight of trouble”—and then rout them. When the English and French armies do meet, as in Caen, rivers of blood are spilled. Loveday, who must rely on his wits as much as his sword to survive, must also contend with his newly developing conscience. An impeccably researched “you are there” novel with a real-time approach, Jones’ entertaining fiction debut (following nonfiction books including Crusaders, 2019) moves episodically from encounter to life-threatening encounter. For all its violence, the book hums with black humor. Jones is at his best when humor and violence come together: “The head flew off, tumbled once in the air and landed by Loveday’s face, so that they were almost nose to nose. Its eyes seemed to widen hugely, then the eyelids fluttered closed.” Retrieving three knights’ publicly displayed skulls in Paris against all odds is an undertaking that’s as much fun as a good heist scene. It will be hard to top those scenes in Jones’ planned sequels.

An enjoyable romp through the darkest of ages.
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

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New episode every Tuesday
friend, Jaki? And can he somehow tip them off to the location of photos he shot that reveal the depths of the war-torn island’s atrocities? With that setup, Karunatilaka’s novel is at once a murder mystery and a historical novel of the island nation’s violent struggles throughout the ’80s. That necessitates explaining a host of ethnic and political factions, plus outside forces from India to the United States, on top of which Karunatilaka layers a host of otherworldly ghouls, demons, and spirits that Maali has to navigate. But despite that complexity, the novel reads smoothly and powerfully, buoyed by Maali’s defiant and flawed persona—his weeklong stint as a dead man means reckoning with his sexual promiscuity, gambling habit, and unsettled family as much as the riots and state-sponsored death squads he’s strived to expose. Though the novel is maximalist in its plotting, it’s intimate in the telling—Karunatilaka writes in the second person to better root the reader in a maelstrom of characters and otherworldly incidents. And the main point gets across: The world is sick with violence and corruption, but truth will out, and the possibility for change exists if we don’t succumb to defeatism.

A manic, witty, artfully imagined tale of speaking truth to power.

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**BRATWURST HAVEN**

*King, Rachel*

West Virginia Univ Press (152 pp.)

$19.99 paper | Nov 1, 2022

978-1-952271-49-6


Nobody wants to see how the sausage gets made, but the 10 employees of St. Anthony Sausage don’t have much choice. The workers at the Colorado factory, as well as others in the fictional towns of St. Anthony and Laforge, form the beating heart of the first short story collection from King. The book begins with “Railing,” which follows Lance, who got a job at the factory after losing his job as a railway engineer as the result of a horrible accident. He notes the upside of his new gig—“the temperature kept me alert, and the hard work sometimes distracted me from thinking about the man I’d killed”—but still senses that something’s missing from his life. In “A Friendship,” King tells the life story of Joey, another factory employee, from his childhood in St. Anthony to his service in Vietnam to his eventual death. It’s a stunningly sad tale of regret: “He knows it’s his own fault he doesn’t have friends at the end of his life,” King writes in one of the collection’s most heart-rending passages. King explores sibling dynamics in “Mid- dle Age,” about Valerie, a factory inspector who takes a road trip from Colorado to Oregon with her sister, who’s just retired from the military. The trip doesn’t become the bonding experience Valerie had hoped for: “They’d missed years of each other’s lives, and simply answering these kinds of questions now would not make up for that.” King’s writing is straightforward but elegant, and she suffuses the stories here with knowing details of working-class life. She inhabits every character’s voice beautifully and never condescends to them; this is a book written with care and compassion. It’s an excellent collection that’s likely to appeal to fans of Alice Munro and Tobias Wolff—or to anybody with a taste for emotionally resonant short fiction.

Quiet but powerful.

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**VINTAGE CONTEMPORARIES**

*Kois, Dan*

Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)

$27.99 | Jan. 17, 2023

978-0-06-316-241-9

A bittersweet love letter to 1990s New York.

Anyone who lived through the final decade of the last century in New York City will instantly recognize the world evoked by Kois, a longtime editor, in his debut novel. That goes double for young people raised in suburbs across the U.S. who moved to the city to work in publishing or the arts or for nonprofits. To be sure, that is a very specific readership slice. But those who fall into it may find themselves
remembering—fondly or not, depending—their early 20s in a city that could be alienating, frightening, and diminishing but also intoxicatingly exciting. Kois focuses on the friendship between two young women, one a conscientious Midwesterner working in book publishing and subletting a sketchy apartment with a college friend, the other a free spirit who conceives of site-specific works around the city and lives in a squat. For unclear reasons, Kois has named both characters Emily. “If we were characters in a story,” one says to the other during an early encounter, “it would be pretty confusing that we were both named Emily.” Kois skirts confusion, to some degree, by identifying one Emily (the publishing one, who is the novel’s main character) as Em through much of the book. The somewhat nonlinear plot tracks Em’s maturation from a literary-agency assistant hanging out downtown in the early 90s to an established book editor raising a young daughter with her lawyer husband all the way uptown in the mid-2000s. Em’s rocky yet formative early friendship with Emily eventually peters out only to fire up again years later and again prompt change and growth. What’s best about Kois’ work here is not his novel’s low-stakes, episodic plot but rather his eye for detail and penchant for humorously trenchant descriptions:

Em notes that Emily is wearing leather pants “that Em would never have been able to pull off, even if she could have pulled them on.” Such asides are amusing, but what does the Emilys’ story mean at a deeper level? It’s hard to say, though this line, near the end, offers resonance: “Maybe we’re all frauds at twenty-five. But in our fraudulent selves we see the seeds of the artists we might become, if we can overcome our worst tendencies.” In the book’s final line, Em tells her daughter, “I’m always watching.” This keenly observed if imperfect book makes clear that Kois is, too.

This atmospheric first novel is an ode to friendship, creativity, and an era now gone.

INTERCEPTION CITY
THE TRUTH MAY OR MAY NOT SET YOU FREE, BUT IT CAN DEFINITELY GET YOU KILLED.
“A twisty, fast plot with lots of bloodshed and humor.”
—Kirkus Reviews for Interception City

“TROPIC HEAT
EVERYTHING GOES BAD FASTER IN THE TROPICS.
“Mattson fuels this taut story with a swift, unwavering pace...A riveting and enjoyable Southern crime tale that runs full tilt.”
—Kirkus Reviews for Tropic Heat

FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION AND INFORMATION ON PUBLISHING RIGHTS, EMAIL RWF999@AOL.COM
A tragedy has sent a young artist into seclusion. A potential apocalypse may be enough to bring her back.

For the past two years, 10 months, and 18 days, Katie's lived in darkness, on retreat from her former life as a rising artist after a personal tragedy eclipsed any happiness she believed possible. Jacob's Ladder, a remote island named by a former resident for its potential as a stairway to heaven, offers Katie the chance to hide from the rest of the world, merely existing, not healing. She lives each day trying to fulfill what she's called “the Promise” to those in the life she once knew, though a promise of what is not clear. The closest neighboring islands, Oak Haven and Ringrock, are equally cloistered. Though Katie’s realtor has suggested that

Ringrock is some sort of Environmental Protection Agency research station, Katie’s cynicism makes her suspect something more nefarious. The protagonist’s remote world and the author’s moody writing are disrupted one night by the startling appearance of drones and the suspicious behavior of a fox Katie’s dubbed Michael J. The wary canine serves as a harbinger of potential danger, and Katie responds by arming herself to the hilt when unexpected guests descend on Jacob's Ladder. While the true purpose of these visitors is unclear, Katie senses that the greater world is at the precipice of permanent collapse and that she may be the only one who can prevent the impending apocalypse.

A moody tone hangs like a cloud over the alarming but vague danger awaiting the world.
“A traditional culture deals with threats from inside and outside its tightknit community.”

**STOLEN**

Laestadius, Ann-Helen

Trans. by Rachel Willson-Broyles

Scribner (400 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Jan. 31, 2023

978-1668007167

A traditional culture deals with threats from inside and outside its tight-knit community.

Kick-started by the disturbing poaching and slaughter of a reindeer that was part of a Sámi family's herd in remote northern Sweden, Laestadius' saga details the inequities faced by the contemporary Indigenous Sámi population. Elsa, a 9-year-old to whom the murdered reindeer had been entrusted, is threatened by the hunter and scared into not revealing his identity to her family or authorities. Previous reindeer slaughters had gone unpursued by local police since this sort of crime against the Sámi (and their way of life) was considered mere theft. Frustrated by the seeming passivity with which the group accepts the situation, Elsa sets upon her own path as she grows into adulthood. She questions traditional gender roles as well as the failure of local police to apprehend the hunter who is torturing and killing her community's reindeer. The legacies of long-held social prejudices against the Indigenous group—racism, economic insecurity, and the traumas borne by the community's elders who had been removed from the group in childhood and sent to “nomad schools”—continue to haunt Sámi life with devastating effects. Elsa must reconcile her own quest for justice with the need for some in the group to just survive. Looming over the tale, which unfolds over the course of more than a decade, is the specter of climate change and its impacts on the traditional Sámi herding methods. Laestadius, who is Sámi and of Tornedalian descent, indicates in her acknowledgements that the novel is based upon actual occurrences in Sápmi territory. Willson-Broyles’ translation from Swedish is matter-of-fact and incorporates many phrases and words from the Sámi language.

A revelatory account of not-well-known assaults on the rights of an Indigenous group.

**ALLIGATOR ALLEY**

Lawson, Mike

Atlantic Monthly (288 pp.)

$27.00 | Feb. 7, 2023

978-0-8021-6052-2

A much-respected Department of Justice administrator’s reservations about the apparently random shooting of a colleague sends D.C. fixer Joe DeMarco on a journey to identify the real killers (not hard) and bring them to justice (much harder). Andie Moore, found shot dead behind the wheel of her car, seems to have been the victim of an impatient thief. But her boss, Congressional Medal of Honor winner Henry Cantor, who runs the DOJ’s Oversight and Review Division, is convinced that her murder is connected to her investigation of Lenny and Estelle Bermann, who used the assisted living facility they owned to bilk Medicare of $15 million—which, Henry reminds House Speaker John Mahoney, is not all that much money. He’s right, of course: Andie had snapped a damning photo of McIntyre and McGruder, a pair of FBI agents investigating the case, executing the Bermans in an Everglades swamp so that they could pocket the proceeds themselves, and when they realized they’d been followed to the rendezvous, they tied up the unexpected loose end. It doesn’t take long for DeMarco and Emma, the Defense Department op he teams up with, to identify McIntyre and McGruder, but the killers have an accomplice who’s even more coldblooded than they are and even more intent on tying up loose ends. The quest to identify the murderers morphs into a quest to bring them to justice before they can tie up enough loose ends to sink Lawson's consistently absorbing franchise. The denouement, well planned on every side, goes abruptly off the rails due to some unwelcome coincidences and a remarkably heroic gesture by one of the leading players.

Storytelling that’s as brisk, efficient, and unsentimental as the killers.
THE THREE LIVES OF ALIX ST. PIERRE
Lester, Natasha
Forever (432 pp.)
$28.00 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-538-70693-0

A young woman working in Paris in the aftermath of World War II is haunted by the consequences of her work as a spy in Lester's sumptuous historical romance.

Australian author Lester moves back and forth through time as she follows orphaned Alix St. Pierre, raised in Los Angeles by wealthy friends of her late French parents, from her post–boarding school, prewar life in Paris to her years in Switzerland working for the Office of Strategic Services under the direction of Allen Dulles and her postwar career as a publicist for up-and-coming fashion designer Christian Dior. Determinedly self-sufficient Alix is haunted by guilt for the role one of her key informants during the war, code-named “La Voce,” may have played in the deaths of her fiancé, Bobby, and one of the Italian partisans with whom she worked. Determined to bring La Voce to justice, she forms an unlikely alliance with New York publishing heir Anthony March, described by one of Alix’s friends as “very louche and luscious.” The two grow increasingly attached as the search for their dangerous target proceeds. The various plotlines don’t mesh seamlessly: While Lester appears to be doing her dutiful best to deal with the atrocities of the war years and the grim experiences of the women and men who must cope with them, her writing comes alive while telling the stories of Dior and those who worked with him, and it’s hard not to wish she’d given herself more time with that fizzy subject matter. The budding romance between Alix and Anthony, during which Alix swoons over Anthony’s manly form and hidden sensitivity while instructing herself to remain independent, seems tacked on from another, steamier, novel entirely. Readers may find themselves skimming the thoroughly researched but often plodding World War II sections in hopes of returning to Alix’s admittedly more frivolous but decidedly more fascinating life in postwar Paris.

One life would be plenty.

I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU
Makkai, Rebecca
Viking (448 pp.)
$28.00 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-0-593-49014-3

Art imitates life: A podcast explores whether a man who has served more than 20 years in prison for the murder of a young woman was wrongfully convicted.

While Makkai’s latest is likely inspired by the Adnan Syed/Serial story—in the news recently as Syed’s conviction was vacated and he was released from prison—she has added intriguing layers of complication to her version. Bodie Kane, producer of a hit podcast about Hollywood starlets, has been invited back to Granby, the elite New Hampshire boarding school she graduated from in 1995, to teach a course on podcasting during the two-week “mini-mester” of January 2018. Among the topics Bodie suggests to her students is the murder of her classmate Thalia Keith, which occurred in the spring of their senior year on the night of the school musical. A Black man who worked for the school as an athletic trainer was convicted and imprisoned for the murder of the White Thalia, but doubts have fueled interest in the case ever since, including a 2005 episode of Dateline and a website promoting the view that the boyfriend did it, robbieserenhoisguilty.com. As Bodie works with her high schoolers to investigate, a major #MeToo–type scandal breaks in her own life, involving her partner, a well-known visual artist. Meanwhile, her return to Granby forces her to confront her troubled younger self: the ways she was affected by her disastrous childhood and her connection to a teacher who was certainly a predator and may even have been the murderer. Punctuating the story with lists of references to familiar
“Two lovers navigate their lives as they are split into separate nations.”

THE BOOK OF EVERLASTING THINGS

Makkai, Emma
Flatiron Books (480 pp.)
$29.99 | Dec. 27, 2022
978-1-250-80202-6

Two lovers navigate their lives as they are split into separate nations.

Malhotra’s debut novel starts off in pre-Partition Lahore, where Samir Vij, a 10-year-old Hindu boy, inherits his paternal uncle Vivek’s olfactory prowess. Much of the plot—spanning 80 years and several cities—is accentuated by this inheritance. The Vij family’s perfumery; Samir’s love for a young Muslim girl named Firdaus Khan, who’s a calligrapher; and the communal riots marred with smoke and blood in the days preceding the 1947 Partition are all deftly described through Samir’s nose. Malhotra’s prose is sensuous and rich, and the ease with which she conjures a world that no longer exists is impressive.

THE HUNTSMAN

Judith Sanders
Flatiron Books (344 pp.)
$29.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-250-85210-4

“...an extraordinary thriller. More than that, it approaches its subject from a wholly unique perspective; one that is sure to keep the reader guessing until the story’s shocking conclusion.”

—Steven Jon Whritner, Emmy-winning Writer & Producer

“This shrewd exploration of a killer’s mindset will unnerve and enthrall readers.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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crimes—“the one where” this or that happened—Makkai places the fictional murder in a societal context of violence against women and the obsession with true crime. Fans of The Great Believers (2018) should be forewarned that this book does not have the profound impact of its predecessor, partly because the emotions brought up by its topic are on the outrage-anger spectrum rather than the grief-sorrow one. Also, Makkai seems not to want us to fall in love with Bodie, who herself is a bit cold, but perhaps this is because the whole narrative is addressed to a “you” she is furious with.

Well plotted, well written, and well designed to make its points.
Sometimes the prose gets heavy-handed, though. In the first few pages, when young Samir inhales the smell of tuberose: “All that surrounded him—the river, the legends, the sand, the breeze, the morning light, even his family—dissolved. Everything solid melted into air.” This seems too transcendental so early in the novel. Perhaps the hyperbole would have served a purpose later, when tuberose was not just an intoxicating smell, but a memory of the past. While the Partition of India and creation of Pakistan mold the shape of Samir’s and Firdaus’ lives, the novel is, above all else, a meditation on memory, the preservation of intimate history, loss, and love. The story is teeming with these themes, but the jumps from India to France, from Samir’s perspective to Firdaus’ and the years skipped in between, feel abrupt and simplistic. Perhaps this is what Malhotra set out to achieve—to create a present so embedded in the past that it doesn’t make sense on its own.

A quiet and moving portrait of eternal love and remembrance.

THE DELUGE
Markley, Stephen
Simon & Schuster (896 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-982-12309-3

A hyper-realistic, alarming vision of the world destabilized by climate change. This sprawling novel, about 900 pages long, covers three decades of American life, beginning in 2013, as partisan divisions widen and the effects of rising global temperatures become more pronounced, and extending to a cataclysmic near future marked by social and ecological collapse. The large cast of characters introduced here includes climate scientists, domestic terrorists, political leaders of various stripes, and a gaggle of regular citizens caught up in the apocalyptic maelstrom. Shifting points of view are set against newspaper articles and government reports as the intricacies of the plot unfold and the dramatic intersection of the central characters’ lives is gradually revealed. This is an exhaustively researched book, crammed full of commentary and speculation on contemporary trends: widening wealth gaps, political polarization, the inefficacy of reformist measures to address environmental threats, the blinkered resistance of conservative forces, the inevitability of violent assaults on scapegoats as currents of irrationality pulse through the nation. There are intriguing surprises in this chronicle of accelerating disorder and anomie, and the conclusion rewards those who persevere through the thickets of character development, though overall the novel has difficulty sustaining narrative momentum, and its extraordinary length seems, at last, rather unjustified. A more streamlined story that felt less inclined to bolster its authority with mountains of detail would likely have been more powerful. Nevertheless, the author has produced a highly memorable invention in a character named Kate Morris, a charismatic eco-activist with a ferocious clarity of purpose. Her narrative, taken on its own, is unusually vivid and distills much of what the novel seems to care about most: warning of massive disruptions to our civilization in the decades to come and exploring possibilities for maintaining our humanity as we struggle to manage them.

An ambitious rendering of a forbidding future and the public and private challenges that will define it.

WESTERN LANE
Maroo, Chetna
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (160 pp.)
$25.00 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-374-60749-4

A grieving family’s life is altered when they become obsessed with the game of squash. Gopi is the youngest in a family of three daughters. Her sisters, Mona and
Khush, are 15 and 13, respectively, and Gopi is just 11 when the novel opens. The girls’ mother has just died. When a relative tells Gopi’s father that he must find something for his daughters to do to keep them from running wild, Pa decides they should take up squash at Western Lane, the sports center near their home in England. All the girls train diligently, but only Gopi shows true talent. Pa begins to train her harder, finding her an opponent in 13-year-old Ged, the son of a Western Lane employee, and finding himself a friend in Ged’s mother. Gopi pushes herself harder and harder on the squash court, finding release in the repetition of drills and volleys. (“It was with a feeling of having been rescued that I raised my racket and served,” she remembers.) As Gopi disappears into her new identity as an athlete, the rest of her family members are struggling under the weight of their bereavement and the pressure to move forward with their lives under the watchful eyes of their relatives and their community. It is this pressure that threatens to crack the family apart forever. Maroo’s subtle and elegant writing at first seems surprisingly restrained for a novel about a subject as high-spirited and energetic as squash and from a narrator as generally high-spirited and energetic as an 11-year-old girl. But Gopi’s retrospective narration accumulates slow layers of heartbreak as the story proceeds, patiently building up an entire landscape of emotion through gestures, silences, and overheard murmurings in the dark.

A debut novel of immense poise and promise.

LOOKING FOR JANE
Marshall, Heather
Atria (400 pp.)
$27.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-6680-1368-7

Mothers and daughters, secrets and lies.

Canadian writer Marshall makes an absorbing debut with a timely novel about the complexities of pregnancy and motherhood: “About wanting to be a mother and not wanting to be a mother, and all the gray areas in between,” as she writes in an author’s note. Her deftly braided
narrative, which takes place in Toronto beginning in the 1960s, focuses on three women whose lives have been deeply affected by the struggle over women’s reproductive rights in Canada, which finally ended in 1988 with a groundbreaking decision to legalize abortion. In 1960, though, Evelyn Taylor is sent to St. Agnes’s Home for Unwed Mothers, where she is forced to give up her daughter for adoption. In 1979, Nancy Mitchell is horrified by witnessing a cousin’s sordid back-alley abortion; and in 2017, Angela Creighton, who had been adopted as an infant, is undergoing rounds of in vitro fertilization so that she and her wife can have the baby they long for. Angela sets events in motion when she opens a misdirected letter addressed to a Nancy Mitchell, a wrenching confession from Nancy’s dying mother telling her daughter that she had been adopted and sharing, at last, the name of her birth mother. Angela’s efforts to find Nancy lead her to another discovery: of an underground network of abortion providers, staffed by physicians who risked their lives and careers to help women end unwanted pregnancies. They called themselves the Janes. One of the abortion providers is Evelyn, who became a physician in response to the trauma and “crippling sense of helplessness, and lack of control over her own life” she had suffered at St. Agnes’s. Nancy, sympathetic to the cause, volunteers as an administrator, booking and scheduling patients. Although the three lives intersect a bit too neatly, Marshall keeps the tension high as she reveals the devastating consequences of denying women autonomy over their bodies.

A charged topic handled with sensitivity and compassion.

THE GLASSMAKER’S WIFE
Martin, Lee
Dzanc (216 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-950539-48-2

A historical whodunit based on a true story from the mid-19th century.

In Heathsville, Illinois, both Leonard and Betsey Reed take a shine to their hired girl, Eveline Deal. Leonard teaches her the secrets of his trade, glassmaking; Betsey reads to her from *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, one of the most popular women’s magazines of the time. Eveline likes them in turn, but when “the Mister” dies under questionable circumstances, Eveline points the finger at “Miss Betsey.” Eveline is an observant girl. She knows Leonard to be plain-faced and Miss Betsey to be beautiful. She knows that Miss Betsey resents the Mister for selling 20 acres of land from her dowry without discussing it with her. And Eveline knows that Miss Betsey resents the Mister for selling 20 acres of land from her dowry without discussing it with her. And Eveline knows that Miss Betsey creates reasons to be alone with Ethan Delz, the handsome owner of the local dry goods store, and that the pair of them talk in a way that might make one pause. The main plot points are settled quickly, and Betsey finds herself imprisoned for the crime, but questions linger as to whom the guilty party actually is. It feels like most of the narrative action is completed in the story’s opening act, which makes the bulk of the book lag. Plot developments don’t hinge on ongoing drama; instead, we get carefully timed revelations from various characters. While the book is set in the past, only cursory allusions to the lifestyles of the times and dialectal inflections keep one aware of the setting.

If you’re looking for history or mystery, or maybe a bit of both, there are better options available.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY
Malicot, Laurent
Trans. by Daniel Levin Becker
Transit Books (454 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Jan. 24, 2023
978-1-945492-65-5

A woman’s 40th birthday soiree doesn’t go as planned in this psychological thriller.

The first sentence begins “She watches him through the window” and continues till the end of the page, some 275 words. It carries the
A compelling blend of mystery, horror, and suspense.

THE SUN WALKS DOWN
McFarlane, Fiona
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)
$28.00  |  Feb. 14, 2023
978-0-374-60623-7

Set in arid Southern Australia in 1883, this tale of a farming community’s search for a missing child offers intimate human drama, ruminations on the intersections of art and life, and a sweeping, still relevant view of race and class in Australia—and by extension, the U.S.

Six-year-old Denny Wallace wanders off his family farm during a sudden dust storm in the novel’s gorgeously rendered, anxiety-provoking first pages. The next scene, describing a wedding Denny’s sisters happen to be attending in the nearby town, charms with sexy innuendo and mild comedy. The tonal switch, jarring but effective, prepares the reader for plotting and characterizations that repeatedly confound expectations. Organized into the seven days and nights of searching for Denny, the suspense story—will he be found in time?—is a strong foundation for the novel’s larger ambitions. The treacherous beauty of Australia’s landscape comes vividly to life as a metaphor for the multiple human dramas unfolding. Australian-born McFarlane excels at creating a broad perspective on 19th-century Australia. The cast is Dickensian in size, but there are no caricatures.

A masterpiece of riveting storytelling.

With a line of description here, a snatch of dialogue there, every character develops a fertile interior life: Denny’s sisters and financially strapped parents; the lusty young bride and groom from the wedding; the uncomfortably privileged members of a wealthy ranching family; a visiting Swedish artist and his wife who disagree on art’s relationship to life. Indigenous people, taken for granted by the Whites, play particularly central roles, participating in the search with more skill than the White employers they observe with disdain. Even outsiders, like an Afghan trader passing through, are spotlighted in set-piece monologues. Although at times Denny’s would-be saviors, wrapped up in their private issues, almost forget about him, the boy remains the reader’s point of gravity as he navigates a frightening world with a child’s intuition.

A masterpiece of riveting storytelling.

Day’s tale is a thrilling mix of police procedural and fantasy adventure; he’s particularly deft at weaving magical touches into an otherwise realistic and familiar world.”

“Such details, from an image of a wand casually sitting on a desk in the opening pages to a bird’s-eye view of Aka’weyo’s astral projections, transform this straightforward story into something that’s far more than the sum of its parts.”

“A twisty, genre-blending story that starts with a bang and never slows down.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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A wide range of stories examine family and life in contemporary Botswana.

CALL AND RESPONSE
Moeng, Gothataone
Viking (304 pp.)
$27.95 | Jan. 31, 2023
978-0-593-49098-3

A wide range of stories examine family and life in contemporary Botswana. These stories—set mainly in the author’s hometown of Serowe and the Botswanan capital of Gaborone—illuminate the inner lives of girls and women of varying ages. Idiomatic phrases add texture to the prose, elegantly describing the characters’ lives and their internal conflicts. In the opening story, “Botalaote,” Boikanyo tires of taking care of her sick aunt and creates emotional distance by calling her “the patient.” Like all young people, she seeks excitement and would rather, as she says, “eat my youth.” Boikanyo begins dating a boy called Sixteen who helps distract her from her responsibilities. Years later, when she tells her friends the story of her youth, she realizes that death was omnipresent. Her friends are most interested in the “juxtaposition of school and cemetery, [which were] side by side, a hill cutting them off from the ward. It was as if they thought that, away from our parents, we kids fraternized with the dead.” With death comes the inevitable question of how to live, which many of the narrators of these stories grapple with. In “Small Wonders,” a widow frozen with grief can’t understand how the world hasn’t stopped since her husband’s death. She isolates herself and tries to delay the necessary final farewell ceremony. And in “A Good Girl,” a young woman who as a child strove to be well-mannered goes to university and lives in a way her family wouldn’t approve of as she searches for love. Of herself and her roommates she says, “We wanted love, oh, we wanted love, but we knew; we had been warned, that for girls like us, love was dangerous, a bright-burning flame, it would lick us alive.” Moreover, she recognizes the hypocritical expectations placed on her. Her brother flaunts his infidelity to his wife while she feels it’s necessary to hide her exploits.

A lovely debut brimming with deeply felt and well-rounded stories.

SOMEONE ELSE’S SHOES
Moyes, Jojo
Pamela Dorman/Viking (400 pp.)
$24.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781984879295

Two London women accidentally switch bags at the gym and end up walking in one another’s shoes—literally.

Sam Kemp is struggling—between her demanding jerk of a boss, her pushy parents, and her husband’s untreated depression, she has the weight of the world on her shoulders. When she accidentally grabs the wrong bag at the gym as she rushes out to a meeting, she’s initially dismayed to find the bag contains a towering, strappy pair of Christian Louboutin heels instead of her usual sensible footwear. But when she’s forced to wear the shoes into her meetings, she discovers something—they give her confidence and power she’s never had before. Emboldened, she doesn’t rush back to the gym to return them.

That’s unfortunate for Nisha Cantor, whose gym bag Sam accidentally stole. Nisha just got cut off by her ultrachic, controlling husband—now ex-husband. He won’t return her calls, he shuts her out of their penthouse, and he closes her credit cards, essentially leaving her with nothing. Out of options and money, Nisha finds herself working as a cleaner at the building where she once lived, hoping to sneak into her husband’s penthouse and get some of her things. But Nisha is also desperate to get those shoes back, and she’ll stop at nothing to find them. Meanwhile, Sam is dealing with her own problems, mainly feeling alone as she attempts to keep her family afloat while her husband’s illness worsens.

When Nisha and Sam finally meet, the two of them realize they might actually be able to work together to fix both their lives. Nisha and Sam both have satisfying arcs as characters who start out being difficult to like—Nisha because she’s a snob and Sam because she’s a pushover—but become better, stronger people because of their friendship. Moyes is also brilliant at creating fully formed, charmingly funny side characters, like Nisha’s co-worker Jasmine and Sam’s friend Andrea.

Ultimately, the story is about the importance of women from all walks of life supporting and looking out for one another.

A compelling, full-of-heart novel about the power of female friendship.

MY FATHER’S HOUSE
O’Connor, Joseph
Europa Editions (440 pp.)
$28.00 | Jan. 31, 2023
978-1-60945-835-5

A priest in Vatican City leads a perilous rescue effort surrounded by Rome’s Nazi occupiers.

In 1943 and 1944, Obersturmbannführer Paul Hauptmann terrorizes a starving Rome. But he is forbidden to enter Vatican City, at one-fifth of a square mile, the tiniest country in the world. If Jews or escaped Allied POW’s can manage to get there, they may have a chance to be smuggled to safety. The novel is inspired by a real historical figure named Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty, an Irish envoy to the Vatican. O’Flaherty and a small group go to great lengths to secretly aid as many people as they can. Discovery means death, so the group uses elaborate ruses—they form a choir as a cover, and O’Flaherty quietly passes along individual instructions during choir practice. They speak in code—“Books in the Library” means escapees being protected. It’s a risky game they’re about. Hitler only tolerates the Vatican’s existence and could wipe it out in the blink of an eye, so O’Flaherty’s superiors are deeply uneasy about the monsignor’s activities. Meanwhile, Hauptmann knows there is an Escape Line, and he is eager to prove it. And given that
his “favoured interrogation tool is the blowtorch,” his odds look better than O’Flaherty’s. But the “nuisance of a priest” is not nicknamed Hughdini for nothing, and he is moral to his core. If the story were told in typical thriller style, emphasizing action over language, it would still be good, but O’Connor’s phrasings are a special joy. One unnamed cardinal is “a long drink of cross-eyed, buck-toothed misery if ever there was, he’d bore the snots off a wet horse.” On Christmas Eve, three bitterly cold German soldiers are invited indoors for some holiday cheer. They are “fine examples of the super-race”: One of them is “a haddock-faced, lumpenshouldered, Wurst-fingered corner boy, that ugly the tide wouldn’t take him out.” And the Vatican Embassy has “rats you could saddle.”

A deeply emotional read. And when the action is over, the coda could water an atheist’s eye.

DAUGHTERS BEYOND COMMAND
Olmi, Véronique
Trans. by Alison Anderson
Europa Editions (496 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Jan. 17, 2023
978-1-60945-790-7

Repercussions from seismic changes in French culture resonate within a provincial family.

Agnès and Bruno Malivieri’s daughters—Sabine, Hélène, and Mariette—are being raised in Aix-en-Provence in a working-class environment, with all the traditional gender, class, and religious constraints present in France until the late 1960s, when the book opens. Sabine, the eldest, yearns for a life in Paris and the arts. Mariette, the “mouse” of the family, is dogged by chronic asthma and has a quiet, dreamy way about her. In between the two is Hélène, who lives the most unconventional life of all the Malivieri’s: Her summer vacations, school breaks, and holidays are spent in the bourgeois Parisian home of her maternal aunt and uncle, the Tavelis. (The arrangement, which takes Hélène years to understand on a psychological level, allows her to lead a life of privilege while providing her family in Provence with some financial relief.) As the young women’s roles are redefined during decades of social tumult, their roles within the family shift as well. Sabine’s artistic efforts take her in unanticipated directions, while Hélène’s passion for animal rights props her out of the security of the Tavelis’ cocoon. After her older sisters leave the family home, Mariette grows into an awareness of the realities of the world Provence in a working-class environment, with all the traditional gender, class, and religious constraints present in France until the late 1960s, when the book opens. Sabine, the eldest, yearns for a life in Paris and the arts. Mariette, the “mouse” of the family, is dogged by chronic asthma and has a quiet, dreamy way about her. In between the two is Hélène, who lives the most unconventional life of all the Malivieri’s: Her summer vacations, school breaks, and holidays are spent in the bourgeois Parisian home of her maternal aunt and uncle, the Tavelis. (The arrangement, which takes Hélène years to understand on a psychological level, allows her to lead a life of privilege while providing her family in Provence with some financial relief.) As the young women’s roles are redefined during decades of social tumult, their roles within the family shift as well. Sabine’s artistic efforts take her in unanticipated directions, while Hélène’s passion for animal rights props her out of the security of the Tavelis’ cocoon. After her older sisters leave the family home, Mariette grows into an awareness of the realities of the world

THE END OF DRUM-TIME
Pylväinen, Hanna
Henry Holt (368 pp.)
$28.99 | Jan. 24, 2023
978-1-250-82290-1

This second novel by award-winning author Pylväinen—following We Sinners (2012)—brings to life a clash of cultures in 19th-century Lapland.

In 1851 in the remote town of Gárasavvon in northern Scandinavia, preacher Lars Levi...
Laestadius tries to turn his congregation of Swedes, Finns, and Sámi reindeer herders away from alcohol—“the Devil’s piss”—toward God. “He looked at his congregants, his parishioners, his reindeer, skittish on the snow, and he saw them multiply before him, ten upon ten, so that the back of the church was not littered with drunks who stank of their drinking, but instead each face shone clean and each body’s blood coursed with the mysteries and the magic of Christ.” Revered among his followers, his spiritual awakenings begin to concern the church authorities to the south. Meanwhile, one of his daughters falls in love, the local shopkeeper laments his choices, a local woman breaks her engagement, and the Sámi herders prepare to drive their reindeer to the sea on their traditional route. Pylväinen seamlessly moves among different points of view, giving rich and satisfying breadth to a story of cultural upheaval. In the little Gárasavvon church, a confrontation about faith starts a chain reaction. And in Russia, decisions are being made that will impact everyone, the fallen and the saved. Pylväinen’s excellent debut novel concerned a contemporary American family, members of the obscure religious sect called Laestadianism; this novel goes back to its roots. Beautifully written and masterfully researched, the book’s greatest triumph is the characters, full of human foibles, passions, and tenderness, jealousy, courage, doubts, and moments of transcendence. “He looked at the children, and he wondered suddenly about the length of their lives, if they would lose their reindeer, if they would go on to live in homes with walls that didn’t move…. The thought made him inexpressibly sad.”

Ambitious and resonant, a vivid, fascinating, and moving novel.

**THE GUEST LECTURE**

*Riker, Martin*

Black Cat/Grove (256 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Jan. 24, 2023

978-0-8021-6041-6

An optimistic approach to considering the dismal science and life in general may be an economist’s dream.

On the eve of a guest lecture she’s set to deliver—to an audience whose identity is never fully revealed—economics professor Abby wrestles with thorny theoretical issues and a few problems closer to home. Having recently learned that she’s been denied tenure, Abby ponders her family’s future (social and economic) as well as the opportunities and occurrences which have culminated in this night of insomnia in a mediocre hotel room. Worried about remembering all the points of her lecture on John Maynard Keynes’ 1930 essay “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren,” she uses the loci method of memorization and attempts to create visual associations between parts of her speech and specific locations within her family’s home. Accompanying her on the mental walk-through is Keynes himself (a circumstance that goes unnoticed by her sleeping husband and daughter). The essay in question is intimately entwined with Abby’s professional life and, perhaps, also her personal life, as Keynes argued for a certain optimism in the face of the “Great Slump” facing England at the time of its writing. Abby’s thesis is that rather than predicting a utopian sort of future for England, Keynes was using rhetoric to encourage alternate visions; unfortunately, her hypothesis leads neither to tenure nor a bestselling book. Keynes proves to be an amiable and encouraging companion on Abby’s tortured tripe through the memory palace she has constructed. Addressing her as “Abigail,” the revered economist urges her to liven up the speech with “pixie dust” details about his life and provides other clarifying advice as well in this unique novel of ideas.

A thoughtful and thought-filled stroll down a life’s Memory Lane.

**YOU SHOULD SMILE MORE**

*Ryan, Anastasia*

Sourcebooks Casablanca (256 pp.)

$15.99 paper | Jan. 17, 2023

978-1-72825-335-0

When a telemarketer is fired because of her face, she and two colleagues embark on a harebrained quest to take down their boss in this comedic debut. Vanessa Blair never thought there was anything particularly wrong with her face. Though she made the occasional eye roll or grimace about yet another employer-mandated team-building exercise, Nessa certainly never thought her “resting bitch face” would warrant her getting sacked from a telemarketing gig at Directis. Then Xavier Adams, her smarmy, perpetually barefoot boss, terminated her employment on account of her face and “dark soul,” leaving Nessa with a measly three days’ pay and sketchy severance agreement. When her co-workers Jane Delaney and Trisha Lam have similar experiences with Xavier, the three women begin to ruminate on their time at Directis. What kind of work environment hands out Underperforming Employee of the Week certificates? After a drunken night of bashing Xavier, Nessa finds herself enmeshed in a scheme with Jane and Trisha to destroy their boss and uncover whatever fishy business is keeping Directis afloat. Hijinks ensue with a revenge plot consisting of glitter-bombing the office AC unit, stealing Xavier’s hairless cat, and the formation of the Bridge Brigade, an espionage unit comprising Nessa’s mom and the neighborhood bridge ladies. Even Carter Beckett, the hot tattooed unemployment officer in charge of Nessa’s case, can tell that Directis is keeping secrets. Can Nessa and her friends prove that Directis is more than just a crappy job before Xavier ruins their career chances? Reminiscent of *The Office* and *9 to 5*, Ryan’s debut is a slapstick blend of comedy and heart, with plenty of laugh-out-loud moments and strong female heroines. It’s a wonder that Nessa and her co-workers stayed at Directis as long as they did—Xavier Adams is Michael Scott meets Miranda Priestly, “body slamming the English language” with phrases like “tweak” and forcing employees to play musical chairs dressed as mermaids. Readers will want to see Xavier
They are of modest means but nevertheless send Esther to a primary school—a decision Esther doesn’t quite understand but her beloved dad attributes to wanting to keep her safe from “little punks.” Being a working-class kid in a private school—where she is popular and does well in her studies—invites Esther to share her thoughts on issues both timely and timeless.

Young Esther lives with her mother, father, and older brother (and eventually a baby brother) in Paris’ 17th arrondissement. They are of modest means but nevertheless send Esther to a private school—a decision Esther doesn’t quite understand but her beloved dad attributes to wanting to keep her safe from “little punks.” Being a working-class kid in a private school—where she is popular and does well in her studies—invites Esther to share her thoughts on issues both timely and timeless.

A wacky ode to the resting bitch face.

**ESTHER’S NOTEBOOKS**
*Sattouf, Riad*  
*Trans. by Sam Taylor*  
*Pantheon (168 pp.)*  
*$30.00 | Jan. 24, 2023*  
*978-0-593-31692-4*

A collection of 156 installments of a weekly comic strip by cartoonist Sattouf that follows the everyday life of a real Parisian girl—his friend’s daughter—from ages 9 to 12 as she shares her thoughts on issues both timely and timeless.

Young Esther lives with her mother, father, and older brother (and eventually a baby brother) in Paris’ 17th arrondissement. They are of modest means but nevertheless send Esther to a private school—a decision Esther doesn’t quite understand but her beloved dad attributes to wanting to keep her safe from “little punks.” Being a working-class kid in a private school—where she is popular and does well in her studies—invites Esther to share her thoughts on issues both timely and timeless.

**A NEW RACE OF MEN FROM HEAVEN**
*Sen, Chitatli*  
*Sarabande (190 pp.)*  
*$17.95 paper | Jan. 17, 2023*  
*978-1-956046-02-1*

A poignant collection of stories about people in search of connection.

The Indian and Indian American characters in Sen’s short fiction, chosen by Danielle Evans for the 2021 Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction, are adrift. In “The Immigrant,” it’s not clear who is lost: a little boy who goes missing from a restaurant or Dhrum, a consultant who sits nearby writing a letter to his parents, confessing his love for a woman about whom they probably wouldn’t approve since she’s Muslim and he’s Hindu, while also second-guessing his worth because of “the immutable fact of his Indianness.” In “A New Race of Men From Heaven,” Sasha hangs on to her virginity well into her 20s and can’t figure out why. In “Uma,” a recently widowed woman leaves her family in India and goes to America to care for her brother’s children only to find that her days lack shape and she is less welcome than she expected. In these stirring, understated stories, the intersections of ethnicity, religion, and gender raise the stakes for the characters—so that when the reasons for their disconnection are finally revealed, it’s often a double whammy. That’s the case in “North, South, East, West,” a piece that slowly teases out the wrenching circumstances of an Indian mother’s distance from her family. “Within this little space she ought to know her children better,” the mother thinks, surveying her small American apartment. “They ought to know her.” And yet by the time we learn what happened back in India, it’s impossible to blame her for withdrawing even as we root for her to emerge. Almost every story here is a study in restraint, Sen’s considerable talent evident in her ability to wring meaning from the smallest details.  

**TOMB OF SAND**
*Shree, Geetanjali*  
*Trans. by Daisy Rockwell*  
*HarperVia (624 pp.)*  
*$29.99 | Jan. 31, 2023*  
*978-0-06-329940-5*

An 80-year-old woman begins a new life and, in the process, confronts her past.

Winner of the 2022 International Booker Prize, this ambitious novel is something of a behemoth, upending and redefining concepts of modernity, boundaries, gender, colonialism, and the India-Pakistan Partition. Along the way, Shree challenges the idea of what a novel—or even a story—can do. At the book’s center is 80-year-old Ma, who lives in Delhi with her son and daughter-in-law. Deeply depressed following her husband’s death, Ma refuses to get out of bed. Then, suddenly, Ma disappears for a few days, and when she turns up again, with no explanation for her absence, she goes to stay with her daughter. But the novel itself: “Think of a story as a living being,” she writes. “There
Because we’re middle-aged housewives. Who’s more invisible than us? We can get away with murder. Literally.”

There are countless beings and countless types of beings.” Some of this material becomes repetitive and could have benefited from a strict editor. Then, too, Shroff is occasionally prone to a didacticism that isn’t quite as mind-blowing as she might have intended: “That which is perceived in a state of semiconsciousness is true unvarnished reality,” for example; “A rock is only a rock as long as it’s a rock.” Still, the language games and puns, nimbly translated by Rockwell, are delightful (“Their minds turned to curd: hue and cry occurred”), and Shroff’s larger project is truly admirable: an utterly unique novel that redefines its own boundaries even as it unfolds.

Shroff’s experimental novel doesn’t always succeed—but even when it fails, it fails in a compelling way.

**THE BANDIT QUEENS**

*Shroff, Parini*

Ballantine (352 pp.)

$28.00 | Jan. 3, 2023

From the Indian village five years ago, he left her saddled with debt—villainous characters who pause midvillainy to explain that they murdered him. Geeta simultaneously resents her dubious reputation, wields it to scare local children into compliance, and uses it to make up for her loneliness: “She wasn’t respected here, but she was feared, and fear had been very kind to Geeta.” Then Farah—a member of the microloan club Geeta belongs to along with fellow female entrepreneurs—has a proposal. Would Geeta help her remove her proverbial nose ring by murdering her abusive husband? While hesitant at first, Geeta ultimately agrees. But, of course, this murder does not go smoothly. From there follow a series of betrayals, the uncovering of an underground alcohol trade, and more murder proposals. Some of Shroff’s attempts to insert serious discussions of abuse, misogyny, and class throughout the novel feel awkward, and the story could have used some editing (perhaps one less murder?). Still, if you can lean into the melodramatic slapstick nature of it all—villainous characters who pause midway to explain that their nicknames are works in progress; characters who pause mid–hostage situation to wish each other a Happy New Year—the novel will reward you with occasional witty one-liners, tender moments of deep female friendship, and salient truths: “Because we’re middle-aged housewives. Who’s more invisible than us? We can get away with murder. Literally.”

Readers will appreciate—if not quite be riveted by—this tale of the strength of women in impossible situations.

**BEHIND THE SCENES**

*Stetz-Waters, Karelia*

Forever (352 pp.)

$25.99 paper | Jan. 31, 2023

978-1-538-70925-2

Two successful career-minded women kick off a tender romance at an animal rescue fundraiser, but they must contend with lingering grief and heartbreak to reach their happily-ever-after.

Thirty-eight-year-old Rose Josten is an affluent consultant at Integral Business Solutions with a deep love for her rescue pugs and the finer things in life. While attending a fundraiser for the Humane Society, she meets a mysterious woman who, on first impression, seems very much her opposite. Ash Stewart, who’s 40, feels more at home in ripped jeans and band T-shirts than designer clothes, but from the first time she meets Rose, their banter is flirtatious and easy even though Ash is still carrying the emotional remnants of a divorce and limping from a particularly horrific car accident. A talented filmmaker, she’s hoping to finally see an important and personal project come to fruition. When Ash approaches bombastic billionaire Irene Brentworth to contribute funding, she knows it’s a long shot. Surprising no one more than Ash herself, Irene is interested and asks to see a more fleshed-out proposal. Hoping to help Ash get ready for the big pitch, her friend and employee Emma reaches out to the highly sought-after Integral for a consultation. When Rose agrees to take the job, she has no idea she’ll soon be reunited with the mysterious woman she chatted with at the fundraiser. Most of the conflict is internal, with Rose concerned about hitting her midlife crisis and Ash trying to rebuild her professional career. It’s lovely to see a romance between two women older than their 20s. Rose and Ash are settled in their careers and their passions and are confident about who they are and how they want to be perceived by those around them. Stetz-Waters balances humor with a touch of charming satire; the words *sweet* and *earnest* are just the start to describing this slow-burn romance.

A delight from start to finish.

**A CASTLE IN BROOKLYN**

*Wachtel, Shirley Russak*

Little A (288 pp.)

$24.95 | Jan. 1, 2023

978-1-6625-0874-5

Covering six decades, Wachtel’s debut novel about the friendship forged by two Polish Jews who survive the Holocaust together evolves into a story about surviving the many guises of loss.

In 1944 Poland, Jacob Stein, 18, and Zalman Mendelson, 12, meet while hiding from the Nazis in a hay barn. They remain together—Zalman sharing his family’s tragic history, Jacob unable to talk about his past—until the war ends...
“Things heat up fast when a baker investigates a customer’s murder.”

**BREAD OVER TROUBLED WATER**

A gentle novel of high ideals that never quite comes to life.

and they emigrate together to America. While Zalman farms in Minnesota, Jacob stays in New York City, where he marries Esther and takes over her job, one she secretly loved, managing her father’s business. Once financially secure, Jacob hires Zalman, whose father trained him in architecture and whose career in Minnesota has conveniently been cut short by an arm injury, to design the dream home Jacob has always fantasized building. Zalman moves into the finished house with Jacob and Esther in a supposedly temporary arrangement that lasts for years. The reader senses early danger signs of the romantic triangle that entangles the three for the rest of their lives. Esther grows dependent on Zalman for platonic companionship as Jacob becomes increasingly introverted. The birth and raising of their son renews Esther and Jacob’s marriage. But then tragedy strikes, causing decades of guilt, grief, and missed connections, almost always handled by those affected with fortitude and resilience. Except for the stereotypical portrayal of some poor White Southerners as cretins, Wachtel writes with a surfeit of affection for her characters, constantly (over-) emphasizing their well-meaning goodness. Although the last scene occurs in 2010 and Wachtel pointedly uses details like home decor and dress styles to demarcate the changing decades, the outside world remains a cardboard backdrop. Ultimately the novel’s focus shifts from the characters to the house that has bound and divided them, repository of their hopes, regrets, and memories.

A book moves most freely when the women in the cell get together to gossip and talk about their lives and in the flashbacks to Anya’s earlier life. Still, Yarmysh’s prose is stiff, and her characters seem more like sociological sketches than living beings. A subplot in which Anya begins to see visions or hallucinations in the cell not only strains credibility—it seems to contradict the very project Yarmysh set for herself.

With two-dimensional characters, stiff prose, and a dose of prison clichés, the book fails to deliver on its own promise.

**M Y S T E R Y**

**BREAD OVER TROUBLED WATER**

Archer, Winnie

Kensington (352 pp.)

88.99 paper | Nov. 29, 2022

978-1-4967-3356-6

Things heat up fast when a baker investigates a customer’s murder.

Yarmysh, Kira

Grove (368 pp.)

$27.00 | Feb. 7, 2023

978-0-8021-6073-7

A young Russian woman faces 10 days in a detention center.

This debut novel by Yarmysh, best known as press secretary to the Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny, certainly holds a great deal of promise because of both its author’s job title and its own premise. When Anya is arrested at a Moscow rally protesting government corruption, she is sentenced to 10 days in a detention center. In the cell she shares with a handful of other women, she encounters a kind of cross section of Russian femininity: There’s Diana, who, at 25, is on her third husband; Maya, who has undergone innumerable elective surgeries and makes a living as a “kept” woman; Ida, who seems to have a learning disability and spends all day looking forward to her dose of Lyrica; and a few others. Almost no one Anya encounters has committed anything more egregious than driving without a license. Yarmysh’s intent is clearly to produce a timely, prescient social commentary, but many of her observations come across as trite. She writes that “prison time was elastic: it stretched out interminably, only to then fly like an arrow.” Meanwhile, Anya notes that “the detention center was a bit like a summer camp for dysfunctional adults.” The book moves most freely when the women in the cell get together to gossip and talk about their lives and in the flashbacks to Anya’s earlier life. Still, Yarmysh’s prose is stiff, and her characters seem more like sociological sketches than living beings. A subplot in which Anya begins to see visions or hallucinations in the cell not only strains credibility—it seems to contradict the very project Yarmysh set for herself.

Winnie Archer’s heroine sifts through a surfeit of suspects to separate the wheat from the chaff.
William Palmer, is convinced that that killer was Roger, whom he caught wiping the fingerprints off the chair in question. Unmoved by Roger’s desire to protect someone else, Nicolson assures him that he’d never turn Roger in, since he surely had his reasons. As Roger embarks on a quest to identify the real murderer to spare himself further genteel embarrassment at Nicolson’s hands, readers privy to a fateful encounter of Ena’s that Roger missed will have their own very definite ideas who the culprit is.

Berkeley makes his highly artificial plot consistently lively, amusing, and treasurable.

THE MASTER OF MYSTERIES
Burgess, Gelett
Poisoned Pen (496 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Jan. 3, 2023
9781728264011

Two dozen tales first collected in 1912 that, whatever their strengths and weaknesses, are nothing like any other detective stories you’ll read this year. Astro the Seer is not exactly a detective; he’s an Egyptian palm reader and psychic who has a working relationship with the NYPD and a pre-amatory relationship with his blond assistant, Valeska Wynne. Whatever his credentials, he’s consulted by men whose wives have disappeared, parents whose children have been kidnapped, society ladies whose jewels have been stolen, and occasionally the police themselves. But this description doesn’t begin to do justice to the fantastic variety of his cases. Astro is called on to track down a ghost who stalks an old house, to explain a series of strange gifts sent anonymously to a young woman, and to investigate the appearance of a mysterious doppelgänger and the fate of a pair of babies switched at birth. More often than not, the florid premises of these stories are more ingenious than their conclusions, as in “The Lady in Taupe,” which asks who’s been sending love letters to a married woman. From time to time, however, humorist Burgess (1866-1951) either produces an expertly straightforward whodunit like “The Middlebury Murder,” which offers three suspects in the shooting of an architect in his office, or goes full-bore crazy, as in “Vengeance of the Pi Rho Nu,” in which a bridegroom unaccountably vanishes the day before his wedding. Editor Leslie S. Klinger supplies an introduction, a biography, and study questions and reprints Burgess’ own very strange biography of his hero.

Unapologetic exotica to fuel a stroll down Memory Lane.
Finn is already under a certain amount of pressure. Feliks Zhirov, the Russian mobster arrested because of what she told the police, demands that she identify EasyClean, the online contract killer he’s been mistaken for, before Zhirov’s trial begins in two weeks. And he isn’t kidding. Finn realizes when she sees evidence that one of Zhirov’s people is stalking her nanny, Veronica Ruiz, and her two kids. Vero has problems of her own, since she’s borrowed $200,000 from Marco, a loan shark with since she’s borrowed $200,000 from Marco, a loan shark with teeth, to pay off her other creditors, and the only way she has to raise that kind of money is to liquidate a slightly bullet-ridden Aston Martin she and Finn acquired less than legally in Finlay Donovan Knocks Em Dead (2022). How could things possibly get worse? For starters, Finn and Vero could respond to the pressure Marco’s enforcer Ike Grindley puts on them by, um, dump dumping a pile of cars on top of him, eliminating the threat from him personally but accelerating it from every other direction. The rumor that EasyClean is a member of the Fairfax County Police Department leads Finn and Vero to accept an invitation to the citizens’ police academy, where they hope to get a closer look at the most likely suspects in the case while exposing themselves to the gaze of the academy’s coordinator, Finn’s maybe-sweetie Det. Nicholas Anthony. Chaos ensues, and the cliffhanger ending eliminates any point to peeking at the last few pages for enlightenment.

More purely manic than the heroine’s first two adventures, which at least held out the hope of resolution.

Odd places and the fact that the animals in the barn are carrying on for no discernible reason sound less like the work of spirits than of practical jokers, but Gemma reluctantly agrees to investigate. With Ryan Ashburton, her detective boyfriend, out of town, Gemma beds down for the night in Scarlet House with Jayne and Andy, her boyfriend, while animal caretaker Dave Chase, a retired veterinarian, and neighbor Craig Jones stay in the barn. Several odd and scary things happen, but it’s not until Dave takes a fatal tumble from the hayloft that Gemma takes things seriously. It’s rumored that the historical society is in financial trouble and that Scarlet House may be for sale. Though there are no glaringly obvious suspects, many people involved with the house seem to have conflicting agendas. When Gemma’s older sister, Pippa, who has a hush-hush job for the British government, suddenly arrives, Gemma doesn’t think for a minute that she’s just come for a visit.

Sherlock Holmes’ methods work once more in a charming combination of history and mystery.

A questionable client determined to prevent her uncle’s poisoning provokes another ebullient dash down Memory Lane with Los Angeles private eyes Bertha Cool and Donald Lam. The case, first published in 1947 under the pseudonym A.A. Fair, begins as Beatrice Ballwin tells the partners she’s convinced that her uncle, hard-driving real estate developer Gerald Ballwin, is at serious risk for being poisoned, presumably by his socialite second wife, Daphne. She forks over a generous retainer Donald sniffs at after for a minute that she’s just come for a visit. A ghost hunt turns to murder. British expatriate Gemma Doyle owns the Sherlock Holmes Bookshop and Emporium and, with her partner, Jayne Wilson, half of the adjoining Mrs. Hudson’s Tea Room in West London, Massachusetts. An expert on all things Sherlock-ian, Gemma has used the Great Detective’s methods in the past to solve crimes, so she’s naturally asked to discover who’s haunting Scarlet House, built in 1648 and currently owned by the historical society. The disappearance of several items that later turn up in
A COURAGE UNDIMMED
Graves, Stephanie
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Jan. 24, 2023
978-1-4967-3153-1

The murder of a medium presents a prickly problem for a village sleuth in World War II England.

When Capt. Jameson Aldridge first approached pigeoneer Olive Bright to provide birds for espionage missions in occupied Europe, they used the story of a budding romance as a cover for spending time together. Now that Olive’s working at nearby Brickendonbury Manor, home to a training school for agents, the fake romance is becoming real for her as her desire to become an agent battles her fear that she’s not brave enough to pull it off. Olive, who’s developed a reputation as a sleuth after solving several murder cases and who is very active in village affairs, is appalled when Mrs. Velda Dunbar, a newcomer and spiritualist, goes into a trance on the village green and announces the sinking of the HMS Bartholomew with several local men onboard. Lady Revell, whose sister recently passed away, asks Mrs. Dunbar to arrange a séance, and Olive is asked to invite a select group. Assigned to escort a Navy officer on a tour of the manor, she finds Hogan has never taken to energetic, insensitive Anita Hunzeker, Lt. Cmdr. Ian Fleming clever but arrogant, with ulterior motives.

A well-meaning plod.

HIDDEN IN THE PINES
Houston, Victoria
Crooked Lane (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-63910-147-4

A very cold case has a surprising connection to a recent death in Wisconsin’s Northwoods.

For 50 years Judith Hanson has wondering what really happened to her older sister, Maggie, who was found dead at age 16 lying on the banks of the local river. Now that she’s retired, she’s moving into her family home in Loon Lake to prepare it for sale and take a last stab at finding the truth about Maggie’s death. When Judith sees an ad for an administrative assistant in the McBride County Sheriff’s Department, she applies, hoping for inside information. Lew Ferris can use plenty of help now that she’s county sheriff but still wants to find time for fly-fishing. A lawyer is about to file suit against one of Lew’s underlings over a death that was declared an accident. Sharon Knudsen was supposed to have drowned after a Jet Ski smashup, but the coroner is known to be an incompetent drunk, and the girl’s family wants an investigation. Meanwhile, Lew’s significant other, Mallory Osborne, daughter of retired forensic dentist Doc Osborne, is in the area to do publicity for wealthy hedge fund owner and art collector Matthew Brinkerhoff. When Lew reads the file on Sharon Knudsen’s so-called accident, she learns that the driver of the Jet Ski was Barry Brinkerhoff, Matt’s son. Could the accident actually be murder? A shady scheme run by Matt Brinkerhoff and some long-forgotten DNA kits provide Judith with the answer to the mystery of Maggie’s death.

Complex relationships and a wild chase through the forest provide plenty of excitement in contrast to the Zen of fly-fishing.

THREE CAN KEEP A SECRET
Hilliard, M.E.
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781639102365

A small-town librarian continues to demonstrate that the most dangerous homicide zones in America are public libraries.

From the moment her husband’s murder chased her from her big-job job in the New York fashion industry to the upstate village of Raven Hill, Greer Hoggan has never taken to energetic, insensitive Anita Hunzeker, who chairs the library’s board of trustees. But she’s far from rejoicing when Anita is found dead in her wrecked car, bashed to death with a flashlight. Nor do any of the other librarians or townfolk united in their dislike of Anita celebrate her demise, though they don’t exactly mourn her either. A hush seems to fall over Raven Hill, as if the locals were waiting for something. And so they are: the fatal poisoning of historian James Walters, whose research seems to have taken him a little too close to the Ravenscroft Trust, the vehicle by which matriarch Harriet Ravenscroft funded the relatives who came after her. The discovery of Anita’s fingerprints on a bottle of wine in Walters’ house convinces Officer Jennie Webster, Greer’s workout buddy, that the two murders are connected, and she urges Greer to dive into the kind of research librarians do best. Greer uneartshs so many suspects, motives, and possible alibis, however, that the case becomes ever murkier. The records she consults with the help of Raven Hill archivist Millicent Ames and everlasting temporary diocesan archivist Sister Mary Josephine carry hints of family quarrels, financial irregularities, and perhaps an illegitimate birth that would scuttle all the assumptions the locals make about the Ravenscroft Trust. But the details are so unremittingly dry that only a librarian convinced she was channeling Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers would find excitement here.

A charming portrayal of village life, romance, and sacrifice set against the horrors of war.
Tabby is happy to try to harness her gift for good, but Sage, who's a medical examiner. Tabby hopes that Sage will come around, too, casting call only to see David, the male producer, hire an attractive airhead named Misty to play Cryptessa Muldoon, the female lead, much to the dismay of his girlfriend, Becca, the female producer. Since David refuses to let Jaine edit any of his lame jokes, her job is limited to cutting Misty's lines down to a length she can remember, not using any words longer than three syllables. The remaining cast members spend rehearsal time either mocking Misty or choking down the ghastly vegan lunches David provides at his leading lady's insistence. So nobody complains when Misty leaves the ranks of the undead and joins the just-plain-dead thanks to a dose of rat poison someone adds to one of her smoothies. It isn't until the police zero in on her co-star Aidan, Lance's latest crush, that Jaine feels she needs to turn her skills as an amateur sleuth to cracking this case—and only because Lance begs her to save Aidan's well-toned buns.

Levine specializes in chaos cozies, and her latest does not disappoint.

A Scot living in California continues to get tripped up by American ways and American English.

Therapist Lexy Campbell lives on a houseboat behind the Last Ditch Motel, where her floridly eccentric friends have gathered for her second Thanksgiving in the U.S. The Covid lockdown they've lived through was easy compared to the nerve-wracking wait for Della, her overdue friend, to give birth. Having offered Della and Dylan the use of the houseboat for the delivery, Lexy's moved with her boyfriend, Taylor, to the motel only to be awakened by the squalling newborn. Asked to deliver breakfast to an actual paying guest, Lexy finally realizes his silence is due to a bullet in the head. When their pal Sgt. Molly Rankinson announces that this isn't a case of suicide, Taylor reckons that they were awakened at 3 a.m. by a noise Lexy now thinks was a real killer. Maybe one of the benefits Quig, her friend with mental abilities, can give her is some help with the investigation. After all, he's a medical examiner. Tabby hopes that Sage will come around, too, because when the twins work together, they can do amazing things.

Cozy meets karma: more savage in the application of woo-woo skills than most.

A freelance writer discovers that a job as a script doctor can be a real headache. Jaine Austen thinks she's finally caught a break when her neighbor Lance Venable recommends her for a job editing the script of a new musical based on the long-defunct TV show I Married a Zombie. The lure is that the producers, a couple of IT nerds who won the lottery and are using their windfall to bankroll a stage version of the creaky old sitcom, can offer $5,000 in ready cash. The downside is that the script is terrible. Reluctant to give up such a lucrative gig, Jaine attends a casting call only to see David, the male producer, hire an attractive airhead named Misty to play Cryptessa Muldoon, the female
The murder of a much-hated chef leaves investigators with too many suspects.

Tish Tarragon is in a tizzy. Both her book-themed cafe and her catering business are on hold until she can find new quarters after her vengeful ex-boyfriend evicted her. Luckily, her best pal, television weatherman Julian Davis, and her new love, Sheriff Clemson Meade, are there to support her as she caters a wedding and searches for a venue for her business and a place to live. Unfortunately, the perfect spot is beyond her means. The wedding is being held at Abbington Green, a lovely Victorian B&B where most of the guests are staying. A guest unconnected to the wedding is obnoxious Gunnar Randall, a television host renowned for insulting and demeaning chefs hoping for a good review as they present their meals to him. Inn owner Glory Bishop’s will eventually leads Magdalena to the discovery that the Schmucker’s magic ingredient is marijuana. Shortly after Magdalena takes her guests on a tour of the Schmucker facilities, from a smelly hog farm to a slaughterhouse processing plant, Terry Tazewell is found back in the inn with his throat cut, and Magdalena joins Toy in sleuthing. She’ll need all her talents to extricate herself from a situation stickier than her favorite cinnamon buns.

Foodies and cozy lovers will enjoy both the puzzle and the recipes.

MEAT THY MAKER
Myers, Tamar
Severn House (224 pp.)
$29.99 | Jan. 3, 2023
978-1-4483-0866-8

Magdalena Portulacca Yoder Rosen, a Conservative Mennonite woman married to a Jewish man, creates more headlines suitable for the tabloids.

Magdalena’s husband, retired doctor Gabriel Rosen, helps her run the world-famous PennDutch Inn, where guests pay extra for the pleasures of mucking out stalls and weeding gardens while eating stodgy but tasty food. Just one generation removed from the Amish Church, which her grandparents left when her grandfather decided to buy a car, the clever and sarcastic Magdalena is the murder magnet of Hernia, Pennsylvania. As mayor and town benefactor as well as innkeeper, Magdalena often works with police chief Toy Graham, whose good looks attract plenty of women even though he’s gay. Several of Magdalena’s most recent guests are in town to try to make a deal to sell the renowned sausages made by the Schmucker brothers, members of a local Amish family. Grocery store CEOs Christine Landis and Kathleen Dooley are in the hunt along with Terence Tazewell, the owner of the Guzzle ’n Gorge restaurants, which encourage excessive eating and drinking. Only the very Southern gentleman Ducky Limehouse makes it clear that he’s not a fan of sausages. Then Magdalena’s best friend, Agnes Miller, eats one of the Schmuckers’ signature products and promptly moons her nosey next-door neighbor. Her strange behavior eventually leads Magdalena to the discovery that the Schmuckers’ magic ingredient is marijuana. Shortly after Magdalena takes her guests on a tour of the Schmucker facilities, from a smelly hog farm to a slaughterhouse processing plant, Terry Tazewell is found back in the inn with his throat cut, and Magdalena joins Toy in sleuthing. She’ll need all her talents to extricate herself from a situation stickier than her favorite cinnamon buns.

Another zany but pointed look at the Amish and Mennonite lifestyle grafted onto a modest mystery.

THE DEVIL STONE
Ramsay, Caro
Severn House (288 pp.)
$29.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-4483-0974-0

A Glasgow police detective whose chaotic life has pushed her to her limits catches a case that will change her forever.

Health problems prevent Christine Caplan’s husband, Aklen, from working. Her son, Kenny, has dropped out of university. Only her daughter, Emma, seems to be on track. Already demoted from DCI to DI for mishandling evidence, Christine, who lands in more trouble when she’s accused of causing the death of a purse snatcher, suspects she’s being targeted. She’s supported only by her friend Lizzie, with whom she’s bonded over their dislike of “The Bastard,” Lizzie’s ex-husband and Christine’s ex-lover. When DCI Bob Oswald vanishes after viewing the scene of what seems to be mass murder, Christine is sent off to the Highlands to help with the shocking case. Two young troublemakers have broken into Otterburn House and come upon the long-dead bodies of five members of the wealthy McGregor family in a Satanist setting. One of the troublemakers is so traumatized that he has to be hospitalized. Christine doesn’t exactly get a warm welcome from the team led by DI Kinsella, who seems over his head and bent on proving the youngsters guilty. A search is launched for the renegade youngest McGregor son, now the only heir to a large fortune. He may be hiding on the island of Skone, which is owned by the liberal Allanach Foundation. A lot of Christine’s best information comes from disrespected local DC, Craig, but she quickly learns that she can’t trust her own colleagues when her investigation turns up both a drug operation and the body of the missing DCI.

Intriguing characters people a challenging mystery fraught with peril.
“Well-drawn characters introduce the criminal underworld to the occult kind in a breathless and compelling plot.”

HELL BENT

ENCORE IN DEATH

Robb, J.D.
St. Martin's (384 pp.)
$24.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781250284082

In 2036, the poisoning of a beloved actor at a swanky party celebrating his actress wife has Lt. Eve Dallas and Det. Delia Peabody scouting around for those who might not have considered him quite so beloved.

Minutes after giving her champagne cocktail to Brant Fitzhugh to hold while she joins her co-star in an impromptu duet, Eliza Lane—who’s headlining a revival of Upstage, the play that launched her career 25 years ago when Leah Rose's fatal overdose made her understudy an overnight sensation—is cradling her husband's body in her lap. Was he the intended victim, or was she—or was the murderer someone like actress Vera Harrow, whom Brant had dropped 10 years ago to marry Eliza and who wouldn't much have cared which of them she killed? Eve's suspicions alight first on Ethan Crommell, a fan who became such a dedicated stalker of Eliza that he was confined to an institution from which he's recently been paroled. He's followed by Vera, then by Eliza's bestie, thrice divorced Sylvie Bowen, who has ample reason to be jealous of her old friend. But Eve isn't satisfied that any of them fills the bill, and when she unearths a startling link between the long-deceased Leah Rose and one of the 200 party guests, she's ready to forget all those other false leads. Fans of detective fiction set in the present day, however, will find Robb's major plot twist so familiar that they're more than likely to beat Eve to the solution this time.

An episodic, anticlimactic case notable mainly for the future Broadway glitz.

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

Tracy, P.J.
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 17, 2023
978-1-250-8994-5

In LAPD Det. Margaret Nolan's third case, her personal demons finally take a back seat to the demons battering on a gallery of Hollywood types.

Disney star Evan Hobbes insists that the photos showing him in seriously compromising positions with young fans are deepfakes. The good news is that he’s soon proved correct: They’ve been produced by Brianna Cornish, who took $5,000 to sink his career. The bad news is that by the time the fakes are traced to her, Hobbes has been found dead in a rockslide following a party given by Disney exec David Baum and his wife, Essie, whose brother, Seth Lehman, is Hobbes' agent. Things get worse for the Baums with the news that Hobbes, who richly deserved to die for earlier, less explicitly documented sins, was choked to death, and worse still when David is killed along with Kira Tanner, an aspiring actress in possession of a thumb drive that carried a good deal more blackmail material. It’s all business as usual for Lehman's boss Rebecca Wodehouse, the Dragon Lady who presides over Wodehouse International Talent with such imperious hauteur that you’d never guess the agency her father launched will go broke unless they can replace soiled clients like Hobbes with the likes of A-list actress Daphne Love, who's found her way back to the embraces of Sam Easton, Nolan's friend and informal consultant. Tracy dishes enough dirt on her characters’ sordid pasts to make killers like Nolan and Easton seem tame. So many cast members come across as repellent that the big reveal is something of a letdown since they don’t all turn out to be guilty.

Who needs movies anyway when you have books as laden with dirty secrets as this one?
the first book, this one ends with a cliffhanger.
Well-drawn characters introduce the criminal underworld to the occult kind in a breathless and compelling plot.

**MERU**

Díoya, S.B.
47North (447 pp.)
$16.99 paper  |  Feb. 1, 2023
978-1-6625-0509-6

A galaxy-spanning space opera about two lost souls determined to prove themselves.

As the adopted human child of two more-than-human parents known as “alloys,” Jayanthi wants nothing more than to prove she has the skills to design new genomes. But when her mentor tells her she’ll never achieve her goals, she starts to look for another way to prove her worth. When she realizes that her sickle-cell disorder could actually be a beneficial adaptation on the newly discovered planet of Meru, her mentor comes up with a new plan—to send Jayanthi herself to Meru in an attempt to prove that humans can once again be allowed to explore the universe without making harmful changes to a planet’s biosphere. Meanwhile, Vaha, an alloy whose body is adapted to live in the vacuum of space, is desperate to prove that zie isn’t the failure as a pilot that zir maker believed zie was. With no other offers for work coming in, Vaha jumps at the chance to carry Jayanthi to Meru, continue practicing new types of flight in orbit around a planet, and hopefully fulfill zir maker’s ultimate design for zir life. Throwing two lonely people with something to prove together is a great recipe for drama, and these characters and their relationship do create a strong throughline for the novel. The world presented here is rich and complicated, but it’s so different from our own that the resulting exposition and explanations can have the effect of distancing the reader from the characters. Still, the love story, plus plenty of jaw-dropping space scenes, will reward readers patient enough to explore this far-future world.

A complex and sometimes slow-moving but ultimately rewarding novel.

**SECRETLY YOURS**

Bailey, Tessa
Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$28.99  |  Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-06-323902-9

A woman writes secret letters to the man she had a crush on in high school.
When her beloved grandmother died, Hallie Welch became the sole owner of Becca’s Blooms, a gardening and landscaping company in St. Helena, a small town in Napa Valley. Hallie is facing old anxieties about where she belongs without her grandmother’s anchoring presence. Rather than face her feelings, Hallie channels her grief through childish acts of sabotage and petty thievery against the new wine store threatening to put her grandmother’s best friend out of business. When Hallie hears that Julian Vos is back in town on sabbatical to write a novel, she’s determined to finally rid herself of the crush she’s been harboring for 15 years. Julian doesn’t remember Hallie, but he’s strongly attracted to her despite the fact that her special brand of chaos wreaks havoc on all his carefully timed schedules and plans. The winery owned by Julian’s family, Vos Vineyards, was once one of Napa’s preeminent wineries, but it’s struggling to recover after wildfires almost destroyed the business. When Julian’s sister, who’s dealing with untreated alcoholism, returns home as well, Julian realizes the depth of his family’s dysfunction. Bailey’s characteristic banter and instant chemistry between her main characters aren’t enough to salvage the novel, which feels entirely constructed of scenes and tropes but without any real plot. Characters do things—prank calls are made, letters are written, grapes are picked, speeches are given—but very little of it makes coherent sense given the way characters have been described. Of note, Julian suffers from anxiety and panic attacks, but they are used as a plot device. Readers looking for a nuanced exploration of how people live with and manage mental illnesses will not find it here.

Frenetic, fast-paced, and hollow.

**MIDNIGHT DUET**

Comfort, Jen
Montlake Romance (347 pp.)
$12.95 paper  |  Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-5420-3851-5

This modern, romantic spin on *The Phantom of the Opera* stars a former Broadway star and a German rock musician.
When a catastrophic accident on a Broadway stage leaves Erika Greene with a scarred face, she rethinks some
choices she’d made in the past and uproots her life to Paris, Nevada. She’d inherited an opera house there from her grandmother; it’s in massive need of repairs that she can’t afford, but Erika doesn’t want to sell to casino magnate Raoul Decomte. Her solution comes in the form of German hair metal band Nachtmusik, who want to rent the place while they develop their new album. The band’s frontman, Christof Dae, has always been an ambitious, focused planner, but he was blinded when his girlfriend and band mate left. He hasn’t yet told the rest of the band: his sister, Sibylle, in tune with the macabre and mystical; Americana-obsessed Waldo; and Sergei, who gives off vampire vibes. Christof is immediately enchanted by opera house proprietress Erika, and she’s equally taken with him. But even when they act upon their attraction, Christof reminds himself that the band comes first. Musical theater fans will lap up all the references, but this romance populated by big personalities will appeal to anyone who likes their love stories on the zanier side. For a story with so much lust, there are only a few richly described intimate scenes; it’s more of a slow burn in that department. Sometimes the story loses sight of the tension that propels it and meanders a bit, but the characters are always compelling.

Charmingly bonkers.

RADIANT SIN
Robert, Katee
Sourcebooks Casablanca (368 pp.)
$13.99 paper | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-72825-700-6

Cassandra’s predictions of doom come true, though not for her own love life with Apollo, in a new Dark Olympus novel.

Following the events of Wicked Beauty (2022), which introduced a new player to the oligarchy that runs the city of Olympus, this story spotlights Cassandra Gataki and her boss, Apollo. She’s the oldest daughter of overreaching parents who tried to murder their way into the circle of the Thirteen who control the city. Haunted by the ignominy, she’s focused on raising her younger sister, Alexandra, and keeping everyone at bay with her prickly personality, even the man who holds the title of Apollo—and with whom she’s in love. Her goal is to save up enough to leave the city with Alexandra, but the plan is both accelerated and derailed by political events that put the ruling powers on high alert. When Minos, who clearly has plans to upend Olympus, invites Apollo to a weeklong house party, he asks Cassandra to accompany him under the cover of a fake relationship so she can help him snoop out information. Even as the high-stakes games commence, the tension and forced proximity lead them to give in to their feelings and have sex. Written in the present tense and from Cassandra’s and Apollo’s alternating first-person perspectives, the novel has a sense of immediacy. But the couple’s emotional lives feel limited and the kink-light scenes, with some references to rope play and safe words, feel forced onto the narrative. The political coup plot is less of a whodunit than a when-will-they-do-it. Moreover, the high-concept idea that the Greek pantheon is made up of job titles that can be inherited/earned/stolen necessitates an explanation of which character is/ was whom; keeping track of histories, past relationships, and alliances becomes taxing as the series progresses. The romance is quickly wrapped up even as the story ends on a cliffhanger regarding the longer arc of the series.

For readers who might like Greek myth fanfic with a hint of BDSM and Survivor.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**BLOODBATH NATION** by Paul Auster; photos by Spencer Ostrander ......................................................... 161
**PSYCH** by Paul Bloom ................................................................................................................................. 164
**LIVES OF THE WIVES** by Carmela Ciuraru ................................................................................................. 168
**WACO RISING** by Kevin Cook ................................................................................................................... 169
**SHIRLEY CHISHOLM** by Anastasia C. Curwood .......................................................... 170
**THE WORLD ITSELF** by Ulf Danielsson ........................................................................................................ 170
**THE WISE HOURS** by Miriam Darlington ...................................................................................................... 171
**THE PHILOSOPHY OF MODERN SONG** by Bob Dylan .............................................................. 172
**THE CRITIC’S DAUGHTER** by Priscilla Gilman ....................................................................................... 175
**THE GHOST AT THE FEAST** by Robert Kagan .......................................................................................... 179
**THE PARROT AND THE IGLOO** by David Lipsky ..................................................................................... 182
**TENACIOUS BEASTS** by Christopher J. Preston ..................................................................................... 188
**EMPIRELAND** by Sathnam Sanghera ........................................................................................................ 189
**A HACKER’S MIND** by Bruce Schneier ....................................................................................................... 189
**CINEMA SPECULATION** by Quentin Tarantino ....................................................................................... 193
**THE CLIMATE BOOK** by Greta Thunberg ............................................................................................... 193
**THE GOOD LIFE** by Robert Waldinger & Marc Schulz .............................................................................. 194

**CINEMA SPECULATION**
Tarantino, Quentin
Harper/HarperCollins
(400 pp.)
$35.00 | Nov 1, 2022
9780063112582

**WE ARE ELECTRIC**
Inside the 200-Year Hunt for Our Body’s Bioelectric Code, and What the Future Holds
Adee, Sally
Hachette (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Feb. 28, 2023
9780306826627

A science writer explores bioelectricity and the developments of exciting new electrical treatments.

While the idea that our minds and bodies are powered by electricity is well known, Adee shows how recent cutting-edge research suggests remarkable possibilities. Devices such as pacemakers and defibrillators are commonplace, but scientists are now having success using electrical impulses to treat rheumatoid arthritis and even spinal damage and paralysis. There is evidence that small, controlled jolts of electricity delivered from outside the skull can temporarily improve mental clarity and physical performance. When Adee volunteered to try it, she was amazed at the results, although she acknowledges that the process is still experimental. It has been a long road so far, and the author spends the first third of the book tracing the research that established the existence of bioelectricity and how it works. In the early days, the field attracted an array of quacks, con men and pseudo-scientists, which was a hindrance to serious work. There was also the problem that medical researchers and physicists lacked a shared scientific language. Progress occurred anyway, and the structure of the nervous system was gradually uncovered. After that, the roles of electrical signals in cell division, communication, and specialization became a focus of study. All of these developments have opened important new frontiers, including possible effective treatments for cancer. Some of the current research projects that Adee discusses—e.g., using electrical diodes to implant memories—sound like they belong more in science fiction. Yet there was a time when electroencephalogram technology, now used widely in brain scanning, was dismissed as ludicrous. Adee emphasizes that much of the new research will inevitably hit dead ends, as much scientific inquiry inevitably does, and many experiment results are proving difficult to reliably replicate. Nevertheless, she provides a wealth of material to think about.

A clear, intriguing examination of a field with huge potential.
HOLDING FIRE
A Reckoning With the American West
Andrews, Bryce
Mariner Books (272 pp.)
$27.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
9780358468271

A powerful meditation on a rural life of hunting in a world of guns—some of them used for sinister purposes.

“Animals slid backward into holes or crumpled motionless on the ground. I had learned to kill by watching and practicing, just as I had learned to stretch barbwire. I tried to do it well.” So writes Montana rancher Andrews, author of Down From the Mountain, about an early encounter with a hunting rifle. After growing up in the Northwest, the author arrived in Montana without a firearm, which raised considerable suspicion on the part of the people of the Madison Valley, some of whom “took it as an insult.” After acquiring a rifle, Andrews mistakenly killed a 6-month-old fawn instead of a full-grown deer, allowing that while the “meat was excellent,” the guilt was substantial—and an impetus for doing it right the next time. At the heart of the book stands a gun, a .357 Magnum, that has only one purpose. “I had never looked at my grandfather’s black-shining, beautiful revolver and told myself the simple truth: This thing I keep and carry is built for killing people,” writes the author. Andrews has spent considerable time wondering what to do with it. In one instance, he contemplated rowing out into the Pacific and dropping the pistol in the corrosive saltwater; in another, he took it to a shop while deciding whether to sell it, receiving a lecture from the owner: “What it’s made for is protection. What it’s made for is to save your damn life.” Ultimately, in a grand and philosophically charged adventure, Andrews decided to make it into something non-lethal, which required him to learn the skills of a blacksmith. He did so under the tutelage of a merry nonconformist whose every movement and word “told me something about how a person ought to live.”

A welcome, eminently sensible contribution to the literature of the American West—and responsible gun ownership.

MASTERS OF THE LOST LAND
The Untold Story of the Amazon and the Violent Fight for the World’s Last Frontier
Araujo, Heriberto
Mariner Books (432 pp.)
$29.99 | Jan. 17, 2023
9780063024267

A potent narrative that lays out “the factors that have made the largest rainforest on Earth the world’s most dangerous place for environmental and land activists.”

When colonization began in earnest in the Amazon in the 1960s, it unleashed decades of environmental devastation and violent crime, both of which are particularly evident in Rondônia, a settlement in the Rondônia state in northern Brazil. In 1966, the then-military government launched Operation Amazonia, which encouraged citizens to develop and settle the jungle, colonizing the Kayapó tribal land to create agricultural plots. In the following decades, this region of Brazil would become known for extreme deforestation—one statistic noted that “each year between 1978 to 1988 the Amazon lost an area of forest bigger than the state of Connecticut”—as well as rampant violence and the destruction of Indigenous ways of life. The fazendeiros, Brazilian cattle farmers and planters, who often gained possession of their land through nefarious means, controlled populations of impoverished laborers through capital and viciousness. As Araujo reports, by the early 2000s, “almost everyone was armed…and strong men ruled the roost through extreme violence.” Refreshingly, the author resists restricting the text to bleak negativity. In fact, he focuses equally on positive aspects, using activist Maria Joel’s courageous life story as a thread running throughout the

Dialectically Integrated Psychotherapy
A Unifying Approach to Theoretical Integration
Susan M Hingle


“When Hingle astutely observes that the state of psychotherapy today is fractured”

“The author lucidly articulates a grave problem for psychotherapy: the absence of both an overarching reflection on the relationship of the mind to reality and a serious consideration of the nature of consciousness.” —Kirkus Reviews

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Despite some setbacks, 2022 was special because I finally got back to nature, spending significant time outdoors in North Carolina, Colorado, Washington, Wisconsin, and in and around my hometown of Charleston, South Carolina. In my previous column, I highlighted 10 of the best books of the year that showed the genre diversity of the list. Below are seven titles from the list that illuminate the natural world in a variety of invigorating—if not always pleasant—ways.

**Ever Green: Saving Big Forests To Save the Planet** by John W. Reid and Thomas E. Lovejoy (Norton, March 15): “In this captivating book, Reid and Lovejoy take readers on a journey through the five remaining megaforests...vividly describing each region’s native plants and animals as well as their diverse Indigenous populations and cultures. Although the idea of saving the forests is hardly new, the language and details the authors use (as well as the included images) to describe these regions lead to an especially powerful message.”

**The Rise and Reign of the Mammals: A New History From the Shadow of the Dinosaurs to Us** by Steve Brusatte (Mariner Books, June 7): “Throughout, the author employs lucid prose and generous illustrations to describe the explosion of mammal species that followed the disappearance of dinosaurs. A must for any list of the best popular science books of the year.”

**An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us** by Ed Yong (Random House, June 21): “An ingenious account of how living organisms perceive the world... Building on Aristotle’s traditional five senses, Yong adds expert accounts of 20th-century discoveries of senses for echoes, electricity, and magnetism as well as perceptions we take for granted, including color, pain, and temperature. One of the year’s best popular natural histories.”

Birds and Us: A 12,000-Year History From Cave Art to Conservation by Tim Birkhead (Princeton Univ, Aug. 9): “Melding science, natural history, memoir, and travelogue, ornithologist Birkhead offers a commodious history of humans’ connection to birds, from prehistoric times to the current burgeoning interest in bird-watching... This beautifully produced volume is replete with drawings, photographs, maps, and vivid color plates. A fascinating, authoritative avian history.”

**Life on the Mississippi: An Epic American Adventure** by Rinker Buck (Avid Reader Press, Aug. 9): “An invigorating blend of history and journalism informs this journey down Old Man River... Besides being a willing and intrepid traveler, Buck is also an able interpreter of history, and it’s clear that he’s devoured a library of Mississippiana. It all makes for an entertaining journey in the manner of William Least Heat-Moon, John McPhee, and other traveler-explainers. For armchair-travel aficionados and frontier-history buffs, it doesn’t get much better.”

**The Evolution of Charles Darwin: The Epic Voyage of the Beagle That Forever Changed Our View of Life on Earth** by Diana Preston (Atlantic Monthly, Oct. 4): “Preston rightly points out that Darwin did not discover evolution. Thinkers throughout history speculated that life was ever changing, but no one explained how. Natural selection was the first testable explanation, and Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* delivered the evidence... An irresistible scientific biography and adventure story with a happy ending.”

**Wild New World: The Epic Story of People and Animals in America** by Dan Flores (Norton, Oct. 25): “Historian Flores... writes that when humans arrived in America 15,000 years ago, they found a vast continent teeming with unfamiliar creatures, including mammoths, mastodons, horses, bison, beavers, ground sloths, saber-toothed cats, and flightless birds. During the 20th century, scholars believed that, unlike modern man, early cultures lived in harmony with nature... An outstanding addition to the literature on the ecological history of America.”

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
“A harrowing, haunting reflection on the routine slaughter wrought by guns.”

BLOODBATH NATION

Auster, Paul
Photos by Spencer Ostrander
Grove (160 pp.)
$24.00 | Jan. 10, 2023
9780802160454

The acclaimed novelist lays out how America became a nation terrorized by personal weaponry.

In this brief but remarkably moving work, Auster blends personal and historical commentary, anecdotal and statistical evidence, sober analysis, and passionate appeals for reform, sketching the origins and present reality of American gun violence. Early in the book, he reveals a disturbing secret: When his father was 6 years old, his grandmother deliberately shot and killed his grandfather in an act attributed to temporary insanity. Auster suggests that this tragedy and its ramifying trauma might be viewed as broadly and uncannily representative of modern American life, where such violence has been normalized by its frequency. The author remains both sensible and compelling in his commentary as he notes the divisiveness of efforts at gun control, and he skillfully summarizes the reasoning and emotional commitments of both pro- and anti-gun activists. His outline of the nation’s historical relationship with guns is astute and memorable, and he persuasively assesses the sociopolitical roots of the “right to bear arms,” the ideological impacts of long-term conflicts with Native Americans and the enslavement of African Americans, and the strange oscillations of outrage and complacency that define contemporary responses to mass shootings. Though Auster’s arguments will be familiar to anyone who has followed gun control debates closely, the author’s overview is exceptional in its clarity and arresting in its sense of urgency. The book includes a series of photographs by Ostrander, each of them absent of human figures or any overt suggestion of traumatic events — caption: “Safeway supermarket parking lot. Tucson, Arizona. January 8, 2011. 6 people killed; 15 injured (13 by gunfire).” The photos document the sites of mass shootings and provoke, like the text, disquieting confrontations with the nation’s transformation of all private and public settings into potential sites of violence.

A harrowing, haunting reflection on the routine slaughter wrought by guns.
and dark suits that typified every prior astronaut group.” Most were military officers, but there were also doctors, engineers, chemists, physicists, and astronomers. More significantly, the group had three Black members, one Asian, and six women. These 10 astronauts feature prominently throughout the narrative, which Bagby peppers with invented dialogue and insight into their thoughts, a common approach in the genre. Regardless of style, the author has done her homework, writing a gripping account of America’s mature manned space program, dominated by the shuttle that flew 135 missions from 1981 to 2011, 133 successfully. Its predecessor (the Saturn V rocket and its capsules) completed every mission, but they were built in an era when money was no object. Developed when America no longer feared Soviet technology and was plagued by budget cuts, the shuttle was a hypercomplicated system full of design compromises. Without ignoring the cutthroat politics that regularly trumped the science, Bagby describes a score of shuttle missions in detail, with emphasis on the triumphs (launching and then repairing the Hubble telescope, sending off planetary probes, building the space station) as well as an unnerving number of technological near misses. The two disasters feature prominently, and nearly 100 pages devoted to Challenger in 1986 deliver perhaps more information than general readers want to know—though space buffs will enjoy it.

A capable chronicle of America’s post-Apollo space program.

MORE TO SAY

Essays & Appreciations

Beattie, Ann

Godine (208 pp.)

$17.95 paper | Feb. 14, 2023

978-1-56792-752-8

A collection that shows Beattie “moonlighting as a nonfiction writer.”

In this entry in the publisher’s Nonpareil series, acclaimed novelist and short story writer Beattie offers a series of essays on literature, art, and photography. The author is an accomplished essayist with an elegant, precise writing style. Peter Taylor’s short stories “deepen, brushstroke by brushstroke, by gradual layering,” their surfaces “no more to be trusted than the first ice on a lake.” An Alice Munro story is “always a tactile experience,” but “beware the convenient cliché.” Andre Dubus is “one of the best American short story writers ever.” Beattie is also amazed by the novels of her friend David Markson, many of which are “spoken of as representing a leap forward for American literature.” In a lecture scrutinizing John Updike’s use of language, she writes, “I am in awe of what he can conjure up with a sentence or, at other times, a word.” Beattie also writes about her husband, the painter Lincoln Perry, whose art is “painted so as to keep the eye in motion.” He’s active as he paints, while Beattie is silent and stoic while at work “to better encourage or trick the character into coming out of hiding.” In “The Distillation of Lavender,” the author lovingly profiles the photographer Jayne Hinds Bidaut’s tintypes—“Reverent. Fragile,” like “lyrical poems.” Beattie’s charming portrait of Grant Wood’s Iowa and his American Gothic is spot-on. She ponders tone in a piece on Georgia Sheron’s “extraordinary” photographs and is mesmerized by Trisha Orr’s unique paintings of antique pitchers and jars “spilling forth intricate flowers spun together as if contained within a painterly spiderweb.” Joel Meyerowitz’s “glorious” photographs of Cape Cod “open us to the exhilaration of feeling something that we thought we knew, only to have it reappear as something infinitely more complex and more beautiful.”

Shimmering prose and critical acumen on display in an eclectic collection.
A history of the civil rights movement from the 1960s to the present as seen through the lens of two longtime activists.

Zoharah and Michael Simmons met in Atlanta in 1965, serving as student activists, and they soon transformed politically, becoming Black Power activists. As ethnic studies scholar Berger writes, that stance “is the bridge connecting the twentieth-century battles against Jim Crow to the ongoing fights against war, racism, patriarchy, and capitalism,” and to have these long-term participants as witnesses affords a further bridge between past and present. Zoharah and Michael, writes Berger, went from organization to organization as the Black Power movement evolved, working with and alongside the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Nation of Islam, the Black Panthers, and Black Lives Matter. Early on, both acquired an awareness of “Black consciousness” that joined Black America to “Third World” peoples and their struggles around the world. Michael became a representative for the American Friends Service Committee, traveling the world to study democratization movements. While observing the status of residents of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, he became aware “that people were being treated worse than Black people,” and he extended the aims of the civil rights struggle. Zoharah, meanwhile, engaged in anti-drug activism and worked to establish a Freedom School to “empower kids to make positive decisions.” There were as many defeats as victories on those institutional fronts. As Berger notes, even some of the devout Quakers of the AFSC seemed taken aback that Michael became the organization’s Director of European Programs, and he was soon laid off along with “troublemakers of Michael’s generation and temperament.” Now in their 70s, both continue to follow an activist
path, with Michael proclaiming that he “still enjoyed, as he put it, being a pain in somebody’s ass.”

Both personal and with a big-picture view—a welcome contribution to the literature of the civil rights movement.

BLACK ON BLACK
On Our Resilience and Brilliance in America
Black, Daniel
Hanover Square Press (288 pp.)
$27.99  |  Jan. 31, 2023
9781335449382

A novelist and scholar explores a variety of aspects of Blackness in modern America.

Black, a professor of African American studies at Clark Atlanta University, begins the book with “A Sermon,” which lists a series of reasons why he writes, including the erasure of queer Black love and the devaluing of Black beauty and culture. “I want Blackness to bloom all over this land to mend what whiteness has broken,” he writes in a forceful statement of purpose. “I want people to love the stranger, honor the ex-con, respect the sex worker. To assume their humanity regardless of their appearance or station. To know that every life is worth its breath. We all are. But sometimes we’re not so sure. So, for those in-between times, I write….Until we discover that as long as there are books, there is everlasting life! This is why I write.” The author examines the problem of patriarchy in the Black church and advocates for a new, revised Bible that celebrates Black divinity. He also questions the utility of integration, claiming that many “elders” regret how desegregation led to the breakdown of institutions like Black-run schools and businesses, which nurtured and celebrated Black excellence and success. Some of the most powerful essays feature Black’s personal experiences. For example, in one piece, the author writes about a professor in his undergraduate program who pushed him to do academic work that he never dreamed he could do—and to hold himself to high standards that have served him throughout his academic career. In another piece, he describes his grandmother’s subtle support of his queerness despite the danger this could have posed to both of them. Not all of the pieces are as potent, but overall, the author’s passionate prose reflects his unique, thought-provoking perspective.

An innovative, lyrical take on the queer Black experience.

PSYCH
The Story of the Human Mind
Bloom, Paul
Ecco/HarperCollins (464 pp.)
$29.99  |  Feb. 28, 2023
9780063096356

The veteran teacher of a popular psychology course writes a book on what he taught, and it’s delightful.

Bloom, a professor of psychology and cognitive science at Yale and author of Against Empathy and The Sweet Spot, begins with a series of compelling questions: Are we rational? What makes us happy? What do feelings accomplish? What did Freud get right? He then follows with a series of lucid stand-alone chapters that can be read in any order. He warns readers not to expect pop psychology’s emphasis on man’s “transcendent or spiritual nature.” Modern psychology is materialist (the mind as a physical entity), evolutionary (shaped by natural selection), and causal (driven by the forces of genes, culture, and experience). The author illustrates his points by discussing consciousness. Although no one fully understands it, many philosophers see consciousness as a biological phenomenon akin to digestion. Computers simulate thought processes by storing, processing, and manipulating information. They do this with dazzling speed, but it’s only a simulation, not the real thing. Talking about uploading “consciousness” into a computer is meaningless; “your consciousness is the product
of your physical brain; lose the brain, lose the consciousness.” An early chapter on Freud will jolt most readers with news that he remains a major figure of university study—in the English department. Psychology students may never hear his name. Many of his ideas seem wacky; he provided little proof, and most have failed to survive the passage of time. Bloom adds that a major exception is Freud’s notion of an unconscious mind at war with itself—unnerving evidence that we are not in full control of our lives. Consistently engaging, Bloom checks all the boxes with sections on the other great men (Descartes, Skinner, Piaget) and important subjects, including language, learning, perception, and memory. Humans possess amazing abilities in this area, but our eagerness to believe nonsense is off the charts.

Illuminating reading for anyone interested in the human brain.

SILENT SPRING REVOLUTION
John F. Kennedy, Rachel Carson, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and the Great Environmental Awakening
Brinkley, Douglas
HarperCollins (896 pp.)
$40.00 | Nov. 15, 2022
9780063212916

Brinkley continues his cycles of histories in which presidents engage with the environment.

The great presidential conservationist, of course, was Theodore Roosevelt, subject of Brinkley’s The Wilderness Warrior. Rightful Heritage chronicled “FDR’s enthusiasm for preserving treasured landscapes in every state.” Here, the author charts the transformation of conservation into environmentalism, a change of understanding and emphasis that, in his view, owes disproportionately to popular books by Rachel Carson. Silent Spring...
inspired a campaign to reduce the use of the toxic pesticides that were entering the food chain and killing birds by the millions, and Carson's works were favorites in the Kennedy White House. As Brinkley relates, when Lyndon Johnson came into office, he took action a step further. While his disastrous policies in Vietnam dragged his Great Society program down, Johnson got some important things done, drawing on the talents of environmental researchers who "were elevated as indispensable first responders rushing to save nothing less than the future of the United States." Considering the Great Society a "bookend" of FDR's New Deal, Brinkley also documents the considerable resistance to these environmental reforms on the part of industry, so that, when Richard Nixon arrived in the White House, he had to balance two opposing impulses: to let business and its right-wing think tanks have their way or to push through environmental legislation. He allowed the Environmental Protection Agency to come into being while cautioning its director that environmentalists were "a bunch of commie pinko queers." Despite his many failures, Nixon got things done, too. (Who knew that he had "a soft spot in his heart for whales"?) Still, as this readable but overlong history documents, it was Carson who merits most of the credit, along with her Kennedy/Johnson cabinet member Stuart Udall, "the most successful interior secretary in American history."

A solid addition to the literature at the intersection of environmentalism and politics.

**SERVING HERSELF**

_The Life and Times of Althea Gibson_
Brown, Ashley
Oxford Univ. (576 pp.)
$29.95 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-19-755175-2

An in-depth look at how racism and homophobia challenged the life of a sports superstar.

Brown, a scholar of African American, women's, and sports history, makes her book debut with a thoroughly researched, insightful biography of Althea Gibson (1927-2003), the first African American inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame, whose prowess extended to golf as well. Drawing on Gibson's prolific media coverage, autobiographies, and archival sources, Brown creates a palpable portrait of an aggressive, ambitious woman whose race made her an outsider in the White-dominated sports world and whose gender nonconformity—refusal to meet expectations about how a Black woman should look and behave—made her a social misfit. She preferred jeans, F-shirts, and shorts to tennis skirts; she kept her personal life private, inciting gossip about lesbianism. Born on a South Carolina farm, Gibson grew up in Harlem, where she played "any kind of ball" she could find. She was tall, strong, and ruthlessly competitive. Her innate talent was honed by coaches and mentors, and her career was supported by influential benefactors and patrons. They pushed her to finish high school, take a scholarship to college, and work on her demeanor. Brown recounts all of Gibson's games, from her first tournament win in 1946; her 1950 debut at Forest Hills, "a shrine to tennis"; and her debut at the storied courts of Wimbledon in 1951. By 1958, Gibson was an undisputed star on the amateur circuit, winning Wimbledon, the U.S. Nationals, the French Championship, and five Grand Slam Singles. Supremely confident, she made forays into singing (including on _The Ed Sullivan Show_), acting, exhibition matches on tour with the Harlem Globetrotters, and golf, "the last American sport to admit Blacks on the elite level." Though the narrative is overwhelmed by details of every game, Brown sensitively examines Gibson's refusal to be seen as "a representative" of her race, offering context for her views on social justice, women's rights, and African American causes.

A perceptive look at a driven woman.

**THE COLLABORATORS**

_Three Stories of Deception and Survival in World War II_
Buruma, Ian
Penguin Press (320 pp.)
$30.00 | March 7, 2023
9780593296646

The seemingly unrelated stories of three World War II--era figures who "embellished[ed] their biographies with exotic tales of adventure."

Buruma's subjects didn't know each other, had little influence on history, looked after their own interests in occupied nations, and lied about it afterward. The author, who has written numerous books about this era, notes that "none of the three was utterly depraved. They were all too human, especially in their frailties. Similar frailties can be seen in many figures strutting around the public sphere today." Having spent perhaps too much effort justifying the significance of his subjects, he proceeds to write an enjoyable book that will appeal to WWII buffs. Felix Kersten (1898-1962) spent World War I in the German army, ending the war in Finland, where he studied physical therapy before moving to Berlin. A charismatic figure, he grew wealthy as a practitioner of healing massage, serving many highly placed figures, including Heinrich Himmler. Safely ensconced in Sweden after the war, he proclaimed (and a gullible biographer agreed) that he had used his influence to save anti-Nazis and Jews. Buruma expresses understandable skepticism. In Holland, which was decimated by the Nazis, Friedrick Weinreb (1910-1988) survived by convincing them that he could find Jews in hiding while also collecting money from Jews with the false promise of keeping them from deportation. He served three years in prison, but, an aggressive self-promoter, he later convinced many that he was a hero of the resistance scapegoated by the establishment. Perhaps the most bizarre of the trio was Kawashima Yoshiko (c. 1906-1948), daughter of a Chinese aristocrat who gave her up for adoption to a Japanese official. Raised and educated in Japan, she was a flamboyant figure who dressed in men's clothes and whose aggressive support of that nation's conquests in Manchuria and China made her a
popular figure in Japanese media during the 1930s. She sat out the years after Pearl Harbor in Beijing, after which a vengeful Chinese government executed her for treason.

Entertaining WWII minutia.

THE SERGEANT
The Incredible Life of Nicholas Said: Son of an African General, Slave of the Ottomans, Free Man With the Tsars, Hero of the Union Army
Calbreath, Dean
Pegasus (400 pp.)
$29.95 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781639363254

The fascinating life story of a soldier who fought for liberty across multiple continents.

Many Black Americans fought for the Union, but biographies are scarce because their lives were poorly documented. This is not the case with Nicholas Said (1836–circa 1882). The son of a brilliant general in the Bornu Empire in Africa, he was kidnapped by slavers at age 13. He served aristocrats in Turkey and then Russia, where he served as a free man (slavery was illegal in Russia). He traveled widely in Europe before sailing to the U.S. in 1860; in 1863, he enlisted in one of the first all-Black units. Award-winning journalist Calbreath makes extensive use of his subject’s vivid, hyperbolic autobiography and contemporary letters and journalism. When material runs thin, he recounts the history of the period with emphasis on the experiences of African Americans both inside and outside the U.S. Class was far more important than race in 19th-century Europe. As a high-level retainer, Said looked down on household help, socialized freely with the upper classes, and rarely encountered racism—until he crossed the Atlantic, where he encountered plenty. Other authors extol the heroism of Black units, but Calbreath emphasizes their disgraceful treatment by superiors and misuse on the battlefield. Literate and responsible, Said rose to
become the senior noncom responsible for the regimental hospital. War’s end found him in South Carolina, and he remained in the South as a teacher in Black schools. He discovered a talent for public speaking, a major form of entertainment at the time, prospering on the lecture circuit for years. A popular orator, he attracted White audiences with his stories and absence of rhetoric in favor of equal rights. It’s widely believed that he died in 1882, though “two widely circulated newspaper articles in the 1890s suggested he met a very different fate, living until at least 1897, when he was allegedly shoveling coal as a prisoner in the prison mines of Alabama.”

A lively biography of an undeservedly neglected historical figure.

LIVES OF THE WIVES

Five Literary Marriages
Ciuraru, Carmela
Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$29.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
9780062356918

A series of eye-opening vignettes about the romantic and practical sacrifices five women made for their literary partners. Whether serving as muse, assistant, mother figure, antagonist, or lover—or some combination thereof—these women were crucial to the careers of their partners, but the road was often rocky, fraught with numerous challenges. In her latest book, Ciuraru, author of Nom de Plume: A (Secret) History of Pseudonyms, offers a rare window into five relationships—Una Troubridge and Radclyffe Hall, Elsa Morante and Alberto Moravia, Elaine Dundy and Kenneth Tynan, Elizabeth Jane Howard and Kingsley Amis, and Patricia Neal and Roald Dahl—providing a respectful yet unflinching look inside the daily, often complicated lives of the writers and their wives. Once romantically entwined, the wives often had to shelve their own aspirations in order to nurture their partners, sometimes fighting like hell to keep their own identities. They often grappled with substance abuse, codependency, domestic violence, professional envy, and infidelity (Troubridge, Howard). “Modern marriage,” writes Ciuraru, “is a series of compromises, a relentless juggling act of work obligations, childcare demands, household chores, money squabbles, hoarded grievances, simmering hostilities, and intimacy issues…. Toss in male privilege, ruthless ambition, narcissism, misogyny, infidelity, alcoholism, and a mood disorder or two, and it’s easy to understand why the marriages of so many famous writers have been stormy, short-lived, and mutually destructive.” While none of the stories fade into the sunset with a neat, happily-ever-after conclusion, Ciuraru shows how some of these women thrived in their own careers later in life. “As has been true historically for many women artists and writers,” she writes, “only a divorce or the death of a spouse liberated them to create and publish their best work—or any work at all.” While the stories of betrayal and suffering might not exactly ruin literary heroes, readers beware: The reality is often harsh—but also fascinating.

An illuminating, well-rendered literary biography.
As horror movies have moved into the artistic and commercial mainstream, the genre has attracting interest for its social meaning and racial inclusiveness. Coleman’s academic work focuses on media studies and cultural politics, and Harris is an entertainment journalist and horror movie buff; both bring expertise to their collaboration. They note that for a long time, the main function of Black characters was to get the narrative rolling by being the first victim of the murderer/monster/alien/etc. In fact, the actor Tony Todd holds the record for the most screen deaths, at 24 (and counting). Coleman and Harris identify various other stereotypes, always in secondary positions. There were some outlier films, like *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which had a Black man in a leadership role. That movie became the source code for the zombie genre, although it did little to help Black actors. Eventually, after decades of effort, Black actors began to break into big-budget movies in prominent roles. When they did, there was a receptive audience. Will Smith’s *I Am Legend* (2007), for example, made more than $256 million in the U.S. These movies were not really about the Black experience, and there were still few Black creatives in the film industry. The real turning point, however, was *Get Out* (2017), which won numerous awards for director/writer Jordan Peele and also earned $176 million in the domestic market. The rise of direct-to-video movies and streaming also opened new opportunities for Black filmmakers. The authors often write with their tongues firmly in their cheeks, but they make serious points about representation and depiction. They acknowledge the level of improvement but emphasize that there is still much to be done.

Coleman and Harris write with keen observation, a satirical eye, and a genuine love for their subject.

**WACO RISING**

*David Koresh, the FBI, and the Birth of America’s Modern Militias*

*Cook, Kevin*

Henry Holt (288 pp.)

$28.99 | Jan. 31, 2023

9781250840523

A fresh, powerful account of one of the bloodiest events in the 1990s—and its relevance to current times.

In 1993, a 51-day standoff at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, ended in a devastating fire and dozens of deaths. In the aftermath, certain elements of the story were distorted and misrepresented, and this controversial attention caused the true humanity behind the narrative to get lost. In this engrossing resurrection, prolific journalist and author Cook digs deep to uncover the forgotten human side of these terrible events, and he offers a painstaking reconstruction of leader David Koresh’s life and ascent to leader. At times, Koresh didn’t appear to be the madman portrayed in the media, but the author makes it clear that he did not practice what he preached. “Koresh alone decided who could break the rules and when,” writes Cook, and he maintained his power with psychological manipulation and mind control. The author is equally incisive about the Branch Davidians who followed Koresh and agreed to live frugally and communally. Together, they reinforced their leader’s often apocalyptic teachings and separatist ways. As Cook notes, “they used a biblical term to describe the ATF, FBI, and National Guard forces surrounding them: Babylon.” With government forces closing in and the media circus growing in intensity, further nefarious actions—including sex with underage girls and stockpiling of illegal firearms—led to the fight and ensuing massive fire that ended in “the deadliest day in FBI history.” In describing the standoff with exquisite detail and care, Cook masterfully portrays the scope of the violence and heartbreak on all sides. The author’smeticulous history and character portraits also serve as timely reminders of the danger of homegrown militias and the cultlike figures who often lead them. Unfortunately, this material is still fertile ground in America.

A thorough, engaging work that reminds us of the humanity behind tragedy.
Before the passage of the 14th Amendment, for instance, the Bill of Rights was used in order to keep White Southern voters: “By successfully wresting key exemptions for agricultural and domestic workers from federal regulation, much of the Southern racial and agricultural order remained relatively untouched by the long arm of the New Deal.” Toward the end of a lucid narrative that spans three centuries, the author argues that the federal government has been an unreliable ally and sometimes an open enemy of the rights of non-White people. Even so, without federal power, as current events richly suggest, even those tenuous rights would almost certainly be diminished or eliminated.

A broad-ranging history of resistance to the federal government, especially in matters of civil rights reforms.

“Federal power has proven itself, quite consistently, by design and by practice, to be inadequate to the basic claims of citizenship of its people,” writes Cowie, a professor of history at Vanderbilt. The “design” aspect figures in the constant struggle between federal authority and states’ rights. Before the passage of the 14th Amendment, for instance, the Bill of Rights did not apply to state governments, only to what Congress could or could not do. Even the powers of the 14th Amendment, Cowie notes, were trimmed by the Supreme Court—a fact that makes his book timely given current court decisions against past civil rights rulings—which required Congress to establish martial law in the South in order to effect even the small gains of Reconstruction. Provocatively, Cowie argues that resistance to federal authority, as exemplified by Alabama Gov. George Wallace and his “segregation forever” vow, is almost always cloaked in the language of tyranny and freedom—and the freedom demanded by those resisters is won at the loss of freedom of some citizens, almost always members of ethnic minorities. Cowie adds that federal officials have often acquiesced to the demands of the “freedom” crowd, as when Franklin Roosevelt overlooked Jim Crow racism in order to keep White Southern voters: “By successfully wrestling key exemptions for agricultural and domestic workers from federal regulation, much of the Southern racial and agricultural order remained relatively untouched by the long arm of the New Deal.” Toward the end of a lucid narrative that spans three centuries, the author argues that the federal government has been an unreliable ally and sometimes an open enemy of the rights of non-White people. Even so, without federal power, as current events richly suggest, even those tenuous rights would almost certainly be diminished or eliminated.

A powerful history showing that White supremacist ideas of freedom are deeply embedded in American politics.

The child of Black Caribbean immigrants—“her very person,” writes historian Curwood, “was at the intersection of race, gender, ethnic, and class identities”—Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005) decided early in life on a career in politics. She first attained influence in New York and then captured a formerly gerrymandered district in Brooklyn to enter the House of Representatives. There, she served for seven terms, where she defended issues of interest not just to her constituency, but also to an increasingly restive national community. She was prescient in many ways. Early on, writes the author, she worked to diversify the Democratic Party, pressing for a Black vice presidential candidate, a Native American secretary of the interior, and so forth—a vision realized only with the Biden administration half a century later. Chisholm fought what she considered the restrictiveness of terms such as women’s liberation and Black Power, which “created reactivity and a lack of critical thinking about how the movements could connect, especially through and among Black women”—again, a vision realized in the Black Lives Matter movement and with the rise of successors such as Stacey Abrams. Curwood deftly reveals Chisholm’s complexities and sometimes secretive nature as well as her tenacity in political struggles with Richard Nixon, who finally gave in to her campaign for raising the federal minimum wage in 1974; and Jimmy Carter, whom she faulted for calving off a separate Department of Education from the former Health, Education, and Welfare. As to welfare reform, Chisholm decréd efforts to do away with federal aid to the needy even as she viewed welfare itself as “a symptom and direct cost of the corrosive effects of racism and sexism.” With the growth of reactionary conservatism in the Reagan years, Chisholm left institutional politics—but by no means political work.

A model political biography that all modern activists should read.
the world, and he is never less than evenhanded in addressing those theories—some enshrined in the cultural imagination—that are demonstrably untrue. A lucid introduction by Carlos Fiolhais, professor of physics at the University of Coimbra, sets the stage for Danielsson’s persuasive argument, which uses as its starting point the view that physics is the “mother” science that strives to explicate and define the real world. In this framework, it is about observation and testing as opposed to the incorporeal or spiritual mysteries that even some distinguished colleagues propound, dualistic notions on reality that are little different from religious belief. Danielsson’s message is clear: Do not mistake our evolving descriptions of the world, which are simply attempts to represent it, with the world itself. Mathematical models, however useful, are not the same as the real world. Computers do not think. Free will and determinism are both illusions. There is no consciousness separate from the body. Danielsson’s clarity of thought and expression and his use of illuminating literary and historical references are equal to the quality of his writing.

Science “popularizing” doesn’t get much more comprehensible, or provocative, than this.

THE WISE HOURS
A Journey Into the Wild and Secret World of Owls
Darlington, Miriam
Tin House (336 pp.)
$27.95 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781953534835

An invigorating dive into the world of owls.

In a smooth mixture of memoir and nature writing, Darlington, author of Otter Country, does for owls what Rebecca Giggs did for whales in Fathoms. Interwoven into the discussion of Darlington’s fieldwork is the story of her son’s mysterious illness. Fortunately, as with the author, his encounters with owls seem to bring him immense joy, to be “infected with owlishness.” Darlington’s original goal was to observe all of the wild species that reside in the British Isles. She begins by discussing barn owls, sharing details of the rewarding time she spent volunteering with the Barn Owl Trust and their surveys. She describes her encounters with the rarely seen tawny owl, which has an “unsettling cry,” a little owl that glared at her with “ferocious lemon-yellow eyes,” and a short-eared owl that nearly landed on her head. Darlington’s research took her to Serbia, Finland, Spain, and France, and the author is consistently enthusiastic about her experiences in each locale, whether reveling in the “melancholy call” of the Eurasian eagle owl or picking out the “highly vocal” call of the pygmy owl, a “tiny owl...the size of a pine cone.” Darlington also warns that the owl population in Britain is in decline due to human activity, particularly the use of chemicals to treat rodent infestations and encroachment into their natural habitats. Throughout, the author’s lyrical prose is captivating: “The high moorland was woven with August colour, splashed with purple heather and coconut-scented gorse...There was a stroking southerly breeze that seemed to whisper through the grasses warning of the end of the summer.” Ultimately, writes Darlington, “all an owl wants is to be left in peace, to make its living, to bring up its young safely and without disturbance, to continue the bloodline. Not so different from us, really.”

Heartfelt, enchanting, and beautifully written.
“The iconic singer/songwriter reflects on a lifetime of listening to music.”

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF MODERN SONG**

**Dylan, Bob**

Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)

$45.00 | Nov. 1, 2022

9781451648706

The iconic singer/songwriter reflects on a lifetime of listening to music.

Nostalgia abounds in Bob Dylan’s eclectic and eccentric collection of impressive musical appreciations.

Examining 66 songs across numerous genres, going back to Stephen Foster’s “Nelly Was a Lady” (1849), the author offers an extensive hodgepodge of illustrations and photographs alongside rich, image-laden, impressionistic prose. There is no introduction or foreword. Instead, Dylan dives right in with “Detroit City.” Bobby Blake’s 1961 single: “What is it about lapsing into narration in a song that makes you think the singer is suddenly revealing the truth?” Throughout the text, the author is consistently engaging and often provocative in his explorations. Regarding “Witchy Woman” by the Eagles, he writes, “The lips of her cunt are a steel trap, and she covers you with cow shit—a real killer-diller and you regard her with suspicion and fear, rightly so. Homely enough to stop a clock, she’s no pussycat.” Deconstructing Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard’s “Pancho and Lefty,” Dylan describes songwriting as “editing—distilling thought down to essentials.” We can see the author’s mind working, reminiscing, but there’s little autobiography here. Where needed, he tosses in some prodigious music history and biography, and some appreciations read like short stories. Often, Dylan straightforwardly recounts what a specific song is about: “By the time you get to Phoenix it will be morning where she is, and she’ll be just getting out of bed.” Pete Seeger’s “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” is a “remembrance of things past,” and Dion and the Belmonts’ version of the Rodgers and Hart song “Where or When” is about “reincarnation.” Also making appearances are Carl Perkins, Perry Como, The Clash, Roy Orbison, Cher, Rosemary Clooney, Johnny Cash, Judy Garland, Nina Simone, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, the Allman Brothers, and the Grateful Dead. Bobby Darin and Willie Nelson appear twice.

“A record is so much better when you can believe it.” Dylan is clearly a believer, and he will convince readers to follow.

**WHEN INNOCENCE IS NOT ENOUGH**

**Hidden Evidence and the Failed Promise of the Brady Rule**

**Dybdahl, Thomas**

The New Press (224 pp.)

$28.99 | Jan. 17, 2023

9781620977040

A former public defender examines the checkered history of the ruling that holds that all prosecutorial evidence must be made available to the defense in court cases.

The Brady rule takes its name from a tangled case in which John Leo Brady recruited an accomplice to steal a car to use as a getaway vehicle for a planned bank robbery. The accomplice killed the car’s owner. The prosecuting attorney filed his confession away, and in the end, Brady was sentenced to death. The case went before the Supreme Court in 1963, and even though Justice William O. Douglas opined that “the suppression by the prosecution of evidence favorable to an accused on request violates due process where the evidence is material either to guilt or to punishment,” the court did not overturn the conviction. While Brady languished in jail, courts across the country wrestled with due process where the evidence is material either to guilt or to punishment. That case was manipulated by a prosecutor on the make, in the use of the Brady rule—which, of course, hinges on the suppression of evidence—which, despite both eyewitness accounts and later confessions, the defense in court cases.

“Weighing against reform, Dybdahl writes in support of a broader and vigorously enforced standard, is the court’s position that the prosecution won’t destroy evidence contrary to its argument. Weighing against reform, Dybdahl writes in support of a broader and vigorously enforced standard, is the court’s position that the prosecution won’t destroy evidence contrary to its argument. Weighing against reform, Dybdahl writes in support of a broader and vigorously enforced standard, is the court’s position that the prosecution won’t destroy evidence contrary to its argument. Weighing against reform, Dybdahl writes in support of a broader and vigorously enforced standard, is the court’s position that the prosecution won’t destroy evidence contrary to its argument.

A convincing argument for a judicial overhaul in support of fair trials.
very view of Christ and his followers. “The difficulty with Revelation,” he writes, “is not that it predicts a future that never happened but that it presents a view of God that is deeply unsettling... Is it not disturbing that, in the end, the unstoppable justice of God triumphs over his mercy?” The author then goes on to examine how the Christ of Revelation differs markedly from the Christ of the Gospels. He notes that God is portrayed in the Gospels as having mercy and love, whereas in Revelation, God is cruel, vengeful, and propelled by justice devoid of mercy. “In my view,” he concludes, “the God of Revelation cannot be the true God.” All of this matters, Ehrman believes, precisely because Revelation has had far-reaching consequences on historical events. Christian sects have been built around it, popular views of how the world will end are based on it, and even foreign policy is influenced by it. Revelation is too significant to ignore and too important to be improperly read.

Well-argued, certain-to-be-controversial account of the Bible’s closing story.

THE DARKNESS MANIFESTO
On Light Pollution, Night Ecology, and the Ancient Rhythms That Sustain Life
Eklöf, Johan
Trans. by Elizabeth DeNoma
Scribner (272 pp.)
$26.00 | Feb. 14, 2023 9781668000892

Insightful observations about how lighting is blighting both the environment and our inner lives.

At first glance, this book seems to be an exercise in eccentricity, but it turns out to be an absorbing read. Eklöf is a Swedish biologist whose original area of expertise is bats. When he realized that the bat population was declining, he started looking for the reason. He found that the number of insects, the primary food for bats, was sharply decreasing and that the cause was an excess of artificial light. Most insects are nocturnal, and their feeding and mating cycles are determined by the sun and moon. As artificial lighting has grown more intense and spread into rural areas, these cycles have become fatally disrupted, and the consequences ripple through the food chain. Even more, light pollution—light that is essentially unnecessary but has an adverse impact on ecosystems—is directly affecting mammal populations, including humans. “The biological clock, our circadian rhythm, is ancient, shared, and completely fundamental,” writes Eklöf. He continues, “the artificial light from lamps, headlamps, and floodlights is not in this equation and risks, to put it mildly, creating disorder in the system.” For many people, this dislocation means disrupted sleep, stress, and depression. The author also explores the history of artificial light, pointing out that much of the lighting in our society achieves very little, aside from wasting resources. He readily acknowledges that artificial illumination is a hallmark of civilization, but his advice is to protect the ecosystem, and ultimately our own well-being, by turning down the lights and accepting the natural rhythms of night and day. His conclusion: “Seize darkness. Become its friend and enjoy it—it will enrich your life... Carpe noctem.”

A captivating, poetic call for greater awareness of the natural cycles of the world.

FLORA MACDONALD
“Pretty Young Rebel”: Her Life and Story
Fraser, Flora
Knopf (288 pp.)
$30.00 | Jan. 10, 2023 9780451494382

A distinguished historical biographer tells the “stranger than... Jacobite fiction” story of a Scottish national hero.

Named after Flora MacDonald (1722-1790) by her historian mother and politician father, Fraser grew
THE REOPENING OF THE WESTERN MIND
The Resurgence of Intellectual Life From the End of Antiquity to the Dawn of the Enlightenment
Freeman, Charles
Knopf (816 pp.)
$50.00 | Feb. 7, 2023
9780525659365

A thoughtful portrait.

A complicated perspective on the impact of classical texts on European thought, politics, and culture.

Two decades after the publication of his divisive book, The Closing of the Western Mind, classical historian Freeman traces Europe’s path out of the so-called “dark ages” through the Enlightenment, a process of “reopening” the author attributes to the rediscovery and proliferation of ancient Greek and Roman texts. Appealing to his “personal experience...nosing about it,” the author constructs a version of European history driven by the tensions between rigid, regressive Christian authority and progressive intellectuals who embraced the pagan philosophies of classical antiquity. Writing in accessible yet long-winded prose, Freeman takes a broad approach to this 1,200-year period of massive cultural change. He loosely organizes the narrative around synopses of major texts, cultural developments, and lives of particular intellectual figures, illuminated by dozens of full-color examples of maps, art, and architecture that offer further context to the author’s arguments. This vast scope makes a convincing case for Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and many other classical thinkers’ wide-ranging cultural impact on medieval and early-modern Europe, but it lacks depth and focus outside of the author’s preoccupation with the city-states of northern Italy and his frequent criticism of the Catholic Church. Echoing the claims of his previous work, Freeman characterizes early Christianity as a brutal eradicator of the empirical rationality of Greece and Rome, deriding any attempt to “find a coherent doctrine of Christian belief” as “impossible” even as he details the church’s preservation of ancient texts and subsequent integration of their philosophies into Christian theology and law. The author has an ax to grind, and he does so at the cost of undermining his valid criticism and solid historical research.

A knowledgeable historian delivers a book that is ambitious in scale but shallow in execution.

FREEDOM REREAD
Gibson, L.
Columbia Univ. (140 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Feb. 28, 2023
9780231188937

A critical reckoning with Jonathan Franzen’s fictional vision of suburbia.

In the latest installment in the publisher’s Rereadings series, it’s clear that Gibson, a poet, is decidedly conflicted over Franzen’s work, which is a common sentiment among critics. Is he an ambitious Balzac-ian social realist or passé ventriloquist of White anxieties? Gibson wrestles with the matter by largely focusing on Franzen’s fourth novel, Freedom, though the book also integrates The Corrections and Crossroads as well. Gibson identifies a few of Franzen’s more notable tics as a novelist and social critic: an “agnostic omniscience” that sometimes reads as superiority to his characters, a habit of using military language to bat away criticism, and the way he builds characters by zigzagging moral paths rather than a steady climb toward a climax. “A Franzen protagonist’s arc,” writes Gibson, “does not curve so much as tack: fuckups make good, saints go to pieces.” Franzen’s approach, argues Gibson, is often retrograde—he’s skeptical of technology and averse to politics in the novel. But Gibson reserves a degree of admiration for Franzen’s obsession with what it means to be a good person. By mapping the neuroses of Freedom’s characters against Franzen’s own public statements, he finds a writer who often uses fiction to disguise his anxieties about society and literature’s role in it. “His brand is anger,” he writes, “and it’s among the strongest in the biz.” Gibson’s style can be digestible and academic, which makes it ungainly as a handbook for casual readers. However, the text will resonate for those in a similar love-hate relationship with Franzen, especially in lyrical sections bookending the analysis, concluding with the kind
of ambivalence that problematic cultural figures often inspire: “Did he like this guy, or no?”

A passionate, scholarly attempt to sort out one of American literature’s most divisive figures.

THE CRITIC’S DAUGHTER
A Memoir
Gilman, Priscilla
Norton (288 pp.)
$28.95 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-393-65132-4

The daughter of drama critic Richard Gilman and literary agent Lynn Nesbit reckons with her father’s bumpy life trajectory.

“I lost my father for the first time when I was ten years old,” writes Gilman, author of a previous memoir, The Anti-Romantic Child, referring to her parents’ divorce. Their separation ended an idyllic early childhood among the New York literati of the 1970s, lit by her father’s devotion to his two daughters and his love of make-believe, storytelling, and children’s literature. His impersonation of Sesame Street’s Grover was a beloved lifelong party trick, one of many endearing rituals of his “religion of childhood.” “As his daughter, I have the privilege—or the burden—of making the final assessment of my father’s life,” Gilman writes, and then wonders, “Can I make an act of bracing honesty also an act of love?” She certainly has done so here. For those who don’t know her father’s work—as a critic and professor at Yale Drama School, he was a supporter of iconoclastic theater and the author of a landmark book on Chekhov—Gilman provides a detailed portrait of his career, including many quotes from his writing, which famously combined the personal and the academic in densely nested clauses. After her mother “bitterly divorced him and remained hardened against him,” he went through a long period of personal and financial trials, through which the author and her sister bravely tried to buoy him, until his third wife, a wonderful Japanese woman, appeared to save the day. The cruelty of Gilman’s still-very-much-alive mother during these decades is disturbingly evident, which makes the inclusion in the final pages of an exchange about the marriage that occurred during the writing of the memoir “a balm like no other.” The narrative is passionate, resonant, and beautifully written, with just a few forgivably maudlin moments.

Evokes both a uniquely brilliant and troubled man and the poignantly relatable essence of the father-daughter connection.

ON FREEDOM ROAD
Bicycle Explorations and Reckonings on the Underground Railroad
Goodrich, David
Pegasus (258 pp.)
$27.95 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781639363452

A bicycle exploration of the paths to freedom via the Underground Railroad.

Following a visit to a museum in Illinois, climate scientist Goodrich, who has undertaken multiple long-distance bike treks, began thinking about the enslaved people that made their way north seeking freedom. Chroning his 3,000-mile journey, the author records both well- and little-known historical tales, and he effectively demonstrates his belief that traveling by bike provides a unique feel for the land. In taking these journeys, his goal was to “get closer to the people who walked these paths” and to “find a way to tell
somethe events and character is Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin. For example, she describes the life of Josiah Henson, the conductor on the Underground Railroad who was the inspiration for the book’s main character. When he encountered a group of Native Americans, believed to be Shawnee, they guided him and his family along part of his route to freedom. Goodrich also reflects on the current trend in education to suppress discussions of slavery in order to avoid potential discomfort by White students. “There are things in our history that should make us uncomfortable,” he writes. “Only in grappling with the truths of our past can we begin to construct something new and better.”

A heartfelt reminder of the importance of remembering our past in order to continue to learn from it.

OUT OF SILENCE, SOUND. OUT OF NOTHING, SOMETHING.
A Writer’s Guide
Griffin, Susan
Counterpoint (356 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Jan. 17, 2023
978-1-64009-410-9

How to nurture creativity.
Aiming to offer a “kind and gentle” writing guide, Griffin, author of 22 books, takes a Zen-like approach to generating, constructing, and honing a piece of writing. In serene meditations, sometimes less than half a page long, she reflects on topics such as silence, focus, reading, the need for solitude, and the power of attentiveness to one’s surroundings and feelings. Throughout, the author underscores the importance of self-awareness, of being alert to one’s reveries, which “allows the dreamer to pass boundaries and in the process discover new insights.” While she advises setting aside a special time each day for writing, she also touts the benefits of taking a walk in the fresh air. “Creativity,” she has found, “is more like a cat than a dog. You can’t order it to come to you. You just have to make yourself available until...you find it leaping into your lap.” Once ideas have made it onto the page, Griffin advises thinking about word choice, sentence and paragraph structure, transitions, and the power of repetition and metaphors. Passages of memoir recount her development as a writer, beginning with clumsy childhood efforts, and she shares thoughts from a host of writers, including Proust, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, M.F.K. Fisher, Iris Murdoch, Patti Smith, and Lewis Carroll. Alice McDermott cautions, “A sentence that seeks to dazzle is merely annoying. A sentence that dazzles even as it deflects our amazement, graciously leading us to the next, is a sentence worth keeping.” Above all, Griffin encourages all writers to believe in themselves: “When you tell any story, you create a system in which, as with a watershed, every word or sentence reflects and acts upon every other, in a way that, miraculous as it sometimes seems, is never static, but like nature is always evolving, transforming before your very eyes.”

Warm reassurance from a veteran writer.

DRIVING THE GREEN BOOK
A Road Trip Through the Living History of Black Resistance
Hall, Alvin with Karl Weber
HarperOne (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Jan. 31, 2023
9780063271968

Revisiting a vital resistance and survival tool for Black Americans.

In 2015, broadcaster Hall first learned about The Negro Motorist Green Book, published by Victor and Alma Green from 1936 to 1967. Each year, the Greens offered guidance to Black Americans, many of whom were traveling from the North, where they had migrated, to their families in the South. In a nation rife with bigotry and racial violence, the guide told travelers about restaurants, hotels, medical facilities, and even gas stations that would welcome their business. Although car travel offered some measure of safety for Blacks—they could avoid being threatened, demeaned, or attacked on buses and trains—still, they knew “that simply driving—being behind the wheel of a car—was viewed in many parts of the United States as an affront to social restrictions based on white supremacy.” The Green Book, then, was a crucial resource for Black Americans traveling around the country. For Hall, the books served as an invitation into history, and they became the basis for two road trips: in 2016, to research the BBC documentary The Green Book, and in 2019, accompanied by his friend and co-producer Janee Woods Weber, for his own 10-episode podcast. Hall’s many interviewees bear witness to confusing interactions, frightening encounters, and their elders’ strict admonitions. Often, Blacks would not risk stopping in towns along the way; when they did, parents made sure their children were aware of “the unwritten, often capricious, area-specific restrictions in the southern states and the possibly life-threatening reactions to violating them.” Word of mouth spread information about sundown towns, where Blacks could be arrested or killed if they were on the streets after sundown. Sundown towns, Hall discovered, were not mentioned in the Green Book; neither did the words racism or Jim Crow appear. Nonetheless, the Greens’ “diplomatic language” conveyed their points clearly, and Hall relates them clearly to current-day readers.

A hard-charging resurrection of Black lives in Jim Crow America.
“A well-argued case for a better approach to turning young lawbreakers to better paths.”

CHILDREN OF THE STATE

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH’S DIARIES AND NOTEBOOKS

The New York Years, 1941-1950

Highsmith, Patricia
Ed. by Anna von Planta
Liveright/Norton (672 pp.)
$22.00 paper | Jan. 10, 2023
9781324092940

The intimate revelations of a sensuous, ambitious writer.

Out of nearly 5,000 pages from the notebooks and diaries of Patricia Highsmith (1921-1995), editor von Planta and her team have culled about 20% to represent the author’s formative years as a writer. They begin with her first diary entry in 1941, when she was an undergraduate at Barnard, and conclude in 1950, with the publication of her first novel, Strangers on a Train, and the completion of her second, The Price of Salt. As this volume demonstrates, Highsmith poured everything into her private notebooks: desires, dreams, inspirations, frustrations, and more. Longing for “the unspeakably blissful sensation of being loved,” she recounts a flood of infatuations, affairs, seductions, and betrayals. “We seek forever,” she writes, “one other human heart we can touch and who can touch ours.” Aside from a chronicle of sex with many women (and a few men, one of whom became her fiancé), Highsmith records her efforts to be recognized as a writer. After graduating from college in 1942, she failed to get a job at a glossy magazine—the New Yorker or Harper’s Bazaar, for example. Short-term gigs ended when she found a job as a researcher and scriptwriter for a monthly comic magazine, which supported her for several years and gave her time to work on her fiction. “I am writing like K. Boyle,” she exulted, “with many adjectives, many strong sensuous words that one feels in the body.” In 1943, she sold her first story, and the next year she took her first trip abroad, to Mexico. Her love life in New York’s queer community was energetic and fueled by alcohol. Often, she dated several women concurrently, a practice that didn’t end well, and she was drawn to successful older women. As in a previous collection, this one contains a foreword by Highsmith’s biographer Joan Schenkar and succinct introductions for each year.

A close look at a tumultuous life.

Hobbs, the author of The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace, opens with a dispiriting remark from a juvenile hall history teacher who once hoped his students would one day join society as responsible members: “I used to have high hopes for them leaving here and graduating from high school and maybe even college. Now, I mainly just hope that, within five years of leaving, my students aren’t dead. Even if they’re in adult prison, but still alive, I consider that a success.” Some of the young people Hobbs highlights are aspirational, dreaming of going to school and moving away from the cities where they live—and most jailed youth are people of color and poor. As the author shows, well-meaning teachers can do only so much, and most despise the crumbling, ill-equipped system. Meanwhile, those who are incarcerated in what used to be called reform schools resist at every turn, as when one teacher who stressed building a solid resume with a good work ethic was met with one objector: “The kid kept pressing a reasoned case that selling opioids was a valid job by almost every metric except its illegality.” The most successful program Hobbs examines is not jailing but rather a New York diversion program whereby the youthful offenders go to school and, if they last for a month, are paid to do so and then placed in internship programs. This is most definitely the exception; inside most systems, the jailers assume such things as that any inmate “allowed on the internet would immediately begin organizing gang activity.” One stark truth stands throughout this human book: “Too many youthful offenders will one day die in incidents that are “violent, pointless, and painful.”

A well-argued case for a better approach to turning young lawbreakers to better paths.

CHILDREN OF THE STATE

Stories of Survival and Hope in the Juvenile Justice System

Hobbs, Jeff
Scribner (384 pp.)
$28.99 | Jan. 24, 2023
9781982116361

A former teacher in the system recounts different approaches to institutional criminal justice for youth offenders.

THIS WIDE, TERRAQUEOUS WORLD

Hunt, Laird
Coffee House (176 pp.)
$16.95 paper | March 21, 2023
9781566896672

Deliberately digressive personal essays on the intersection of art, history, and happenstance.

Hunt has long been an acclaimed experimental fiction writer, and even his more conventional novels, like Zorrie, are high on lyricism and atmospherics. As such, it’s not surprising that while these essays generally concern the writing life, there’s little in the way of straightforward confession or craft guidance. “Climb the Whale,” the centerpiece, sinuously shifts from Hunt’s attempt to write a Western to his teenage interest in Levi’s jeans to a 19th-century photo of a dead whale in Massachusetts. An appreciation of the writer Laszlo Krasznahorkai enters the narrative, too, yet for all his meandering, Hunt captures a sense of how stray memories and images inform storytelling, “all the sorts of things that can be seen in the fades of one’s jeans.” Similarly, the title essay is ostensibly about a research trip he conducted for Zorrie, which is about the Midwestern Radium Girls of a century ago. But as his car gets stuck and he finds himself more
deeply immersed in the Great Plains, it becomes a meditation on nature and writers like Willa Cather, whose novels “seem so beautifully drunk on the deeper registers of life’s best natural beauties.” Elsewhere, Hunt considers connections between museum relics and our own pasts; the charm of childhood recklessness; and a five-year stint working at the United Nations. Throughout, he captures the feeling of the hard work of writing, the way a failing novel is “ice you do not want to walk over.” The author isn’t a prose poet, but he writes with a poetic sensibility, letting the metaphorical meaning and depth of his observations arise naturally out of his prose without laboring to extract them.

A slim, elegant attempt to describe the curious alchemy of fiction writing.

**SORRY, SORRY, SORRY**  
*The Case for Good Apologies*  
Ingall, Marjorie & Susan McCarthy  
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster  
(368 pp.)  
$28.99 | Jan. 10, 2023  
9781982163495

How to apologize with grace and sincerity.

Since 2012, Ingall and McCarthy have been analyzing the art of the apology in contemporary pop culture, the news, and politics for their website, SorryWatch.com. This book is a synthesis of their research and the varying perspectives they have chronicled on the site. Even though “good apologies are one of the [life] tools we could all be deploying more,” write the authors, apologizing well is agonizingly difficult for many (most?) grownups.” In conversational prose featuring anecdotes examples, Ingall and McCarthy present six easy-to-follow steps for apologizing effectively. They analyze the many reasons why saying you’re sorry is such a difficult process and present instances where the dynamic power of a resonant “I’m sorry” can create positive change and deepen mutual understanding. They discuss the art of the public apology and how it became “fashionable” for politicians and public figures hoping to save face. They explain how to comprehend why a specific behavior was bad and how to ensure that it doesn’t happen again, and they discuss how to initiate reparations. Throughout, the authors reveal surprising examples of good apologies as well as the neuroscience and psychology behind poor ones—in addition to the things never to say when attempting to right a wrong. Naturally, the bad apologies comprise the text’s juiciest material, and the authors present the five worst celebrity, corporate, and political apologies of all time—e.g., Mark Wahlberg’s vague 1993 apology for hate crimes he committed as a teenager; Harvey Weinstein’s ambiguous response to numerous sexual assault accusations; and Ellen DeGeneres’ issuing nebulous regrets about her toxic work climate. Ingall and McCarthy firmly believe that apologies “civilize” our culture; in making amends for a wrongdoing, they create a happier, more forgiving society, and they offer key teachable moments for children. Closing each chapter are achievable and proactive apology action items for readers eager to do better.

Essential protocol for those seeking to hone their apology skills.

**LOVE & JUSTICE**  
*A Story of Triumph on Two Different Courts*  
Irons, Maya Moore & Jonathan Irons with Travis Thrasher  
Andscape/Disney (352 pp.)  
$27.99 | Jan. 17, 2023  
9781368081777

Inspirational account of a WNBA star and a wrongfully convicted prisoner striving for freedom and falling in love along the way.

This unique synthesis of sports memoir, romance, and social reporting affectingly captures the journeys of the authors. In their succinct conclusion, they write, “Twenty-three isn’t just a number on a basketball jersey but it is also the number of years it took to free a blameless juvenile.” The alternating narrative structure captures both of their voices as their young lives sharply digress. Raised by a loving but overwhelmed grandmother, Jonathan had drifted into small-time drug dealing as a teenager when, out of nowhere, he was charged in a violent hate crimes he committed as a teenager; Harvey Weinstein’s vague 1993 apology for his release, followed by marriage and parenthood. The legal appeal gathered momentum, leading to the bittersweet triumph of his release, followed by marriage and parenthood. The book, often moving yet occasionally hampered by slow, repetitive writing, features a foreword by Bryan Stevenson.

A largely engaging tale of love, faith, and dedication.
**NO MIRACLES NEEDED**

*How Today’s Technology Can Save Our Climate and Clean Our Air*

Jacobson, Mark Z.

Cambridge Univ. (400 pp.)

$14.95 paper | Feb. 2, 2023

9781009249546

How to solve our climate, energy, and pollution crises with today’s tools.

Few readers will disagree with Jacobson, a Stanford professor whose work “forms the scientific basis of the Green New Deal,” when he points out that “burning things—coal, gas, oil, and biomass—has produced the prosperous world that we in the West inhabit” but also dismal environmental damage. A steady stream of solutions pour off the presses, mostly describing futuristic technology or nations cooperating to a degree never seen in history. In fact, Jacobson maintains, 95% of the technologies that we need are already commercially available, and we know how to build the rest. Everyone, the author included, agrees that the world must move away from combustion and toward electrification and learn to provide direct heat and energy through clean, sustainable sources—namely, wind, water, and solar, or WWS. Happy not to encounter another voice of doom or utopian fantasy, readers may settle back to enjoy this common-sense narrative, but they will need to pay close attention. While Jacobson discusses ways to speed adoption of cost-effective systems that are now competing successfully in the marketplace, mostly he delivers technical descriptions of how they work and the science behind them—e.g., the design and operation of a run-of-the-river hydropower plant versus a conventional facility. Readers distant from high school physics and chemistry will relearn the basics of electricity, photovoltaic cells, semiconductors, and power grids. In this expert, densely detailed, and mostly realistic text, Jacobson offers some surprises. For example, battery- and fuel cell–powered cargo vessels and airplanes are now in advanced development. In the final chapter, the author examines policies essential to building a 100% clean infrastructure. These descriptions are heavily technical, and the author admits that overcoming political hurdles will be a greater challenge. The book includes a foreword by Bill McKibben.

A meticulous primer on achieving a WWS energy transition emphasizing the engineering—the easy part.

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**THE GHOST AT THE FEAST**

*America and the Collapse of World Order, 1900-1941*

Kagan, Robert

Knopf (688 pp.)

$35.00 | Jan. 10, 2023

9780307262943

A broad-ranging history of America’s early evolution as a world power, a more deliberate process than is often supposed.

In this second volume of the Dangerous Nation trilogy, Kagan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, writes that late-19th-century America was a kind of conservative paradise. With a tiny military to support, taxes were low, and isolation “meant less need for strong central government, less military bureaucracy, and less need for speedy and efficient decision-making.” In this regime, foreign policy was an afterthought. That began to change with the war with Spain in 1898, which in some ways was a foregone conclusion, for even if Americans were not broadly interested in the outside world, they didn’t mind going to war—and Cuba, at least in the eyes of the Founding Fathers, was “a natural appendage of the growing country.” Seizing former Spanish possessions also helped curb other nations’ designs. Germany, for instance, clearly wanted the Philippines after occupying Chinese territory in 1898 and touching off a colonial land grab throughout East Asia. The U.S. clung to the Philippines not just to deny the archipelago to other powers, but also to civilize—in Protestant terms, of course—what William Howard Taft called “our little brown brothers.” Germany faded from the scene in Asia, but it soon turned to the project of a comprehensive “domination of Europe.” Again, Americans didn’t much care, and after World War I, the nation fell into “a profoundly anti-liberal mood” that supposed that democracy was doomed, a mood that Axis powers used to their advantage. Kagan cogently examines what he considers certain inevitabilities (e.g., the attack on Pearl Harbor) while delivering novel interpretations of events. For example, he suggests that Hitler invaded the Soviet Union earlier than intended in order to inspire the Japanese attack, which he supposed, incorrectly, would tie up the American military in the Pacific and keep it out of Europe.

An insightful study of the birth of the American empire and the resulting “American century.”
AWE
The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life
Keltner, Dacher
Penguin Press (336 pp.)
$28.00 | Jan. 3, 2023
9781984879684

How and why the sensations of awe create deeply memorable moments in modern life.

In this insightful report, Keltner—a psychology professor and director of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California and author of Born To Be Good and The Power Paradox—parleys his two-decade career teaching the nuances of happiness into a focused guide to discovering awe and bliss in the human experience. Through stories from a wide variety of careers, callings, situations, and perspectives, the author explores the kind of deeply embedded first-person spiritual and emotional truths that “science simply cannot capture.” These anecdotes include his own brush with the enduring grief of losing his younger brother, who had colon cancer and died via assisted suicide, an event the inspired him to write this book. Keltner identifies four recognizable aspects, or “stories,” of awe. In early chapters, the author probes scientific and theoretical viewpoints, and he examines how awe is defined and measured, why it occurs, and the methods uniquely exhibited by individuals who experience it. This research is bolstered by Keltner’s firm belief in the eight wonders of life, which include simple gifts like collective effervescence (“human waves of awe”), nature, music, personal epiphanies, and the marvels of life and death. Most compelling are the personal stories, which demonstrate a fascinating assortment of opinions and perspectives on what people individually consider awe-inspiring. The author’s interest in restorative justice brought him to San Quentin State Prison, where inmates shared the things that bring them awe from behind bars as well as how music, visual art, and nature contribute to stress-relieving, growth-inducing sensations. Through his work as an expert in the science of goodness and human emotions, Keltner ably renders these transformative, defining moments with illuminative prose and encouragement for readers seeking their own awe-inspired deliverance.

A timely reminder to appreciate the awe-inspiring everyday wonders flourishing all around us.

STATES OF NEGLECT
How Red-State Leaders Have Failed Their Citizens and Undermined America
Kleinknecht, William
The New Press (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-1-62097-642-5

A scathing indictment of Republican-dominated state governments for ignoring the needs of their residents, weakening democracy, and stoking divisive issues in order to draw attention away from their subservience to corporate interests.

Since the election of Barack Obama in 2008 and the rise of the tea party shortly thereafter, Republican governors and legislatures have been aggressive in passing legislation to cut taxes, eviscerate environmental regulations, withdraw funding from public education, restrict access to health care, demonize immigrants and labor unions, and limit voting rights, all to the detriment of minorities, working-class citizens, and the poor. Kleinknecht, a newspaper reporter and author of The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street America, attributes their behavior to a slavish adherence to a corporate agenda that serves both personal and political interests. In short, many people suffer so Republican governors and legislators can thrive, with the country further divided along the fault lines of class and ideology. Particularly egregious, notes the author, are states such as Florida, Texas, North Carolina, Arizona, Mississippi, and West Virginia (a “failed state”) and governors such as Matt Bevin (Kentucky), Ron DeSantis (Florida), and Greg Abbott (Texas). Kleinknecht compares what is happening in these states to the people-friendly policies of California, New York, and Massachusetts. Regarding the boasts of Republicans in Texas and Arizona about their robust economic growth, the author exposes them as deeply deceptive. Blue states, he writes, may not be “paragons of progress,” but it is the red states that stand as exemplars of unfettered market capitalism and political disdain for public welfare. “Only by fully understanding the trend toward autocracy and corporate domination in the red states,” writes Kleinknecht, “and how abjectly it has undermined the nation, can progressives wrest control of the narrative from the far right and begin to alter the course of American politics.”

An impassioned critique of Republican state officials for the harm they cause their most vulnerable residents.
A women’s studies professor explores how two 20th-century activist victories have shaped the battle over reproductive freedom in the U.S.

As she recounts, Kornbluh discovered that her lawyer mother, Beatrice, had fought to decriminalize abortion in New York in the late 1960s days before she died. The author’s research into the history of reproductive rights in New York led her to the full story of Dr. Helen Rodríguez-Triás. Kornbluh knew the doctor as her neighbor, but she learned that she was also “an effective activist, a female Puerto Rican physician at a time when that made her an extreme outlier, and eventually the first Latina head of the American Public Health Association.” The author chronicles how her mother and Rodríguez-Triás were significant figures in two complementary social movements that took place before and after Roe v. Wade. In the late 1960s, Kornbluh’s mother was part of a group of educated, mostly White women who worked with “risk-taking ministers, rabbis, doctors and lawyers” to force the New York legislature to pass the most liberal abortion law in the country. That law went on to become the Supreme Court’s guiding light when it decided in favor of abortion rights in 1973. But in the years that followed, it became clear to Rodríguez-Triás and other like-minded feminists that abortion rights did nothing to address the basic problem women, especially women of color, faced of “whether, when, and how to have children.” It only masked the racial and economic biases of the American medical establishment, which had a history of coercing women of color into sterilization while discouraging “relatively well-off” White women from getting the procedure. Both timely and engaging, this insightful study reveals that the battle for abortion rights must be considered only one part of a much larger, more complex struggle that needs to address the protection of the sexual freedom and choices of all women.

Necessary reading for anyone worried about this post-Dobbs world.
Earthly life was bacterial for most of its existence. Plants came later, dred million years. Life here and on other planets may be inevitable. and they still rule the world, making up 80% of its biomass. Animals account emphasizes how quickly it happened: within a few hun ago. Scientists have no idea how life began, but Levitt’s page-turning and planetary systems formed, including the Earth 4.5 billion years average readers will learn a great deal. The immense heat caused by ours when aging stars exploded. After more billions of years, galaxies expansion and cooling, the two condensed into stars whose heat and elements, hydrogen and helium. After at least 100 million years of our elemental makeup deliver this in an introductory chapter, but unders will share those feelings. 

How the elements of the human body came to be.

In his debut book, writer and documentarian Levitt hits the ground running with news that a 150-pound human body contains 60 elements, including “enough carbon to make 25 pounds of charcoal, enough salt to fill a saltshaker, enough chlorine to disinfect several backyard swimming pools, and enough iron to make a three-inch nail.” On the open market, our body chemicals would bring about $2,000. To explain how they assembled into a human requires an explanation of life itself, which demands understanding the history of our planet. Many authors who write about our elemental makeup deliver this in an introductory chapter, but Levitt offers an entertaining history of the entire universe, paying most attention to humans in the introduction and final chapters. He keeps matters simple enough that science buffs will be satisfied and average readers will learn a great deal. The immense heat caused by the Big Bang permitted almost nothing to exist except the simplest elements, hydrogen and helium. After at least 100 million years of expansion and cooling, the two condensed into stars whose heat and pressure squeezed them into heavier elements—and even heavier ones when aging stars exploded. After more billions of years, galaxies and planetary systems formed, including the Earth 4.5 billion years ago. Scientists have no idea how life began, but Levitt’s page-turning account emphasizes how quickly it happened: within a few hundred million years. Life here and on other planets may be inevitable. Earthly life was bacterial for most of its existence. Plants came later, and they still rule the world, making up 80% of its biomass. Animals brought up the rear, eventually evolving into humans. The author notes that the process of completing this book “has been a continual source of wonder, stupefaction, exhilaration, and gratitude.” Readers will share those feelings.

Lively, illuminating popular science.

THE PARROT AND THE IGLOO Climate and the Science of Denial

Lipsky, David
Norton (448 pp.)
$32.50  |  July 11, 2023
9780393866704

An exploration of the history of climate change denial. In this simultaneously captivating and disturbing book, Lipsky, a professor at NYU and National Magazine Award winner, explores the history of climate change—and those who deny that it is largely human-made—over the past 70 years. The author begins by sharing stories of the inventors who sparked the technological advances that, without their knowledge, triggered the climate problems we face today, primarily Edison, Westinghouse, and Tesla. Lipsky then moves on to the scientists who identified carbon dioxide as the culprit and brought the problem to the world’s attention. Of course, climate change is not a new concept—“by the mid-fifties, the science was already well understood”—but early predictions were a “gross underestimate” of the situation, particularly because fossil fuel use grew more quickly than time of the Messiah. In his tribute, Florida Gov. Ron DeSan忍受 calls him “the greatest broadcaster that [sic] ever lived.” That’s an accidental anointment, given checkered beginnings. Limbaugh himself records that, after earning a failing grade for not properly outlining a speech, he dropped out of college—doubtless the cause of his scorn for higher education. This book is a constant gush of cult-of-personality praise, with tributes from Ben Carson, Mike Pence, Donald Trump, and others. One radio caller called Limbaugh “practically perfect” and a latter-day George Washington by virtue of “the magnetism and the trust and the belief of all the people.” Limbaugh insists that conservatives are all about love, though he filled the airwaves with bitter, divisive invective about the evils of liberals, as with this tidbit: “to liberals, the Bill of Rights is horrible, the Bill of Rights grants citizens freedom….The Bill of Rights limits the federal government, and that’s negative to a socialist like Obama.” Moreover, “to Democrats, America’s heartland is ‘flyover’ country. They don’t know, or like, the Americans who live there, or their values.” Worse still for a money machine like Limbaugh, who flew over that heartland in a private jet while smoking fat cigars, liberals like Obama are “trying to socialize profit so that [they] can claim it”—anathema to wealthy Republicans, who prefer to socialize risk by way of bailouts while keeping the profits for themselves. Limbaugh fans will certainly eat this up, though a segment of the Republican caucus in Congress (Marjorie Taylor Greene et al.) might want to read past Limbaugh’s repeated insistence that “peace can’t be achieved by ‘developing an understanding’ with the Russian people.”

Strictly for dittoheads.
“Sprinkle these clever essays like breadcrumbs through the forest of your days.”

HAPPILY
A Personal History—With Fairy Tales
Mark, Sabrina Orah
Random House (224 pp.)
$27.00 | March 14, 2023
9780593242476

A mother explores the resonances of fairy tales in her modern life.

After collections of poetry and short fiction, Mark now experiments with memoir, using the plots, characters, and sometimes-terrifying outcomes of fairy tales to frame her experiences. She is a Jewish mother raising Black children in the South; a third wife and tentative stepmother; an exhausted home-schooler during lockdown; and a fairy-tale expert looking for a job in academia: “Your final task, I imagine the dean saying, is to make a rope out of these ashes. Do it and the job is yours.” In an essay about raising Black sons, she recalls the precautions a friend gave her 9-year-old for going to the store: Keep his hands out of his pockets, take off his hood, and hold his receipt in his hand. She imagines the list continuing. “We have given him invisibility powder,” she writes, “we have made wings for him out of the feathers of ancient doves, we have given him the power to become a rain cloud and burst, if necessary, into a storm.” In an essay titled “Sorry, Peter Pan, We’re Over You,” Mark writes about how her son informed her that even though she ordered a Peter Pan costume from Etsy, he’s decided to be Martin Luther King Jr. for Halloween. Here, as at many other junctures, the author appears to deliver pragmatic commentary. “Some idiot kid” probably told him he can’t play Peter because he’s Black, she notes. “Trust me...I know how this stupid world today works.” The essays previously appeared in Mark’s column for the Paris Review, and each takes up a different fairy tale, or set of tales, making clever, lyrical, sometimes-disturbing connections. Overall, there is more observation and analysis than storytelling, and each essay does sort of the same thing. If you wolf it down, the gambit becomes repetitive.

WANDERLUST
An Eccentric Explorer, an Epic Journey, a Lost Age
Mitenbuler, Reid
Mariner Books (512 pp.)
$28.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
9780358468325

The eventful life of a daring adventurer.

Drawing on thousands of pages of memoirs, diaries, letters, travelogues, and novels, journalist Mitenbuler creates a vivid portrait of Danish explorer, writer, anthropologist, and ethnographer Peter Freuchen (1886-1957), a man whose “irrepressible restlessness” impelled him around the world. Nurtured from childhood to be independent and adventurous, Freuchen found his calling after an expedition to Greenland in 1906, which began a career of charting the Arctic, manning weather stations, establishing trading posts, investigating Inuit culture, and, most of all, “learning how to master his circumstances so he wouldn’t be dominated by them.” He savored Indigenous foods such as fermented walrus flipper, musk oxen, and boiled caribou meat; and he found the uninhibited sexual mores of the Inuit much to his liking. In 1911, he married and had two children with an Inuit woman who, sadly, died during the influenza pandemic. He was undaunted by the hardships of the polar environment, which included storms, weak ice, scarce game, and wolves that preyed on his sled dogs. Mitenbuler recounts a particularly horrific episode when Freuchen found himself trapped in a hole by snow; he escaped by forming his frozen feces into a chisel. He emerged with frostbitten toes that he amputated himself; eventually, he lost the foot as well. Unable to continue physical exploration, Freuchen went on to become a technical consultant on movies about the Arctic, some made from his novels. He spent enough time in Hollywood to be swept up in the glamour, although he was frustrated by the “mercurial flightiness” of the movie industry. Back in Denmark during World War II, he worked for the resistance after Nazis invaded, storing ammunition in his shed and passing intelligence. Mitenbuler captures the commanding presence of his outspoken, indefatigable subject: “Freuchen was tall and looked like a wild Viking raider just sprung from his longship.”

A colorful, well-researched biography.
Y et without any medical background, Morris didn’t know how
New York, she received a shattering diagnosis. “In a nanosec-
feeling, including symptoms and side effects: language issues,
to participate in her own care, including making lifestyle and
treatments. “We want to be part of this medical struggle,” she
writes, “not just passive patients receiving the standard of care.”
Yet without any medical background, Morris didn’t know how
to participate in her own care, including making lifestyle and
dietary changes. To foster communication among the extensive
GBM community, she founded a nonprofit, OurBrainBank, with an app for patients to input “what they’re doing to stay well—from diet to exercise to supplements—and how they’re feeling, including symptoms and side effects: language issues, balance problems, tiredness, nausea and so on,” providing a “robust base of evidence” for doctors and researchers and a much-needed sense of connection for GBM patients.
A candid narrative of one patient’s intimate experience.

DANCING IN THE DARKNESS
Spiritual Lessons for Thriving in Turbulent Times
Moss III, Otis
Simon & Schuster (144 pp.)
$25.00 | Jan. 3, 2023
978-1-50117-769-9

Moss, whose parents worked alongside Martin Luther King Jr., presents a
kind yet less-than-clear call to action for the progressive community. The pastoral heir to Jeremiah Wright, Moss is theoretically
astute and immersed in the world of activism, and his mes-
sage harkens back to a thoroughly Scripture-centered remedy for confronting challenges, from tense daily interactions with strangers to encounters with evil itself. Eschewing violence and
anger, the author invites readers to approach others with kind-
ness, understanding, and forgiveness. He asks readers to emu-
late the broadly humane tactics of King in both activism and
daily life. Moss suggests “consecrating chaos”—i.e., find ways to constructively build on the chaos of brutality and injustice in order to combat it. The author highlights activists who have used cellphone video to widely distribute instances of racial vio-
lence and then drive people toward demonstrating peacefully against it. He also suggests that people “redirect their rage” into positive actions that effectively combat injustice. “While there is frustration in restraining your impulses,” he writes, “tolerat-
ing that frustration is our one chance to redirect our power to
achieve our greatest goals….Our impulsive anger may feel justi-
fied, even righteous, for a while. But then those unconsidered impulses ravage our world like demons.” Moss uses several illus-
trations to demonstrate his ideals of love and hope amid unjust times. For instance, he finds deeper meaning in a simple vignette about discovering his young daughter dancing in her room in the dark in the middle of the nigh. Overall, the book is positive, hopeful, and affirming, yet Moss might have done well to dig deeper into the King tradition he hopes to uphold. Serious readers will be left seeking more context. Michael Eric Dyson provides the foreword.

Good as a lengthy sermon, somewhat lacking as a short
book.

BLACK CHAMELEON
Memory, Womanhood, and Myth
Mouton, Deborah D.E.E.P.
Henry Holt (320 pp.)
$27.99 | March 7, 2023
9781250827852

Houston’s first Black poet laureate weaves mythology and magic into a
genre-bending memoir.

Mouton remembers sitting on the porch of the Poetry Foundation when a butterfly perched on a fellow poet’s skin. When the poet smiled and said that Mexican mythology identifies butterflies as visiting ancestors, Mouton thought about her enslaved ancestors’ separation from African mythology, which should have been her birthright. “When have Black people in the Americas,” she asks, “had the time to create a history outside the one they were just trying to survive? And in the few moments we get to dream aloud, who is there to record our origins beyond a whitewashed dictation?” These questions drive Mouton’s memoir, in which she uses incidents from her personal history to create a new Black, female mythology. For example, in one chapter, a memory of sexual harassment leads to the myth of Acirema, a god of White supremacism whom Mouton kills but ultimately cannot vanquish. After the author
An unflinching, compelling look at how “calcified hearts believe”—and disbelieve.

THE BIG MYTH
How American Business Taught Us To Loathe Government and Love the Free Market
Oreskes, Naomi & Erik M. Conway
Bloomsbury (576 pp.)
$35.00  |  Feb. 21, 2023
978165573572

A thoughtful denunciation of the economic dogma that the market knows best.

“How did so many Americans come to have so much faith in markets and so little faith in government?” So ask Oreskes and Conway, continuing the line of research they began in their seminal 2010 book, Merchants of Doubt. Where that book focused on the co-optation of scientists to dispute the realities of climate change and the linkage of tobacco to cancer, this joins that co-optation to carefully planted “free market” fundamentalism that holds that any attempt to regulate business is a form of tyranny. This dogma was fomented by economists such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, who argued that market efficiency was the sine qua non of freedom, as if efficiency were the only dimension of an economy. Oreskes and Conway argue convincingly that this ideology “denies capitalism’s failures and refuses to endorse the best tool we have to address those failures, which is government.”

The demand for an unregulated economy precedes the Chicago School of economics, of course: As the authors note, business leaders vehemently objected to child labor laws more than 100 years ago, using the familiar argument that such laws should be left to the states. The National Association of Manufacturers, formed to resist such regulation, press the argument that humans were naturally unequal and that neither the government nor business was responsible for leveling the playing field. “Even today,” write the authors, “NAM continues to fight workplace safety regulation and stands with the fossil fuel industry in its attempts to escape accountability for climate change caused by its products.” Other entities foster this denialism and economic inequality, from the Federal Reserve and its “pursuit of low inflation, rather than low unemployment, [as] the nation’s primary goal” to libertarian think tanks at universities around the country that preach the government-bad, market-good ideology.

A timely, well-argued contribution to the literature of economic inequality and regulation.
A cultural commentator advocates for cancel culture as a social movement that mobilizes the weak to “speak truth to power.”

With the rise of social media, the ability of individuals to comment publicly on the behavior of others has increased exponentially. According to Owens, calling out people and corporations for their racism, sexism, greed, and general insensitivity toward others and pressuring them to be accountable is the essence of cancel culture, and he argues that cancel culture is a force of progressive social change for the greater good. Political to its core, cancel culture comes in two styles: conservative and progressive. Conservatives are eager to cancel critical race theory and such groups as Black Lives Matter, yet they hypocritically condemn cancel culture for stifling free speech. Progressives use it to protect the vulnerable from being oppressed and exploited even as many on the left fret about its excesses. Overall, Owens views the negative reaction to cancel culture by the rich and powerful—particularly older, White, heterosexual, elite males regardless of political persuasion—as an attempt to preserve their privilege. Further, he wants us to recognize that cancel culture is not new. Along with the Boston Tea Party, his list of historical cancellations includes the Stonewall riots of 1969, the charging of Harvey Weinstein with sexual harassment in 2020, and Representative Liz Cheney’s recent ouster from Republican leadership in the House. “Once passive on Trump’s racist and incompetent leadership as someone who had previously voted for him,” writes the author, “Cheney was one of the few from the Right in Congress who voted to impeach the former president for wrongdoing in the January 6 insurrection.” By so extending his reach, however, Owens dilutes his argument. Distinctions matter, particularly when it comes to political action. Moreover, his belief that cancel culture can turn individual complaint into collective action needs much more thought.

An undercooked yet relevant reminder of the possibilities of cancel culture and how it can make the powerful accountable.

Emmett Till’s cousin chronicles the hopeful reopening of the 1955 Mississippi lynching case based on new evidence.

The horrific 1955 murder of Till in Money, Mississippi, was never solved in court due to the skewed accusation by White woman Carolyn Bryant that the 14-year-old African American visiting her store had menaced her sexually. Her husband and others were acquitted by the all-White jury, and justice never arrived. Till’s family, especially his mother, Mamie, crusaded for justice for decades (she died in 2003), and his murder galvanized the civil rights movement. Parker, an Illinois minister, was outside the store waiting for Emmett, and he knows that Bryant’s version of what happened was a resounding lie. In 2017, a new book by Duke professor Timothy Tyson, The Blood of Emmett Till, purported that Bryant recanted her accusation with the words, “That part’s not true.” The FBI reopened the case, and the author and other family members were eager to reinterview Bryant and Tyson to figure out what actually happened. However, over the course of four years tracking the evidence, Parker, in conjunction with the FBI, could not corroborate Tyson’s claims about his interviews with Bryant, and the case again closed. Parker’s story, well rendered with the assistance of journalist Benson, is a deeply personal, painful reopening of wounds, revealing deep resentment and frustration with the White appropriation of the Till tragedy. “You can’t understand the Civil Rights Movement without understanding the story of Emmett Till—the way we were, the way we are, the way we need to be in order to move forward into a new experience of shared power,” write the authors. While some readers may be frustrated by the lack of closure and lingering sense of injustice, the book is a useful addition to our understanding of a vital case of racial hatred and violence in the U.S.

Compelling evidence that the fight for racial justice is never truly over.

The universe explained by a particle physicist.

Päs, a professor of theoretical physics and author of The Perfect Wave, examines
“An entertaining story of cunning espionage.”

**CODE NAME BLUE WREN**

"what we actually mean when we talk about ‘the universe.’ " It can't be everything we see at night; our Milky Way Galaxy, which has 100 billion stars, is only one of trillions of galaxies. It can't be everything astronomers see because invisible gas clouds contain 10 times more matter. It can't be ordinary matter because there is five times more "dark matter," whose exotic makeup no one understands. The universe itself may be a meaningless concept because there may be an innumerable number of them in an uncountable proliferating "multiverse." Standing under the stars, Päs feels that he is one with the universe. The notion that everything in the universe is part of one unified whole is called "monism," a belief that was codified by the ancient Greeks. Most scholars agree that the Greeks invented science and made important discoveries. They also got many things wrong, but Päs focuses on philosophy, where even concepts of "right" and "wrong" are debatable. The author devotes the first third of the book to his specialty, quantum physics, in which "objects get so completely and entirely merged that it is impossible to say anything at all about the properties of their constituents anymore." Serious explanations of quantum physics require close attention, so most readers will breathe a sigh of relief when Päs switches gears to deliver a history of science and religion in Western culture, which he describes as a battle between Christianity and monistic scholars, who were persecuted until the Renaissance, when modern science revived the ideas of ancient Greece. Päs has no doubt that the great thinkers (e.g., Spinoza and Kant) and scientists (Galileo, Newton, Einstein) were monists. This is difficult stuff, but the glossary helps.

A dense philosophical exploration of the cosmos—not for the faint of heart.

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**CODE NAME BLUE WREN**

The True Story of America’s Most Dangerous Female Spy—and the Sister She Betrayed

Popkin, Jim

Hanover Square Press (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Jan. 3, 2023

978-1-335-44988-7

The life of “the most important spy you’ve never heard of.”

As Popkin recounts, Ana Montes (b. 1957) was arrested days after 9/11, when Americans were “shell-shocked” by the attack. The *New York Times* ran a story on Page 7. A high-level operative of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Montes spied for Cuba from 1985 to 2001. Since her family talked freely after her arrest, there is plenty of material for the author to re-create her life and career. They had moved to the U.S. from Puerto Rico and prospered, so all her siblings attended college. Ironically, two of her siblings—and their spouses—were “true-blue FBI.” After obtaining a degree in international relations, Montes took a low-level job in the Justice Department, impressed superiors, obtained a top-secret clearance within a year, transferred to the DIA in 1985, and continued to climb the ladder. In a parallel story, Popkin notes that Montes’ sister joined the FBI that same year and enjoyed similar success in Florida. At the time, Castro’s Cuba operated a frugal but efficient intelligence service. Recruited by a college friend, Montes underwent an informal but rigorous course in spycraft and then got to work. Popkin delivers a gripping account of her routine, which lacked the fireworks of a Hollywood spy story but contained plenty of stress—so much so that she sought psychiatric help. Her activities attracted enough concern to produce a frightening 1996 interview with a counterintelligence officer, but they didn’t have enough evidence to bring her to justice. Clues to the presence of a Cuban mole continued to bother security agents, but years passed before investigators focused on Montes. Popkin writes a fascinating account of the months before her arrest, during which her apartment, computer, and purse were searched without her knowledge. Following advice from her lawyers, she
confessed, cooperated, and received a long prison term, which ends in January 2023. She has never expressed regret.

An entertaining story of cunning espionage.

**TENACIOUS BEASTS**
*Wildlife Recoveries That Change How We Think About Animals*

Preston, Christopher J.
MIT Press (328 pp.)
$29.95 | Feb. 21, 2023
9780262047562

Inspiring stories of wildlife resilience and recovery.

Many animals headed for extinction are recovering nicely, writes science writer and teacher Preston, who delivers a satisfying account of a dozen successes without minimizing the difficulties involved. He opens with news that four foxes entered British homes over recent years and bit their inhabitants. These victims aside, most people celebrate the fact that British foxes (and American coyotes) are thriving in suburbia. The author also discusses bears, wolves, bobcats, bald eagles, and many species of whale. Formerly slaughtered as pests, food, or merchandise, they are flourishing—so much so that humans will have to adopt different approaches and ethical attitudes and exercise tolerance and a conservationist mindset. Traveling the world, Preston interacted with researchers, activists, and Indigenous people working to restore animals to their former ecosystems, most of which now contain far more humans than before. Some—whooping crane, California condor—were on the verge of extinction. Others remained plentiful but through hunting (beavers) or technology such as dams (salmon), have disappeared from huge areas to the detriment of the environment. North American rivers without beavers become dysfunctional, and their biodiversity plummets. Salmon support a complex food web in their upstream spawning grounds that vanishes when dams shut them out. As Preston shows in this page-turning account, many iconic animals are extinct where they roam freely because they breed with domestic animals. That includes American bison, which interbreed with cattle. Ongoing captive breeding programs aim to produce a genetically pure species, and because farmers and ranchers often hate predators and “pests,” returning animals require permanent and expensive conservation efforts featuring stricter laws, anti-poaching enforcement, insurance, subsidized fencing, and ongoing political and activist pressure. Some readers will note that Preston confines his enthusiasm to prosperous North America and Europe. Conservationists are working hard in Africa and Asia, but there is apparently little to cheer about.

Rare, well-delivered positive news about animals and the natural world.

**DINNER WITH THE PRESIDENT**
*Food, Politics, and a History of Breaking Bread at the White House*

Prud’homme, Alex
Knopf (512 pp.)
$35.00 | Feb. 7, 2023
9781524732219

A journalist shows us what our presidents liked to eat.

Prud’homme, author of several books about Julia Child, brings his interest in cuisine to a lively consideration of the culinary preferences of 25 presidents, from George Washington to Joe Biden. In the White House, he notes, food is both “sustenance and metaphor,” reflecting the tastes of the nation’s top leader as well as the economic, agricultural, political, and social conditions of the country. The author reveals each president’s attitude about food, which ranges from abstemious (Woodrow Wilson, who suffered from chronic indigestion) to disinterested (Nixon) to adventurous. Obama, both praised and criticized for being a “foodie,” had, in the author’s estimation, “the most globally informed palate.” Some men preferred food they grew up eating: Lincoln loved “raw honey and corn bread,” James Garfield and Eisenhower were partial to squirrel stew, and Jimmy Carter loved grits, with a few eggs dropped in. Eisenhower was an accomplished cook of hearty American cuisine, such as grilled steak, boiled potatoes, and apple pie. Truman, like Ike, was a meat-and-potatoes man, and Lyndon Johnson served guests traditional Texas barbecue. Whatever they ate in private (jelly beans, Mexican food, and sweet desserts for Reagan; cottage cheese for Nixon), they realized the significance of the menu at state dinners: occasions for the president to assert his power, showcase “the best of American ingredients,” and display the prowess of the White House cooks. The Kennedys, comfortable with an international palate, were, to their guests’ delight, masters of the art. Prud’homme appends the history with 10 recipes—all of which he tried and some of which he updated—including George Washington’s grilled striped bass; Martha Washington’s preserved cherries; Thomas Jefferson’s Tarragon Vinegar salad dressing; Wilson’s breakfast of two raw eggs dropped in grape juice; Franklin Roosevelt’s reverse martini, heavy on the vermouth; and Carter’s grits.

An entertaining, well-researched, politically tinged gastronomic history.
A British Sikh journalist and documentary probes the lasting effects of "one of the biggest white supremacist enterprises in the history of humanity."

Sanghera opens this U.S. edition (the book was published in the U.K. in 2021) with a note to American readers: “The contention that the War of Independence marked a total rejection of the British Empire is the historical equivalent of a teenager leaving home and declaring that his parents had nothing to do with shaping him.” Indeed, American readers will find much that’s familiar in the account that follows, in which the author probes Britain’s imperial history to find its present-day influences—which are everywhere: in Britain’s monuments and museums, education system, multiculturalism, education system, museums, education system, multiculturalism, racism, even its trash TV. Drawing from sources as varied as Jan Morris, Edward Said, and Twitter, Sanghera moves elegantly through one legacy to the next, frequently opposing imperial apologists against detractors. Observing that much British conversation about empire has been binary—“a veritable industrial oven of hot potatoes”—he pleads for a nuanced view of Britain’s “difficult history.” Acknowledging that his “quintessentially British” education “encouraged me to view my Indian heritage through patronizing Western eyes,” he nevertheless loves the nation, even though immigrants are endlessly instructed to integrate.

It is, as he points out passionately, his home. The author frequently strings lists of names or facts into single, long sentences, accruing evidence for his argument that, say, Britain has been multicultural for centuries in a way that is hard to deny—and when he uses the same rhetorical device in his unexpectedly optimistic conclusion, it’s equally effective. Readers whose familiarity with British history and culture is not acute may find themselves reaching for external context at times, but Sanghera’s exploration of the topic is consistently lively and just as often laugh-out-loud funny as it is deeply painful. Marlon James provides the foreword.

“The sun may have set on the British Empire, but this piercing examination of its legacies is thoroughly timely.”

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A cybersecurity expert examines how the powerful game whatever system is put before them, leaving it to others to cover the cost.

Schneier, a professor at Harvard Kennedy School and author of such books as *Data and Goliath* and *Click Here To Kill Everybody*, regularly challenges his students to write down the first 100 digits of pi, a nearly impossible task—but not if they cheat, concerning which he admonishes, “Don’t get caught.” Not getting caught is the aim of the hackers who exploit the vulnerabilities of systems of all kinds. Consider right-wing venture capitalist Peter Thiel, who located a hack in the tax code: “Because he was one of the founders of PayPal, he was able to use a $2,000 investment to buy 1.7 million shares of the company at $0.001 per share, turning it into $5 billion—all forever tax free.” It was perfectly legal—and even if it weren’t, the wealthy usually go unpunished. The author, a fluid writer and tech communicator, reveals how the tax code lends itself to hacking, as when tech companies like Apple and Google avoid paying billions of dollars by transferring profits out of the U.S. to corporate-friendly nations such as Ireland, then offshoring the “disappeared” dollars to Bermuda, the Caymans, and other havens. Every system contains trap doors that can be breached to advantage. For example, Schneier cites “the Pudding Guy,” who hacked an airline miles program by buying low-cost pudding cups in a promotion that, for $3,150, netted him 1.2 million miles and “lifetime Gold frequent flier status.” Since it was all within the letter if not the spirit of the offer, “the company paid up.” The companies often do, because they’re gaming systems themselves. “Any rule can be hacked,” notes the author, be it a religious dietary restriction or a legislative procedure. With technology, “we can hack more, faster, better,” requiring diligent monitoring and a demand that everyone play by rules that have been hardened against tampering.

An eye-opening, maddening book that offers hope for leveling a badly tilted playing field.
GLOW IN THE F*CKING DARK
Simple Practices To Heal Your Soul, From Someone Who Learned the Hard Way
Schuster, Tara
Dial Press (336 pp.)
$25.99 | Feb. 28, 2023
9780593243091

A former Comedy Central executive’s cheeky approach to maintaining mental health.

Schuster first came on the self-help scene in 2020 with Buy Yourself the F*cking Lilies, in which she wrote about successfully “re-parenting” herself after a traumatic childhood (her parents were neglectful and emotionally abusive). In this follow-up, the author chronicles the turbulent period after she lost her job at Comedy Central during the pandemic. This was not just any job, but Schuster’s “happily-ever-after job.” She notes, “if I’m real with you, my job was my entire life; I hung most of my self-worth on it.” In the run-up to the 2020 elections, she moved from Los Angeles to Flagstaff, Arizona, to become a “ballot healer,” correcting ballots that would otherwise be rejected for clerical errors. Despite the move, Schuster found herself struggling with panic attacks, her “most shadowy memories blasting to the surface,” and she knew that she had to “dig deeper” and “heal my bedrock wounds.” The author offers a tool kit of different self-care practices that she used to restore her mental health. These range from the fairly obvious (meditation, journaling) to the more unusual (visualizing a future self who looks like “Anjelica Huston sitting on a cloud, wearing flowing white linen and PILES of beaded necklaces”). Schuster organizes her ideas into easy-to-follow steps (each chapter ends with a bite-sized “Little Thing That Helps”) and also provides funny, self-deprecating anecdotes—e.g., the time she gave herself an allergic reaction eating a self-imposed raw-beet-and-kale diet during an online meditation retreat. The author doesn’t shy away from her darkest moments, writing about her troubled relationship with her father or her struggle with suicidal thoughts, which can “make you feel full-body sick, like your insides are going to leap out of your skin or, sometimes, like every muscle is paralyzed. It’s an excruciating kind of agony that you want to end at all costs.”

An approachable, exuberant combination of memoir and self-help.

REALIGNERS
Partisan Hacks, Political Visionaries, and the Struggle To Rule American Democracy
Shenk, Timothy
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (464 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-374-13800-4

A sharp assessment of American political history and the arc of its pendulum, which tends not toward justice but toward the wealthy.

“If there’s an abiding winner in the long history of American democracy,” writes history professor and Dissent co-editor Shenk, “it’s the people with money.” The uber-wealthy are usually more or less in the background, but they back members of what the author calls the “democratic elite” who span the distance between rulers and the ruled. It’s these people, Shenk suggests, who have been responsible for conjuring realignments whereby political gridlock or monopoly is broken, if perhaps only temporarily. James Madison’s early alliance with Alexander Hamilton fell apart over who would govern, with “the opulent” Hamiltonians believing that democracy was doomed because the people could not govern themselves. The situation with Hamilton ended badly, but the struggle for power between what would become Republicans and Federalists, and then Whigs and Democrats and New Grangers and all the rest, would endure—but not, Shenk notes, before those early Republicans strangled the Federalists through a realignment that essentially gave them a lock on the electorate and “liberated Americans from the burdens of partisanship.” The burden would soon enough be reimposed, only to see new realignments, era after era, notably with Franklin Roosevelt’s building a power base among the working and middle classes while forging racial unity, something that Donald Trump would do in reverse. Most realignments end up failures, notes Shenk, as does everything else: Politics has always been an exercise in crisis management. Still, at the close of this catalog of tangled maneuvering (as when Obama won the elite for the Democratic Party while losing much of the working class), Shenk foresees other possibilities were the two dominant parties to realign to vie for those forgotten workers and a multiracial coalition to emerge to “jolt the legislative process back to life.”

A novel, intriguing reading of how power politics works—and, with a little imagination, might work.
A national security scholar delivers a study of national division in which well-placed individuals override the dominant public opinion.

Contemplating whether to place Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II, Franklin Roosevelt asked J. Edgar Hoover to investigate their loyalty. Surprisingly, given his racism, Hoover “informed the President that there was no reason for concern.” Roosevelt proceeded anyway, giving in to a small number of Army officers and to Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, who, although an immigrant and minority member himself, supported internment. All this was in stark contrast to American public opinion, with one official government poll revealing that only 19% of those surveyed believed that internment was proper and desirable. In similar spirit, while the earliest period of American occupation of post-World War II Germany was marked by punitive and even vengeful policies, eventually the Truman administration took a more lenient attitude. Americans were also willing to give up a portion of their food and incomes to take care of the defeated Germans, and they organized a relief train to France with an astounding 481 railroad cars filled with food. As Shore notes, there may have been a “performative dimension” to this, the desire to show that Americans were kind and generous. However, Americans were also overwhelmingly on the right side of history during several key moments in which the governing class erred: the atomic bombing of Japan, for instance, whose aim of ending the war might have been accomplished just as easily by dropping one into the sea as a demonstration. Shore closes his detailed study with a nicely ironic moment in which a federal judge, one of those Japanese Americans interned as a child, rules against the Trump administration for its concentration camps for children caught crossing illegally into the U.S.

An instructive history that speaks to the better angels of the American nature.
A 12-year-old living with her grandmother in Kharkiv, Ukraine, records her frightening experiences during the Russian invasion.

Skalietska and her grandmother Iryna were living in a comfortable apartment in Kharkiv when the bombs started falling early in the morning on Feb. 24, 2022. Having just celebrated her 12th birthday, the author was a bright, engaged, artistic young person who expressed shock at that horrific awakening. “No one had told us what we should do if a war broke out,” she writes. “None of us were prepared for a war.” She and Iryna ran to the basement of their apartment building, all the while checking on cellphones to figure out how their family and friends were doing. Soon, they fled to Skalietska’s friend Inna’s comfortable apartment in Kharkiv when the bombs started falling.

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A firsthand account that shows courage but remains mostly surface-level.

Harrowing account of a latter-day revolt of people who were essentially enslaved—in 21st-century America.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the shipbuilding steelyards of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast needed welders and pipe fitters. India had many such workers, and a local so-called immigration lawyer teamed up with a couple of recruiters, one a former police officer, and, for a hefty fee, promised green cards to anyone who traveled to America. As immigrant rights activist Soni writes, one of those workers, who had spent years as a laborer in the United Arab Emirates, saw through the scheme, realizing that “any seasoned migrant worker knew that America let in only those with elite educations.” Still, with promised wages approaching $54,000 per year, he bit, landing in a work camp where the pay was not as promised, the food was execrable, and the treatment of workers was straight out of the antebellum South, complete with an updated version of a slave catcher. Said one overseer, “Our Indians have been dropping with sickness like flies.” Because the workers’ complaints were ignored, some decided to orchestrate the “great escape” of Soni’s title and, with the author’s help, organized a protest that took them on a march on Washington to demand justice. Writing with a sharp sense of irony, Soni recounts how the Department of Justice flubbed the initial investigations while Immigrations and Customs Enforcement actively colluded with the Mississippi shipbuilders against the workers. Soni and the workers hit plenty of dead ends as they tried to enlist the support of the liberal lions on Capitol Hill since “we were stuck in the minds of their congressional staffers as another ‘Interest group.’ ” In the end, even though the workers exposed “one of the largest human trafficking schemes in US history,” no charges were brought against the company or the scammers, a maddening conclusion to Soni’s agile account.

A searing exposé of corporate criminality and its governmental enablers.

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A searing exposé of corporate criminality and its governmental enablers.
hadn’t been 300 people massacred but 300 feet that they fell. In her quest to uncover the truth, Spagna provides a thorough and insightful depiction of what Chinese immigrant life might have looked like in the 1800s. This history is overlooked despite the fact that by the late 19th century, Chinese immigrants “were doing the lion’s share of work in the West,” including up to “three quarters of the farm labor in California.” The author creates a poignant and damning narrative of discrimination and exclusion integral to the formation of the modern West. Blatantly xenophobic legislation—e.g., the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—expelled many immigrants from the region, while many others faced violence. How a historian chooses to narrate a particular history is significant in countless ways. Spagna is consistent in her efforts to “tune our imaginations to empathy rather than exploitation,” and she succeeds in demonstrating that “when given the opportunity to listen, we should.”

A solid history of Western expansion, a powerful refrain against xenophobia, and a celebration of those who resist.

**CINEMA SPECULATION**

*Tarantino, Quentin*

Harper/HarperCollins (400 pp.)

$35.00 | Nov 1, 2022

978006312582

The acclaimed director displays his talents as a film critic.

Tarantino’s collection of essays about the important movies of his formative years is packed with everything needed for a powerful review: facts about the work, context about the creative decisions, and whether or not it was successful. The Oscar-winning director of classic films like *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* offers plenty of attitude with his thoughts on movies ranging from *Animal House* to *Bullitt* to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* to *The Big Chill*. Whether you agree with his assessments or not, he provides the original reporting and insights only a veteran director would notice, and his engaging style makes it impossible to leave an essay without learning something. The concepts he smashes together in two sentences about *Taxi Driver* would take a semester of film theory class to unpack. *Taxi Driver* isn’t a “paraphrased remake” of *The Searchers* like Bogdanovich’s *What’s Up, Doc* is a paraphrased remake of Hawks’ *Bringing Up Baby* or De Palma’s *Dressed To Kill* is a paraphrased remake of Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. But it’s about as close as you can get to a paraphrased remake without actually being one. Robert De Niro’s taxi driving protagonist Travis Bickle is John Wayne’s Ethan Edwards. Like any good critic, Tarantino reveals bits of himself as he discusses the films that are important to him, recalling where he was when he first saw them and what the crowd was like. Perhaps not surprisingly, the author was raised by movie-loving parents who took him along to watch whatever they were watching, even if it included violent or sexual imagery. At the age of 8, he had seen the very adult *MASH* three times. Suddenly the dark humor of *Kill Bill* makes much more sense. With this collection, Tarantino offers well-researched love letters to his favorite movies of one of Hollywood’s most ambitious eras.

**THE CLIMATE BOOK**

*Thunberg Greta*

Penguin Press (464 pp.)

$30.00 | Feb. 14, 2023

9780593492307

The world’s most recognizable climate activist gathers crucial wisdom from prominent scientists and thinkers. In this galvanizing follow-up to *No One Is Too Small To Make a Difference*, Thunberg presents an urgent collection of writing by leaders in the fields of science, engineering, history, philosophy, and activism. The brilliant and alarming narrative tells it like it is: Though politicians, fossil fuel stakeholders, and other relevant entities have known for decades that a warming climate will have devastating results for Earth, most have done little about it. “It is my genuine belief,” writes Thunberg, “that the only way we will be able to avoid the worst consequences of this emerging existential crisis is if we create a critical mass of people who demand the changes required.” Throughout the book, the contributors—among other luminaries, Elizabeth Kolbert, Michael Oppenheimer, Naomi Oreskes, Mike Berners-Lee, Robin Wall Krimmer, and Margaret Atwood—clearly explain the tipping points that have already occurred, permanently altering the oceans, forests, fauna, and atmosphere and the fact that a concerted, global effort is required to effect positive change. The contributors also lay bare the fact that irresponsible, even pernicious, action by those who pushed for fossil fuel use but “greenwashed” information about the effects of greenhouse gas emissions has resulted in prolonged inertia, allowing the problem to get much worse. Yet most of the contributors remain optimistic that, with enough public outrage and demands for change, a solution is possible—only if we act immediately. In the last part of this book, Thunberg provides a guide to what needs to be done and how every single person on the planet can play a role. “We have the unfathomably great opportunity to be alive at the most decisive time in the history of humanity….Together, we can do the seemingly impossible. But make no mistake—no one else is going to do it for us.” The book includes numerous illustrative graphs and charts.

Vital reading for anyone who cares about the planet.
RECKONING
V (formerly Eve Ensler)
Bloomsbury (272 pp.)
$28.00 | Jan. 31, 2023
978-1-63557904-8

A celebrated feminist playwright grapples with the personal traumas that inspired her to become an activist.

In her latest book, V—formerly Eve Ensler (b. 1953)—gathers journal entries, poems, essays, and articles penned over the last 45 years to understand her journey from the young woman she was to the person she became. The author begins this eclectic collection with a childhood memory of her father slapping her in the face. The moment was transformative: From then on, she “had to pretend to be someone else in order to survive,” a situation that made her feel like a “prisoner.” The “walls” of trauma that surrounded her came to symbolize the challenges she struggled to overcome as an adult through addictions to alcohol, drugs, and sex. Working as a volunteer in New York City women’s shelters and jails helped V rechannel self-destructive impulses toward more positive ends. Words—which she calls her “friends” and the source of her power—became another portal to liberation. Through writing, she was able to explore the wounds and complex emotions that emerged in the years after her father’s sexual abuse while documenting the social, political, and economic suffering of women in Europe, Africa, and Asia. As she confronted the destruction wrought by toxic masculinity on so many levels, V began to see how it was tied to the brutal, hyperexploitative system of global capitalism and understand that all forms of injustice—including racism—were connected to female oppression. “There is no hierarchy of suffering,” writes the author, “only the joining into a single river of outrage, compassion and revolt.” Deeply felt, thoughtful, and lyrical, the narrative offers a reflection on the connectedness of the personal and political and the need for all humanity to reckon fully with its past in pursuit of a more just world.

An elegant and timely book.

THE GOOD LIFE
Lessons From the World’s Longest Scientific Study of Happiness
Waldinger, Robert & Marc Schulz
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-98216669-4

A comprehensive examination of what makes a “good life,” based on a study that “has followed the lives of two generations of individuals from the same families for more than eighty years.”

Waldinger and Schulz, the current director and associate director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which began in 1938, use the data from this massive research project to make a convincing argument about what constitutes a good life. Early in the book, they give their conclusion: “Good relationships keep us healthier and happier. Period.” The authors present consistently fascinating insights about the lives of many of the study’s participants, as well as those in related studies, showing what aspects of life are most beneficial, regardless of age, gender, class, wealth, or status. Encompassing the experiences of more than 1,300 descendants from the original 724 participants, the project is “the longest in-depth longitudinal study of human life ever done”—and it is ongoing. The resulting book, write Waldinger and Schulz, “is deeply informed, appropriately, by the long and fruitful friendship of its authors.” Most readers fully understand the chaos of modern-day life, “a haze of competing social, political, and cultural priorities, some of which have very little to do with improving people’s lives.” The Harvard Study, on the other hand, has always remained devoted to illuminating the “lived experiences” of the participants, showing the value of a wide variety of relationships, whether focused on family, friends, romantic partners, or work colleagues. Throughout, the authors maintain a conversational tone and include many of the questions and exercises used in the study to allow readers to examine their own relationships and to develop them further. The book is perfect for readers of Arthur Brooks, Daniel Pink, Angela Duckworth, and other writers who delve into how to fashion prosperous, fulfilling lives.

An engrossing look at why relationships matter, featuring an unprecedented abundance of data to back it up.

THE CURSE OF THE MARQUIS DE SADE
A Notorious Scoundrel, a Mythical Manuscript, and the Biggest Scandal in Literary History
Warner, Joel
Crown (304 pp.)
$28.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
9780593135686

The Marquis de Sade is a name that would light up any literary history; this one focuses on the life of his most famous manuscript.

In 1785, Donatien Alphonse François (1740-1814), aka the Marquis de Sade, wrote 120 Days of Sodom, composing the manuscript in tiny handwriting on a scroll of 157,000 words while incarcerated atop the Liberty Tower at the Bastille. In it, “four wealthy degenerates” conduct a four-month orgy with 32 subordinates, and their perversions only escalate in their depravity and horror. De Sade’s name would become synonymous with sexual pleasure through pain, and this story of his growing reputation through the years explains why. Though journalist Warner looks at the development of “bibliophilia’s most shadowy realm: the world of erotic books,” his primary focus is on the journey of the 120 Days manuscript through its many owners, court battles, a brazen theft, its place at the center of “the largest
“A fiercely argued case that the police can’t be trusted to police themselves—and that such policing is essential.”

THE RIDERS COME OUT AT NIGHT

A fiercely argued case that the police can’t be trusted to police themselves—and that such policing is essential.

I SAW DEATH COMING
A History of Terror and Survival in the War Against Reconstruction
Williams, Kidada E.
Bloomsbury (416 pp.)
$30.00 | Jan. 17, 2023
9781635576634

A broad-ranging study of anti-Black violence in the Reconstruction era.

Reconstruction was not so much a failure as an effort that was sabotaged from the outset. The administration of Andrew Johnson was committed to White supremacy, and the Confederates, though militarily defeated, never really surrendered. Immediately after the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan was founded, and “night riders” began visiting violence on Black Americans who dared press for civil and economic rights. As historian Williams shows, these visits were carefully coordinated, indicating some sort of central organization as opposed to the commonly held belief that they were impromptu and rare attacks. The attacks “frequently targeted prosperous Black people,” seizing income-producing tools and even whole crops. In some instances, as Williams chronicles, Black people organized resistance, and the night riders tended accordingly to steer clear of situations where they were likely to face gunfire. “Yet even within a limited space to operate, right-wingers committed extensive atrocities,” she adds. Because they demanded total domination over Southern society, another understandable Black response was to move, as happened in the Deep South in 1879, “a hurried, mass movement of significant numbers in months” on the part of people called Exodusters, with Kansas gaining 30,000 Black migrants almost overnight. A combination of anti-Black violence, economic disenfranchisement, and voter suppression—all of which lend dimension of the investment fraud, a “decade-long, continent-eral valuable maps and a cast of characters at the beginning of the book, which help orient readers. Ultimately, the narrative’s greatest scandal is not the licentious behavior of de Sade, whom the surrealists dubbed the “freest spirit who ever lived,” nor the literary stature of his transgressive works but rather the sheer dimension of the investment fraud, a “decade-long, continent-spanning, billion-euro con,” in which the scroll played a central role. As Warner demonstrates, de Sade’s depravity pales in comparison to the gyrations of financial tycoons who sought to capitalize on his most monumental work.

An engrossing history of the travels of a notorious manuscript across nations and centuries.

Black Southerners equal citizens. Too many historians, Williams observes, have brushed such matters aside, blaming the failure of Reconstruction on its Northern champions, but Black Southerners did not forget, and many of the testimonials and eyewitness accounts that she draws on come from field recordings from the 1930s—even though, as she concludes, “Black counter-histories of atrocity and betrayal were no match for the machineries of the Lost Cause.” Pair this book with Margaret A. Burnham’s By Hands Now Known.

A deeply researched work that exposes the shameful legacy of the neo-Confederacy, one that lingers to this day.

THE RIDERS COME OUT AT NIGHT
Brutality, Corruption, and Cover-Up in Oakland
Winston, Ali & Darwin Bond Graham
Atria (480 pp.)
$30.00 | Jan. 10, 2023
9781982168599

A searching history of the central problems of policing in America, focused on one once-notorious department.

It didn’t take the killing of George Floyd to convince minority communities that in most places in America, the police are the enemy. This was especially true of Oakland, California, with a large Black and Latine population brutalized by a White-led police force. Down the chain of command, write Polk Award-winning journalists Winston and Bond Graham in this deeply reported book, were the “Riders,” who practiced vigilante justice in the streets, beating and torturing suspected drug dealers and other lawbreakers. As the narrative unfolds, one brave young rookie risks his career and life to expose these criminals with badges. The Oakland police were hardly alone. “If they are allowed to do so—or encouraged, as they so often are—police will frequently subject a society’s poor and racially oppressed to violence, surveillance, and harassment, all in the name of maintaining social order,” write the authors. Thankfully, the whistle-blowing led to hard-won reforms. For one thing, the criminal cops were prosecuted in 2002. One disappeared, probably deep inside Mexico, and has never been found, while the others were fired. (One became a military contractor in Iraq, and another joined a distant police force.) Meanwhile, the Oakland Police Department became something of a ward of the state, overseen by the federal court. While still not quite a model, OPD has changed markedly. Its records are transparent, its officers no longer terrorize the community, the N-word is no longer uttered by contemptuous cops, and, even under criticism, OPD “never attempted to punish the city’s residents with a de-policing backlash.” The wholly timely—if surely controversial—lesson that the authors draw, in a time of reform, is that all police departments require at least some outside, civilian monitoring.

A fiercely argued case that the police can’t be trusted to police themselves—and that such policing is essential.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

AN AMERICAN STORY by Kwame Alexander; illus. by Dare Coulter ........................................... 197
THE TREE AND THE RIVER by Aaron Becker .......................................................... 201
WE ARE HERE by Tami Charles; illus. by Bryan Collier .................................................. 207
EMPEROR OF THE ICE by Nicola Davies; illus. by Catherine Rayner ........................................ 208
BENEATH by Cori Doerrfeld .......................................................... 210
THE GRACE OF WILD THINGS by Heather Fawcett .......................................................... 212
WE ARE HUMAN ANIMALS by Rosie Haine .......................................................... 214
WOVEN OF THE WORLD by Katey Horwes; illus. by Dinara Mirtalipova ........................................ 215
DIM SUM, HERE WE COME! by Maple Lam .......................................................... 219
THE FIRE OF STARS by Kirsten W. Larson; illus. by Katherine Roy ........................................ 220
MR. LINCOLN SITS FOR HIS PORTRAIT by Leonard S. Marcus .................................................. 222
WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT VAGINAS by Allison K. Rodgers; illus. by Annika Le Large .................. 231
SOMETHING WILD by Molly Ruttan .......................................................... 232
THE MONKEY TRIAL by Anita Sanchez .......................................................... 233
BRAVO, LITTLE BIRD! by Annie Silvestro; illus. by Ramona Kaulitzki .................................................. 234
SISTERS OF THE LOST MARSH by Lucy Strange .......................................................... 235
JUMP IN! by Shadra Strickland .......................................................... 236
THE TALENT THIEF by Mike Thayer .......................................................... 237
BEA WOLF by Zach WeinerSmith; illus. by Boulet .................................................. 239

STACEY’S REMARKABLE BOOKS

Abrams, Stacey
Illus. by Kit Thomas
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$19.99 | Dec. 13, 2022
978-0-06-327185-2

Sharing books brings children from multiple backgrounds together in this companion to Stacey’s Extraordinary Words (2021).

Again lightly burnishing actual childhood memories, voting rights activist and former gubernatorial candidate Abrams recalls reaching out as a young book lover to Julie, a new Vietnamese classmate shy about reading in English. Choosing books to read and discuss together on weekly excursions to the school’s library, the two are soon joined by enough other children from Gambia, South Korea, and elsewhere that their beaming librarian, Mr. McCormick, who is dark-skinned, sets up an after-school club. Later, Julie adds some give and take to their friendship by helping Stacey overcome her own reluctance to join the other children on the playground. Though views of the library seen through a faint golden haze flecked with stars go a little over the top (school librarians may disagree), Thomas fills the space with animated, bright-eyed young faces clustering intimately together over books and rendered in various shades beneath a range of hairstyles and head coverings. The author underscores the diversity of the cast by slipping scattered comments in Spanish, Wolof, and other languages into the dialogue and, after extolling throughout the power of books and stories to make new friends as well as open imaginations to new experiences and identities, brings all of her themes together in an afterward capped by an excellent list of recommended picture books. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A worthy message delivered with a generous dose of inclusivity. (Picture-book memoir. 6-9)

ALL’S RIGHT WITH THE WORLD

Adams, Jennifer
Illus. by Christopher Silas Neal
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | March 7, 2023
978-0-06-296248-5

A slice-of-life tale, from dawn to dusk. Drawing inspiration from Robert Browning’s “Pippa’s Song” (the poem is included toward
But you can't sell people (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Illustrations are done in the signature style of Silas Neal, bringing this bustling, beautiful neighborhood to life and demonstrate that even in an urban setting, there are ways to appreciate nature—the kids gaze at a snail on one spread; another page depicts a child’s drawing of flowers on a fridge. The work also quietly reminds readers of the joys of everyday routines. Cats and birds are a recurring thread throughout—perched or soaring above the unnamed protagonists or lounging in the background. Those seeking additional tributes to city life should pair this one with Matt de la Peña’s Milo Imagines the World (2022), illustrated by Christian Robinson, and Jacqueline Woodson’s The World Belonged to Us (2022), illustrated by Leo Espinosa. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A charmer that captures the exuberance of finding happiness in the little things. (Picture book: 4-8)

THE RAINBOW SNAIL
Abisson, Karin
Boxer Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-1-914912-28-3

How do colors make you feel?
A snail emerges from his flowerpot home amid a rainstorm. When the sun appears and the rain clears up, the snail spots a rainbow, boldly illustrated across the page. As the snail looks at it, he considers all the different hues: “What would it feel like to be VIO-LET like a spring flower... or INDIGO like juicy blueberries... or BLUE like the raindrops?” With each new consideration, the outside edge of the snail’s shell, initially all black, turns to that color, pushing the previous hues inward. By the end, the snail’s shell is a matching rainbow, and he proudly declares, “Being all the colors of the rainbow is best! RED, ORANGE, YELLOW, GREEN, BLUE, INDIGO, and VIOLET! HOORAY!” The story is spare, but with the right storyteller, it will open countless conversations about colors, feelings, and descriptive words. The artwork supports the text with colorful, striking shapes on white backgrounds. For all the simplicity of the illustrations, the snail is surprisingly emotive, using googly-like eyes on the ends of its stalks to full effect. This tale will be equally at home shared during a large storytime or intimate lap read, and with both, it will be a welcome teaching tool. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Simple and delightful—just like a rainbow. (Concept picture book: 2-4)

AN AMERICAN STORY
Alexander, Kwame
Illus. by Dare Coulter
Little, Brown (56 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 3, 2023
978-0-316-47312-5

“How do you tell a story / that starts in Africa / and ends in horror?”

Alexander uses multiple voices to weave this poem about a teacher who takes on the difficult but necessary task of starting a classroom conversation about slavery. Between the theft of people from the African continent and the sale of people in America, from the ships that brought them and the ocean that swallowed some of them to their uncompensated work and the breakup of families, Alexander introduces objections from the implied listeners (“But you can’t sell people,” “That’s not fair”), despair from the narrating adult, encouragement from the youth, and ultimately an answer to the repeated question about how to tell this story. Rising star Coulter’s mixed-media art elevates the lyrical text with clarity and deep emotion: Using sculpted forms and paintings for the historical figures gives them a unique texture and lifelike fullness, while the charcoal drawings on yellow paper used for the present-day student-teacher interactions invite readers to step inside. Where
While readers may enjoy the ultra-fuzzy character, it’s unlikely the plot is thin, jumping from moment to moment without a strong introduction or resolution, and although Max is a charmingly designed character, his cuteness can’t make up for the book’s lack of substance. The story/poem culminates in the notion that we are ultimately in control of our emotions: “When you have big feelers, / it is like a dance or an art. / Max can follow his feelings or / be the lead. / It’s up to Max to decide what he needs.” The plot is thin, jumping from moment to moment without introduction or resolution, and although Max is a charmingly designed character, his cuteness can’t make up for the book’s lack of substance. The story/poem culminates in the notion that we are ultimately in control of our emotions: “When you have big feelers, / it is like a dance or an art. / Max can follow his feelings or / be the lead. / It’s up to Max to decide what he needs.”

A superficial exploration of children’s emotional landscapes. (Picture book. 4-6)

**MAX’S FUZZY FEELERS**

_Angus, Mary_

New Haven Publishing (30 pp.)

$11.99 paper | Nov. 28, 2022

978-1-049515-42-8

Max has all the feelings, and it shows.

Max is a white furry moth with translucent white wings, the face of a teddy bear, and fuzzy antennae that resemble rabbit ears—older readers might mistake him for a character from the 1980s line of Care Bear Cousins. His antennae, or feelers, are extremely expressive, standing tall when he’s helped a friend, growing when he’s in trouble, or turning blue when he’s struggling with learning new things. Readers follow Max’s emotional journey; with each double-page spread dedicated to a different experience. The story/poem culminates in the notion that we are ultimately in control of our emotions: “When you have big feelers, / it is like a dance or an art. / Max can follow his feelings or / be the lead. / It’s up to Max to decide what he needs.” The plot is thin, jumping from moment to moment without introduction or resolution, and although Max is a charmingly designed character, his cuteness can’t make up for the book’s lack of substance. The story/poem culminates in the notion that we are ultimately in control of our emotions: “When you have big feelers, / it is like a dance or an art. / Max can follow his feelings or / be the lead. / It’s up to Max to decide what he needs.”

A superficial exploration of children’s emotional landscapes. (Picture book. 4-6)

**BUNNIES IN A BOAT**

_Ardagh, Philip_

Candlewick (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Jan. 31, 2023

978-1-5362-2833-5

Beware of high-speed bunnies!

Readers should prepare for a fast-moving adventure when a fluffle of rabbits embarks on a high-seas adventure. Bunnies of varying colors and sizes board a motorboat, a shark’s mouth emblazoned on the front, for a day of fun in the sun. But while these bunnies might be cute, they aren’t great drivers, proving to be menaces to other creatures hoping for a relaxing day at the beach: “The penguins dive and paddle. / The turtles surf and swim. / when WHOOSH goes a speedboat / and knocks poor Piggy in! / SQUEAL! / Bunnies in a boat! / Bunnies in a boat! / Dashing and a-splashing! / Let’s hope they stay afloat!” It’s a raucously fun read and one that storytellers will make the most of, as the action only gets more dramatic from here on. The illustrations capture the chaos of the runaway speedboat but are so busy that large groups may miss some of the details. Readers who enjoy poring over every page, however, will love the madcap adventure and the reactions of both the bunnies and their seaside victims. A visual subplot follows a pair of thieving squirrels who set out to steal a large pearl and wind up entangled with the bunny boaters. The ending hints at the possibility of a sequel, which should delight many a reader. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Harebrained fun that will leave you giggling. (Picture book. 3-6)

**ICE CREAM MAN**

_Armand, Glenda & Kim Freeman_

Illus. by Keith Mallett

Crown (40 pp.)


978-0-593-56323-6 PLB

In the years prior to the Civil War, a Black man found a way to make ice cream more accessible to the masses.

Augustus “Gus” Jackson was born in 1808 to a poor but free African American family in Philadelphia. He enjoyed preparing meals and at age 12 found a job helping the cooking staff in the White House, working his way up to becoming one of them by the time he was 17. He learned to make ice cream and, several years later, took his skills back to Philadelphia, where he opened his own shop, which became popular with customers. For the first time, people other than the wealthy could enjoy ice cream. While others also opened ice cream parlors, Gus looked for a way to make his ice cream faster and to ensure it would last longer so he could sell it to other stores. Once he achieved his goals, Gus was even able to ship his popular treat without it melting. Gus’ family joined him in his business as it grew. This lively narrative shines a light on a little-known story of how an African American inventor impacted American food culture. The emphasis here is on his abilities and perseverance to make his vision a reality. Mallett’s colorful digital paintings add to the generally upbeat tone of the storytelling. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A charming—and tasty—slice of history. (Ice cream recipe, afterword, sources) (Picture-book biography. 4-8)
**FAE AND THE MOON**

*Aureliani, Franco*

*Illus. by Catherine Satrun & Sarah Satrun*

Yellow Jacket (144 pp.)

$24.99 | Feb. 7, 2023

978-1-4998-1328-9

A child in turmoil takes matters into her own hands.

Light-skinned, red-haired Fae lives in a secluded cabin, lonely and aching for her missing mother. With only two silent mice, a talking bunny named Percival, and her nightmares for company, Fae struggles with anger and sadness while holding out hope that her mother will return. Her mysterious mother brought her to this place, but before she disappeared, told her stories from their old home, tales of the moon, dragons, and the blue rose. Those stories keep Fae feeling connected to her mother, so when Percival suggests that she find a way to honor her mother’s memory by the light of the full moon, Fae plucks the moon from the sky. This sets off a chain of events Fae could not have predicted, with wild beasts, long held at bay by the protective glow of the moon, once again going bump in the night, forcing her to finally understand her own mystical abilities and purpose. Fae’s expressive, innocent face contrasts perfectly with the more sinister characters throughout. Aureliani spares no time getting into the plot, building suspense and layering in the emotional complexity of Fae’s abandonment. However, this pace sometimes feels breakneck, set at Mach 10 to keep a low page and word count to suit a younger audience when the complexity of the tale could have easily been scaled up for an older age group.

*Readers aren’t likely to be moonstruck by this one.* *(Fantasy graphic novel. 6-8)*

**NO MATTER THE DISTANCE**

*Baldwin, Cindy*

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins

(368 pp.)

$16.99 | Feb. 21, 2023

978-0-06-300644-7

A girl with cystic fibrosis forms a special bond with a dolphin.

Eleven-year-old Penny Rooney is thrilled when her teacher announces a poetry slam for sixth graders. However, the theme proves daunting: What does she know about herself? She knows she’s more than her CF, with its nebulizer treatments, digestive enzymes, and periodic hospitalizations. But sometimes it feels like she knows more about members of her close-knit family than herself and that she and best friend Cricket are practically the same person. When Cricket reveals she’s moving from North Carolina to Virginia, Penny can’t imagine who she’ll be without her. Her sadness eases when an ill dolphin unexpectedly swims into her backyard creek. To Penny’s amazement, she and the dolphin, whom she names Rose, can communicate telepathically. But Rose will soon have to rejoin her pod. How can Penny say goodbye to two best friends? In introspective free verse, Penny poignantly navigates an array of tough emotions, including the loneliness of being unable to meet peers with CF in person due to infection risks, the guilt of needing her family’s attention, and—notably—the pressure to repress her fear and anger because, as her doctors remind her, things could be worse. Readers navigating chronic illness will particularly appreciate Penny’s cathartic, empowering self-discovery. An author’s note explains that Baldwin herself has CF. The Rooneys read White by default.

*A thought-provoking take on illness, identity, and long-distance friendship.* *(Verse novel. 8-12)*
An earnest call to appreciate and conserve our planet’s precious fluid.

Along with describing water’s origins in Earth’s early history, tracing the ever flowing water cycle, and closing with suggestions for shrinking our “water footprint” by wasting less around the house, Barr surveys ways we both use and misuse fresh water—perceptively noting, for example, that dams turn and support her imagination. The narrative is carried entirely by the dialogue and visual depictions of Ada’s experiences, and it packs in a great deal of information at an engaging pace. Bayarri’s clear, rounded illustration style and orderly frames have a friendly, welcoming feel, conveying a sense of Lovelace’s cultural and temporal context—women and men in period dress, travel by carriage, pastoral surroundings. Ada is privileged to be taken seriously and is included in gatherings with notable minds like Mary Somerville, Charles Lyell, and Lovelace’s mentor and eventual colleague Charles Babbage. Lovelace could see the way that math could help design hundreds of things: “The great phenomena of the natural world are expressed through mathematics.” Bayarri convincingly demonstrates that Lovelace’s lively creativity allowed her remarkable gift for numbers to truly flourish. The only disappointment is the paucity of the “further resources” list. Still, this is a fine introduction to Lovelace and her work.

Inspiring and informative. (timeline, glossary, index) (Graphic biography. 9-13)

MARY ANNING AND THE GREAT FOSSIL DISCOVERIES
Bayarri, Jordi
Graphic Universe (40 pp.)
$10.99 paper | $30.99 PLB | Jan. 1, 2023
978-1-72847-827-2
978-1-72844-292-1 PLB
Series: Graphic Science Biographies

A determined young woman helped launch an age of discovery of dinosaurs.

Mary Anning’s (1799-1847) childhood was spent hunting fossils hidden in the cliffs at Lyme Regis, England, with her brother and father, cementing the direction her inquiring mind would take. Mary was persistent and successful at spotting the signs of prehistoric life preserved in rock and learned to understand what sort of creature belonged to the bones. The sale of the ichthyosaurus skeleton she discovered in 1811 to a London museum was just the beginning of Anning’s contributions to paleontological discovery. She supported herself through the sale of her finds as well as, intriguingly, Elizabeth Philpot’s drawings of prehistoric squid made with its own ink (preserved in a lady finger belemnite found by Mary). Bayarri’s bulbous-nosed cartoon figures and clear, detailed frames deliver a cheery, episodic account of Anning’s experiences and offer a sense of the coastal cliffs where she made her finds. The gatherings of men at museums and in lecture halls contrast with images of the young woman digging at the rock face of cliffs. Anning was known as a gifted and reliable fossil finder, here credited for inspiring Roderick Murchison, whose achievements as a geologist are hinted at in the text. While her finds were essential to discovery and theory—Mary was frustrated by the lack of recognition for her work—something Bayarri’s biography will correct. People throughout present White.

An appealing introduction to an important dinosaur hunter. (timeline, glossary, further resources, index) (Graphic nonfiction. 8-12)
“Look upon this work, ye mighty picture-book creators, and despair. A stunning accomplishment.”

THE TREE AND THE RIVER
Becker, Aaron
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$18.99 | March 14, 2023
978-1-5362-2329-3

A wordless memento mori considers our fleeting human existence in the span of a single tree's life. Having established himself as a picture-book creator unafraid of taking the long view, Becker offers an oddly comforting look at how wars, floods, and humanity itself can pass in just a blink of an eye. For most of the book, a tree standing on a single spit of land, hugged by a river, is the focus of the story. One can gauge how much time has passed not by the tree, which ages naturally over the years, but by the civilization that grows up around it, from early settlers who build along the banks to an industrial revolution, modernity, and eventual ecological collapse. Meticulous care is taken with every detail in Becker’s pencil, gouache, and digital paint illustrations, leading young readers to try to piece the story of these peoples, ancient, modern, and futuristic, over time. Yet one is ultimately left with a sense of hope. Our world may descend into chaos on occasion, but new life is always on the horizon. With its tiny people (indeed, mostly too tiny to distinguish skin color or features) and distant views of civilization, the book brings to mind some of the best of Mitsumasa Anno’s titles, if Anno had been occasionally influenced by Blade Runner. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Look upon this work, ye mighty picture-book creators, and despair. A stunning accomplishment. (Picture book. 4-9)
A Kid’s Guide to Backyard Bugs
Berkowitz, Eliza
Illus. by Nicole LaRue
Gibbs Smith (96 pp.)
$12.99 paper | March 7, 2023
978-1-4236-6265-5

An introduction to common creepy-crawlies of diverse types that’s not for the nervous.
Berkowitz may start off by urging fans of all things small and wriggly to make an (outdoor) bug “hotel” from natural materials to facilitate observation—but as she kicks off her tally with scorpions and goes on to include centipedes, eastern yellow jackets, hornets, bumblebees, blue-winged wasps, and wheelbugs (also known as assassin bugs) among her 40 entries, not to mention ticks, stink bugs, wolf spiders, and the hickory horned devil, a caterpillar described as “the size of a large hot dog,” even intrepid younger naturalists may think twice about venturing into their backyards. Though the author covers species that are widespread in the United States, she offers “Fun Facts” involving other regions, such as that the rock scorpion of South Africa can grow to 8½ inches long or that the African giant earthworm can reach 6 feet in length...and notes that in parts of the world, people eat crick-ets, stink bugs, and grasshoppers. In close-up illustrations that resemble cut-paper collage, LaRue emphasizes distinctive col-oring and physical features to make identifying the creatures easy even from a distance. Thank goodness.

Appealing to readers who prefer to view nature’s wonders vicariously. (blank “bug log,” conservation notes, glossary) (Nonfiction. 6-10)

Thank You, Teacher!
Berry, Cate
Illus. by Sara Varon
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | March 7, 2023
978-0-06-249157-2

As the school year draws to an end, students recount their classroom adventures and sing the praises of a dedicated teacher.
A diverse group of children stand before their teary-eyed, brown-skinned teacher and prepare to “sing [their] thank-you song.” As they reminisce, we see the teacher cheering a student on through stage fright at a school play, chasing the class’s escaped pet, comforting a scared child when a spider shows up, encouraging the students to share, and more. Each scene is accompanied by a brief, upbeat rhyme that says it all (“Thanks for all the science stuff. / We love it when the class erupts!”). Cheerful, chunky-outlined illustrations reminiscent of Varon’s graphic-novel art make this picture book solidly appealing for early elementary school students. Each moment is endearing, with gobs of visual interest and opportunities for conversation starters about feelings and school memories. The educator’s efforts shine through, emphasizing the importance of showing action through care—adult readers will come away stirred and eager to make an impact on the children in their lives. However, this volume is best shared out of the classroom; if a teacher were to share it with their students, it could be perceived as awkward or gratuitous. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A loving tribute to the efforts of hardworking educators. (Picture book. 4-7)

Pencilmation
The Graphite Novel
Bollinger, Ross
Penguin (192 pp.)
$13.99 | Dec. 27, 2022
978-0-593-38374-2
Series: Pencilmation

A comedic variety show bursting with gags and unpredictable left turns, based on a popular YouTube series.
Readers need not be familiar with Pencilmation before diving into this comic, but fans will find more of the accessible, silly, and sometimes gross humor here. The Everyman protagonist of many of the comic’s vignettes, Pencilmate, faces a wide range of predicaments. Sometimes he exaggerates a benign situation, such as sneezing aggressively in search of a “bless you!” Small frustrations, like untangling an earbud cord or pumping a round number’s worth of gas at the pump, each get their own quick episode of fraught emotions and amplified facial expressions. A narrator often provides con-text and sometimes a pun or fourth-wall break. With skin the white of the page, the stick-figure people who populate these stories are deceptively simple at first, right down to the ever-present ruled-paper backgrounds that might suggest a dispos-able whimsy. However, where else will readers find such delight-ful ideas as professional thumb wrestling, cutout clothing for pencils, or an advertisement for the Fart Academy? The ideas and punchlines are so frequent and manic that at least a few will earn a laugh from readers.
The most expressive stick-figure people you will find without using an internet connection. (Graphic fiction. 8-12)
SEAN MOSES IS

MARTIN LUTHER, THE KING Jr.
Moses D. Powe
Illustrated by Angelina Valieva


“Fatherless Fathers Publishing: Where fathers are a part of the story.”

“A boy gets to portray a hero in Powe’s picture-book introduction to several Black figures from U.S. history.”

“Powe presents a hopeful narrative in this cleverly structured book, which also includes portraits of such men as Frederick Douglass and President Barack Obama. Each biography includes an inspirational quote from the person described and discusses his greatest achievements.”

“A well-illustrated tale that’s also a great pick to expand libraries’ Black history sections.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

For All Inquiries, Please Email
mail@mosespowe.com • mosespowe.com
A chirpy overview of bird behaviors, from morning until night.

A dawn chorus gets this hour-by-hour review underway, and Bond—after introducing himself as principal curator of birds at London’s Natural History Museum—goes on to describe broadly and briefly how select birds wake up, make nests or bowers, lay and tend eggs, fly, Chow down, and end the day with a final twilight snack before night leaves only the “silent assassin” barn owl on the hunt for mice. Whether depicting a pair of flame bowerbirds on a “fancy first date,” a double chorus line of Andean flamingos, or swirls of European starlings in a spiraling “murmuration,” Rancourt’s artwork, which resembles cut-paper collages, focuses attention more on brightly contrasting hues than finely detailed individual feathers or other features. The avian cast isn’t very large, but common, rare, and exotic tropical rainforest species are all at least represented, and the habitats and behaviors are generalized enough to be applicable to most birds in most settings. Aside from a Roman skyline in one scene, there are no human figures or works in view. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A bright, brisk addition to the murmuration of bird books.

(glossary, index) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

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the expressive little worm is downright adorable, with emotions that will resonate with anyone who has felt unimportant. The stunning illustrations are done in quilled paper—a centuries-old technique that involves assembling strips of colored paper into shapes—which adds sparkle and originality. A tutorial of how to make a quilled butterfly and a page on earthworm facts round out the book. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Unusual illustrations enhance an engaging, informative narrative. (Informational picture book. 4-7)

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**BIRDS**

What Do Flamingos, Owls, and Penguins Get Up to All Day?

Bond, Alex

Illus. by Henry Rancourt

Neon Squid/Macmillan (48 pp.)

$16.99 | March 7, 2023

9781684492855

Series: A Day in the Life

**CARAG’S TRANSFORMATION**

Brandis, Katja

Illus. by Claudia Carls

Trans. by Rachel Ward

Arctis Books (235 pp.)

$16.00 | Feb. 14, 2023

978-1-64690-020-6

Series: The Woodwalkers
THE DAILY SNIFF

Cabrera, Jane

Holiday House (32 pp.)

$18.99 | March 7, 2023

978-0-8234-5231-6

Series: Jane Cabrera’s Story Time

Daily doggy news in just one sniff!

“Ted was a dog who liked to keep up with all the latest news.” And like all dogs, he does that through The Daily Sniff—the process of sniffing around town to learn what one’s fellow canines are up to. One day, though, Ted is forced to stay in and wear a cone. His dark-skinned human family tries various ways to cheer him up, but he isn’t happy until it is gone. But when he tries for The Daily Sniff, everything smells bad. His attempts to ferret out the noxious odor fall short, and Ted returns home, but even that doesn’t smell right...plus, Dad’s hat is moving around in the garage. Investigation turns up a skunk who has lost its five little brothers and sisters. Ted helps find them...and once they have safely been reunited and returned to the forest, The Daily Sniff is back! Cabrera adds another short, enjoyable tale to her Story Time line. This one has the added fun of a double-page spread of the town with five tiny skunks hidden about. Toddlers can help Ted find them. All of this, of course, is illustrated in Cabrera’s easily recognizable, jolly, dark-lined, and colorful style.

(This book was reviewed digitally.)

A simple but delightful story for a lap or bedtime read.

(Picture book. 2-5)
TOO MANY RABBITS
Cali, Davide
Illus. by Emanuele Benetti
Trans. by Angus Yu-Yun-Killick
Red Comet Press (28 pp.)
$17.99 | March 14, 2023
978-0-593-38572-2

A two-for-the-price-of-one sale at the pet store challenges a resourceful family to cope with the inevitable consequences.

Hardly have Owen, Zoey, and their dad had time to feel amazed before their two new rabbits have turned into 210, nibbling on the furniture and leaving “little chocolate eggs” all over. It’s time for a grand, if occasionally ruthless, giveaway—but after leaving one with a passing juggler, slipping two into an unsuspecting neighbor’s mail slot, dropping three into the instrument case of a distracted street musician, and so on up to tying the last 20 to balloons, the children are dismayed to discover that there are none left. And so it’s back to the pet store... just in time to take advantage of a two-for-one sale on ferrets! Aside from looking for a message, if any, buried in the silliness, the chief fun of this Italian import will be counting the orange bunnies in Benetti’s duotone illustrations—they’re all there, each individually drawn and engaged, singly or in bunches, in tomfoolery. Human figures, rendered in grayscale, are mostly light-skinned, but there are also a few who are darker-complexioned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A delightful domestic debacle with pictures to pore over and many bunnies to count. (Picture book. 5-7)

THE ART OF GETTING NOTICED
Campbell, Chelsea M.
Illus. by Laura Knetzger
Penguin Workshop (64 pp.)
$12.99 | Feb. 14, 2023
978-0-593-38573-9
Series: Bigfoot and Nessie, 1

An adorably legendary pairing unfolds in this creative, cryptozoological graphic novel. Bigfoot Littletoe III just can’t seem to stand out. The rest of his family members make headlines with their epic photo-bombs of humans. Try as he might, Bigfoot keeps goofing it up, tripping, slipping, or stumbling and missing many opportunities to have his picture taken. When, one day, he gets tangled up in some campers’ tent, a smartly disguised stranger stumbles upon the forlorn Bigfoot. With the flap of a flipper, she shakes him loose, and after a campfire heart-to-heart, she assures Bigfoot that there are none left. And so it’s back to the pet store... just in time to take advantage of a two-for-one sale on ferrets! Aside from looking for a message, if any, buried in the silliness, the chief fun of this Italian import will be counting the orange bunnies in Benetti’s duotone illustrations—they’re all there, each individually drawn and engaged, singly or in bunches, in tomfoolery. Human figures, rendered in grayscale, are mostly light-skinned, but there are also a few who are darker-complexioned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A delightful domestic debacle with pictures to pore over and many bunnies to count. (Picture book. 5-7)

COURAGE IN HER CLEATS
The Story of Soccer Star Abby Wambach
Chaffee, Kim
Illus. by Alexandra Badiu
Page Street (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-64567-629-4

Soccer legend Abby Wambach is celebrated in this vivacious picture-book biography. Abby was always on a team, whether as the youngest of seven spirited children or a member of her soccer team as a child, so she learned early that to be recognized in a group, you have to be “loud and clear.” After graduating from high school, she joined the University of Florida women’s soccer team. Soon she was chosen for the U.S. Women’s National Team. It didn’t take long for Abby to become a top goal scorer and a leader on the team. Then an exhibition game ahead of the 2008 Olympics led to a serious leg injury, preventing Abby from playing with the team as they sought gold in Beijing. Still, she was determined to encourage her team and recover so she could get back on the pitch. Chaffee uses Abby’s cleats to embody her boldness, grounding the narrative and carrying it forward with purpose. This clever choice is complemented by Badiu’s occasional use of whimsical plumes of sparkling color in shades of purple and coral that bloom from the cleats. Confetti bursts from these vibrant clouds as Abby scores her 100th career goal. Though the book focuses solely on Abby’s soccer career—rather than her activism, published books, or other interests—it’s nevertheless a strong work, featuring lively onomatopoeia and threaded with a joyful spirit of perseverance. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sure to win over young sports fans. (Information on Wambach, glossary of soccer terms, bibliography) (Picture book biography. 5-8)
A powerful narrative about Black yesterdays that have built the foundation for all our tomorrows. 

WE ARE HERE
Charles, Tami
Illus. by Bryan Collier
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 3, 2023
978-1-338-75204-5

The creators of All Because You Matter (2020) collaborate once more, assuring children of the Black diaspora of their rich cultural heritage.

Charles’ moving free-verse text, addressed to a brown-skinned child wearing a colorful headband, their hair in two puffballs, argues that though so many contributions of Black people have gone unacknowledged, “we have always been heroes.” When it is “your turn / to rule the world, / people will be amazed / and they will question / the power of you.” But, Charles stresses, we are here and have always been amazing. In an illustrator’s note, Collier mentions that the row houses throughout echo those that Georgia artist John Biggers painted of his childhood home. Row houses grace the endpapers and serve as the backdrop for many scenes showcasing Black people’s contributions to music, activism, fashion, politics, food, astronomy, and more, not just throughout American history, but world history as well. Many of the people Collier illustrates are recognizably famous, like Martin Luther King Jr., after whom more than 1,000 streets have been named, and others ought to be, like Chicago blues musician Howlin’ Wolf. Collier’s signature painterly collage and watercolor images abound in color, texture, and patterning that beautifully reflect Black diversity. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A powerful narrative about Black yesterdays that have built the foundation for all our tomorrows. (Biographical notes, glossary, author’s notes) (Picture book 3-8)

LUCKY CAT
Cheng, Melody, Helen H. Wu & Janet Wang
Illus. by Eunice Chen
Frances Lincoln (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-7112-7047-3

An unlikely pair try their luck. A young girl named June and her family, recent emigrants from Asia, approach an empty sushi restaurant, where a Lucky Cat statue on the counter sparks the parents’ excitement. They explain to June that the restaurant is their hope for financial stability. One night, June discovers that the statue can come to life. Lucky Cat accidentally spills vinegar onto the orders. A few more cat-related mishaps lead to the restaurant closing. Undeterred, the family attempts to open a laundromat as well as several other businesses, all of which fail as the “lucky” feline continues to offer aid. Frustrated, June eventually blames Lucky Cat, scaring her away. Despite the emotional roller coaster the family endures, the descriptive narrative maintains an even tone. Chen deftly uses contrasts in light to heighten emotions in the brightly colored cartoons—in particular when we see June wrapped in a family embrace and given a gentle reminder of the importance of family. A reconciliation with Lucky Cat and a pivot to the family’s homemade baos finally bring good fortune. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A whimsical way to teach budding environmentalists about trees around the world. (Informational picture book 3-8)

A FIELD GUIDE TO LEAFLINGS
Churcher, Owen
Illus. by Niamh Sharkey
Bonnier/Trafalgar (40 pp.)
$17.99 | March 21, 2023
978-1-78342-522-8

“No one is too small to make a difference,” as the leaflings tell us.

In this guide’s delightful conceit, every tree has its tiny leafling, and every leafling has a specific role: protecting, connecting, constructing, etc. Leaflings resemble smiling seed pods with big, round eyes and small bodies, some in minute skirts. Whatever their tree roles, their job in this book is to explain how trees work, and they do it winningly. Akina and Hiroki tell us about sakura, while Iarla and Etain cover holly. Hugo takes on the kapok; several real-life critters that make their home in this giant South American tree can be found here along with information on photosynthesis. On to oak, baobab, kauri, red river gum, redwood, peepal, Huangshan pine, and sweet chestnut, each with companion leaflings and assorted animals. Among the few humans are a child who uses a wheelchair, one in hijab, and several who are brown-skinned; among leaflings, faces might be green, tan, pale, etc., while some bodies are wide, others tall. There’s information about city trees and advice on observing nature. The use of intricate serif fonts dictates lap- or independent-reading only; indeed, the delicate, detailed, page-filling watercolor and ink illustrations (like a naturalist’s notebook) are for poring over. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Infected
Crawford, Terrance
Illus. by Dan Wild Dawson
Scholastic (376 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Jan. 3, 2023
978-1-338-84812-0
Series: Piggy, 1

Humor and horror are seldom far apart in this tale about a virus that turns people into enormous animals.

A passage near the end of this novel says: “The flashing lights and sounds in the mall made Ben feel
“A moving story of resilience in a changing world.”

EMPEROR OF THE ICE

Climate change forces emperor penguins to move to new nesting sites.

Scientists observing emperor penguins from satellites in space (an effective way to monitor these inaccessible nesting grounds) have determined that climate change has made the Halley Bay winter sea ice unreliable. The “thousands upon thousands of emperors” that once nested there have moved elsewhere. Davies weaves this disturbing consequence of climate change into a gentle, positive account of a pair of these penguins raising a chick in a hostile environment. Rayner’s stunning, full-bleed illustrations complement the text and show off the Antarctic’s changing colors. In an early spread, we see the colony from afar,
tiny figures with long shadows. Later close-ups show courtship, then the father with their egg nestled securely over his feet in his pouch, and, finally, a crowd of penguins with their chicks. But before the hatching, over the long, lonely winter, the father stands isolated in a snowstorm, and his mate swims hundreds of miles to get food to bring back. Happily, the last spread shows even more penguin colonies as the text reassures us that, at least for now, the penguins from Halley Bay have found new homes. Once again, zoologist Davies' enthusiasm for the natural world and her ability to shed light on it for a young audience are on full display. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A moving story of resilience in a changing world. (note from biologist Dr. Phil Trathan, information on emperor penguins and climate change) (Informational picture book: 5-9)

THE SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT
Decalf, Jérémie
Eerdmans (64 pp.)
$18.99 | March 14, 2023
978-0-8028-3602-9

A poetic envoy from the Voyager 2 probe as it leaves our solar system for the vast deeps of interstellar space. “Behind me, Earth. // Ahead of me lies the night.” In lines so terse that twin probe Voyager 1 goes unmentioned until his (somewhat) more expansive afterward, Decalf recalls his personified spacecraft’s assembly, launch, and flybys of all four outer planets on the way to the stars—bearing a golden disk of “images from Earth, and some melodies” in hopes of “an encounter, perhaps, / at the edge of night. // With some new friends?” Early scenes of silhouetted human watchers and workers quickly give way to starry backdrops in which, except for planets flashing by, the small knot of instruments and antennas floats, recedes, and at last appears as a shadow against a swirling nebula. Though sandwiched between schematic views of the solar system and of Voyager’s course, this work—translated from French by the author—has little to offer readers curious about the actual mission or its achievements, not to mention the contents of that recorded message, until the quick summary at the end. But some sense of outer space’s immensity and loneliness does come through. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Slight but evocative. (Informational picture book 6-8)

GREENLEE IS GROWING
DeStefano, Anthony
Illus. by Louise A. Ellis
Convergent/Crown (40 pp.)
$12.99 | Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-593-57796-7

The seasons change, and so do we! As the seasons go slipping by from spring into winter, readers follow moments in the long life of Greenlee, who has pale skin and long brown wavy hair. Greenlee’s actions are reflected in the seasons; in the spring, she is depicted as a small child playing in the grass and enjoying a tea party with her dolls. As the seasons change, Greenlee grows older—at the beginning of summer, she’s flying a kite, and by the end of the season, she’s old enough to surf by herself and start a romantic relationship. Autumn shows her as a young mother with a partner and two children (all light-skinned) celebrating Halloween and gathering apples. In winter, Greenlee’s hair has turned gray as she celebrates the winter holidays with grandchildren and a diverse group of friends. The plot is sophisticated, and the execution of rhymes is well done, though the meter is sometimes shaky: “Autumn is here! Autumn is here! / Red, gold, and brown leaves and pumpkins appear. / Kids trick-or-treating, holiday eating, / bonfires blazing, / the smell so amazing.” The illustrations are lush and packed with detail, making this one more suited for one-on-one sharing than with a large group, but they do a pleasant enough job capturing the lightness of the story. The intended audience, though, may not fully appreciate the bittersweet love letter to youth. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Tender but more likely to resonate with caregivers than with children. (Picture book: 6-10)

LOST AND FOUND
Dickerson, Mason
Random House Graphic (192 pp.)
978-0-593-17349-7 PLB
978-0-593-17348-0
Series: Housecat Trouble, 2

This second installment in the Housecat Trouble series gets to the heart of what home means. Awoken at night by the sound of tapping, Buster the cat leaves the comfort of his bed to investigate, fearing it may be a spirit returning to his and his human’s home after a previous infestation. Buster happens upon a white cat in the living room and learns the cat is lost and needs help getting home. The next morning, the two cats strike out on a mission to locate the white cat’s home; along the way, they run into obstacles, meet new friends, and reunite with old ones. The mellow, pastel coloring helps to offset the often congested and closely placed panels, which give this sequel a chaotic, high-energy feel. Beyond the conceit of animals going on an adventure together to solve a puzzle, the story continues to fold in elements of the supernatural, it also speaks to the power of friendship and the joy of getting second chances with those you love most. Although the human characters are motivating figures to the cats, they are largely kept to the sidelines; those who are present appear to be White, Black, and other people of color.

A frenzied, fast-moving tale laced with tenderness. (Graphic fiction: 8-12)
In this third installment in the Oona series, DiPucchio’s diminutive Black mermaid, who has deep brown skin and an impressively expansive Afro, travels from warm to frigid waters to return a baby beluga who shows up in her cave. Oona and her trusty sidekicks, Otto (an otter) and a baby sea turtle, feed the beluga kelp cake, “ninety-nine sushi rolls, a bucket of chowder, and an entire plate of sea-salt cookies,” but the homesick baby throws herself on the ocean floor, crying. Realizing the beluga wants to go home, Oona finds among her treasures some old maps and a broken compass, which she repairs to commence the journey to the Arctic. She loses the compass in a storm, her map gets ripped, and an iceberg threatens to crush the travelers, but they soon meet Siku, a mermaid who offers the support and friendship they need to keep moving. The book’s dedication thanking Holly Mititquq Nordlum, artist, activist, and “enrolled member of the Native Village of Qikiqtarjuaq,” suggests that Siku is Inuit. Figueroa’s richly detailed digital illustrations effectively capture the mood of each scene with shifting palettes as the characters move through different ocean habitats with varying sea life; the visual details will keep budding oceanographers engaged. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fascinating and visually satisfying epic journey of home and friendship. (Picture book. 4-8)

**OONA IN THE ARCTIC**

DiPucchio, Kelly
Illus. by Raissa Figueroa
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 24, 2023
978-0-06-322232-8
Series: Oona, 3

**BENEATH**

Doerrfeld, Cori
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 17, 2023
978-0-316-31226-4

A tender, probing appreciation of what lies just below the surface.

Tucked beneath a quilt in the center of the bed, Finn is having a horrible day. “Grandpa wanted to talk about it. Finn did not.” The child is quite certain that Grandpa won’t understand, but the old man convinces Finn to take a walk with him (still under the quilt) and is soon pointing out instances where what’s on the surface conceals hidden complexities—trees with deep roots, for instance, and water teeming with fish. “Beneath appearances are experiences. Beneath actions are explanations. Beneath what’s different is what’s the same,” he says. As Finn slowly emerges from the quilt, Grandpa ties it all together: “Beneath someone who looks like they won’t understand...is someone who knows exactly how you feel.” As in her *The Rabbit Listened* (2018), Doerrfeld has crafted another brief yet incisive picture book. Here, her cozy yet vibrant art advocates for understanding and acceptance alongside the artist’s unique brand of straightforward simplicity. Grandpa’s tour begins big (with nature) and seems to narrow in focus (with an exploration of emotions), but Doerrfeld caps the book off brilliantly with Finn pointing out the cosmic stars above. “Don’t worry...I’ll remember to think of what’s beneath”—a breathtaking clincher. Grandpa and Finn are both tan-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

No need to scratch beneath the surface of this text to find the glint of gold. It’s apparent right from the start. (Picture book. 4-7)

**THE RACE TO ERASE**

Doyle, Bill
Random House (208 pp.)
978-0-593-48637-5
978-0-593-48638-2 PLB
Series: The Fifth Hero, 1

The reader joins four young climate heroes to help save planet Earth in this interactive, near-future adventure story. Everyone knows that Earth is old and dangerous, and it’s time for humans to get off the planet. At least, that’s the message that the Calamity Corporation has been touting. When 11-year-old Jarrett attends a Climate Club meeting at the home of his classmate Lina, whose parents run the Calamity Corporation, everything goes haywire. Upon touching special spheres secretly created to destroy Earth, Jarrett and fellow club members Malik, Agnes, and Freya are imbued with powers relating to animals, water, land, and air. As they go on the run from evil robots, the heroes require assistance to save themselves and the planet. At three points in the book the reader is required to make a decision that will either end the journey or propel the adventure forward. The nonstop action is engaging, but these interactive elements detract more than add to the story, even if they do fit with the overall theme of how to be environmentally conscious. This tale kicks off a new series, and the ending provides only the barest amount of satisfying closure, leaving much open for future installments. Though characters’ races and ethnicities aren’t described, the book cover depicts one character as brown-skinned; the others are light-skinned or tan-skinned. It’s hinted that Jarrett and Malik’s relationship is more than just a friendship.

Full of fun action but not entirely rewarding. (fact files about kids finding ways to help the environment) (Science fiction. 8-12)
“Dunlap writes with compassion about factors that render adolescents particularly vulnerable to trafficking and what it takes to keep them safe.”

**IT HAPPENED ON SATURDAY**

_Dunlap, Sydney_

Jolly Fish Press (272 pp.)

$19.99 | Feb. 21, 2023

978-1-5107-6922-9

After her best friend acquires a boyfriend at summer camp, an eighth grader persuades her older sister to give her a makeover, then posts it online.

Nori, whose parents recently separated, chooses hanging out with Luke over helping Julia volunteer at the stables where she takes riding lessons. Their friendship fraying, Julia feels abandoned. Her family’s preoccupied, especially sister Danielle, who is wrangling high school, choir, a boyfriend, and a part-time job. The makeover she gives Julia, however, works wonders: Julia could pass for 16, Danielle says. Julia’s sophisticated image prompts flattering from friends and strangers on social media—including handsome Tyler, who says he attends 10th grade at a nearby private school and follows up with requests to meet. Wary at first, Julia’s soon disarmed by his interest. More dates follow—a fancy dinner, mini golf—and expensive treats. Largely estranged from Nori, who warns her this is risky behavior, leading to a fight, Julia tries to enjoy the attention of girls who once ignored her. But Tyler is not what he seems: Following a nightmarish discovery and close call with a trafficker, Julia enters group therapy. Most characters follow a White default; Nori is Japanese American. Dunlap writes with compassion about factors that render adolescents particularly vulnerable to trafficking and what it takes to keep them safe; she offers insights into how excruciating self-consciousness prevents victims from seeking help or sharing their experiences.

_A powerful work. (author’s note, author Q&A, discussion guide) (Fiction. 10-14)_

**EASTER EGGS AND MATZO BALLS**

_Emaus, Jamie_

Illus. by Bryan Langdo

Sky Pony Press (32 pp.)

$19.99 | Jan. 31, 2023

978-1-5107-6922-9

Twenty-first-century families are complicated.

Michael celebrates Easter, and his stepsister, Anna, celebrates Passover, but this year, both holidays come at the same time. So Michael emails the Easter Bunny (at Easterbunny@19BurrowAve.com) for help. The Easter Bunny agrees to hide a special gift in Anna’s golden egg. The problem? None of the Passover-themed presents that Michael suggests will fit inside the egg, no matter how much the bunny squishes or squashes them—until finally they decide on the perfect gift…a piece of matzo. It’s refreshing to read a story about a stepfamily that has so little conflict. But some of the story details may puzzle readers. It’s not always obvious which character is speaking, and it would be very tricky for the bunny to place a piece of matzo inside the golden egg unless the egg were unusually large or the matzo were unusually small. The pictures don’t clear anything up, but they have a simple, childlike charm, with circles for people’s heads and wavy lines for their arms. Characters are tan-skinned. Readers may appreciate the spirit of religious harmony even if they have trouble figuring out the plot mechanics. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Confusing but joyous—like many real-life holiday celebrations. (holiday recipes, glossary of Passover and Easter terms) (Picture book 3-5)

**ALL YOUR TOMORROWS**

_Evans, Harriet_

Illus. by Heidi Griffiths

Tiger Tales (32 pp.)

$18.99 | Feb. 14, 2023

978-1-66430-013-2

A narrator rhapsodizes about a little one’s potential future.

Beginning with the bookplate (“Hopes and dreams for: ____”), this title has a retro, Golden Books feel. Throughout, colorful artwork captures eye and heart. Smiling people of different ages, abilities, and ethnicities abound in varied settings that include images linked with happiness: musical notes, flowers, birds, sunny beach days, yellow slickers in gentle rain, and fireworks. The text is an adult’s address to a precious baby, beginning with the wonder of holding such a tiny being. “In this body so warm and new, / you hold a history yet to happen.” As Evans mentions different parts of the baby’s body (“These legs / will scramble over / mountains”), the verse vacillates between describing certainties ahead—such as acquiring memories and encountering obstacles—and giving words of encouragement and advice (“I hope you’ll / sink your toes into sand, leaving footprints in those / beads of sunshine”). ASL gestures are included on the page about hands. Though this one is ostensibly aimed at newborns and their caregivers, the most receptive audience will be sleepy small children, read to by grandparents or other family members while the parents busy themselves with the newest member. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Heartwarming—but whose name belongs on the bookplate? (Picture book 3-5)
French Canadian.

Escaping the orphanage she hates, Grace ventures with her familiar, a crow named Windweaver, to the cottage of Miss Puddlestone, a reputed witch who is rumored to eat children. But Grace is not afraid; she is there to offer her services and, determined, and poignant. Most characters read default White (with plenty of respectful nods to Anne of Green Gables, this delightful story set on Prince Edward Island features fledgling witch Grace. Escaping the orphanage she hates, Grace ventures with her familiar, a crow named Windweaver, to the cottage of Miss Puddlestone, a reputed witch who is rumored to eat children. But Grace is not afraid; she is there to offer her services and, in return, to learn more about magic. Unfortunately for Grace, the witch is not at all interested in taking her under her wing but agrees eventually (after failing to roast Grace in her giant oven) to consider it—but only if Grace correctly performs all the spells in the witch’s grimoire to prove her potential. Richly imagined and terribly funny in its interactions between Grace and the witch, the narrative’s essence honors the plots points of L.M. Montgomery’s iconic story. Grace is voluble, imaginative, and a lover of poetry and all things in the natural world. Her endearing character—just as charming as the original Anne (no mean feat)—is by turns funny, wise, determined, and poignant. Most characters read default White except for Sareena, Grace’s best friend, who is Lebanese and French Canadian.

A magical, witchy, and thoroughly successful homage to a classic. *(Fantasy. 9-12)*

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**THE GRACE OF WILD THINGS**

Fawcett, Heather

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (368 pp.)

$17.99 | Feb. 14, 2023

978-0-06-314262-6

Grace, a 12-year-old witch, runs away from the orphanage to find a better life for herself.

With plenty of respectful nods to Anne of Green Gables, this delightful story set on Prince Edward Island features fledgling witch Grace. Escaping the orphanage she hates, Grace ventures with her familiar, a crow named Windweaver, to the cottage of Miss Puddlestone, a reputed witch who is rumored to eat children. But Grace is not afraid; she is there to offer her services and, in return, to learn more about magic. Unfortunately for Grace, the witch is not at all interested in taking her under her wing but agrees eventually (after failing to roast Grace in her giant oven) to consider it—but only if Grace correctly performs all the spells in the witch’s grimoire to prove her potential. Richly imagined and terribly funny in its interactions between Grace and the witch, the narrative’s essence honors the plots points and characters of L.M. Montgomery’s iconic story. Grace is voluble, imaginative, and a lover of poetry and all things in the natural world. Her endearing character—just as charming as the original Anne (no mean feat)—is by turns funny, wise, determined, and poignant. Most characters read default White except for Sareena, Grace’s best friend, who is Lebanese and French Canadian.

A magical, witchy, and thoroughly successful homage to a classic. *(Fantasy. 9-12)*

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**THE UMBRELLA**

Ferry, Beth

Illus. by Tom Lichtenheld

Clarion/HarperCollins (48 pp.)

$19.99 | March 21, 2023

978-0-358-44772-6

Dim days end with a bright romp thanks to magic—and the magic of sharing.

Ferry and Lichtenheld drum the weather’s dripping rhythm in brief, rhyming text (“Dreary / Weary / Dim / Grim”) and gray tones: relentless rain. The small, light-skinned heroine’s brief break arrives when she has to walk her dog; she finds a tattered umbrella (free!) in a junk shop. But even that prize disappoints when it deconstructs in bright yellow leaflike bits blown across a park. More rainy nights and days follow, until—what?!—each scattered bit has sprouted into a dazzling new umbrella! The girl harvests and then shares them in the public square (where, looking closely, we can spot one person using a wheelchair and a few with brownish faces, though most appear to be light-skinned). As the brilliant brollies spread everywhere, clouds retreat and play begins. As in Ferry and Lichtenheld’s Stick and Stone (2015), the text will be memorized and chanted; the illustrations rely on very lively linework and more detail than in that book, managing efficiently with gray and (eventually) dandelion hues. Minimally detailed faces, quirky vehicles, and a cartoon canine fit the fanciful concept just as the girl and her friends fit the age range of this tale’s readers. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

This celebration of patience and sharing light will spread delight. *(Picture book. 3-7)*

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**THIS IS HOW I ROLL**

Florence, Debbi Michiko

Scholastic (288 pp.)

$7.99 paper | Jan. 3, 2023

978-1-338-78556-2

Series: Wish

A 12-year-old girl meets a cute boy while spending her summer learning to cook.

Rising eighth grader Sana Mikami dreams of following in her father’s footsteps and becoming a successful chef. But ever since she made a careless mistake in the kitchen, Sana’s dad hasn’t given her lessons. They also left San Francisco, and now he’s too busy being filmed as the subject of a documentary about his new upscale
sushi restaurant. Sana plans on spending this summer with her cousin and best friend, Charli Hirai, proving she can be a chef. But when Charli gets into an intensive arts program, Sana makes new plans with new friend Koji Yamada. Koji’s mom teaches her Japanese home cooking, and Koji helps her show off her new skills in online video tutorials. But Charli thinks Koji is trouble, and Koji resents Sana’s dad, perceiving him as a rich, privileged outsider in their small California town. So Sana lies to everyone, even her parents, as she pursues her dreams. This fun, lighthearted middle-grade romantic comedy centering Japanese American characters focuses on food and cooking even as it digs into topics such as discrimination against women in the sushi world. Sana’s relationships with friends and family grow as they work through dishonesty, miscommunications, and unspoken feelings. Beyond cooking, readers are introduced in an entertaining way to other characters’ passions, like art and gardening.

A delightful middle school rom-com that will leave readers hungry. (Fiction. 9-12)

WHAT DOES BROWN MEAN TO YOU?
Grady, Ron
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 3, 2023
978-0-593-46288-1

A young brown-skinned boy considers the many ways the color brown shows up in his life.

Benny wakes up, beginning his day while his brown dog, Percy, still sleeps. He heads to the kitchen, where he greets his brown father, who is mixing up pancakes. His brown grandparents greet Benny with a kiss as they drink coffee, creating a “lovely moment of bliss.” Outside, his mom picks “juicy tomatoes,” and he observes the brown soil. Benny feeds hay to Bess the brown cow and collects brown eggs. Next, he and Percy explore the outdoors—playing hide-and-seek, balancing on logs, and watching an approaching storm. Caught in the rain, Benny plays in the brown mud before going inside to dry off. With the day ahead gloomy, Benny paints a portrait of his brown family. Benny helps his mom in the kitchen as the family ends their day with dinner and dancing to the joyful songs of James Brown. Once in bed, Benny wonders, “What does Brown mean to you?” There is repetition and rhyme throughout this upbeat, encouraging tale as Benny describes how the color brown appears throughout his daily activities and the emotions that arise. Many scenes evoke readers’ senses as the boy and his family explore what brown means to them. Simple illustrations, created with pencil and finished digitally, in a neutral palette complement the text. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An affirming celebration of being brown. (Picture book. 3-7)

HOW TO TALK LIKE A BEAR
Grady, Charlie
Illus. by Alex G. Griffiths
Flamingo Books (32 pp.)
$18.99 | March 14, 2023
978-0-593-35066-9

Communication is always the key. A brown bear in a striped shirt, black pants, and green shoes is here to help turn readers into better communicators. How? By teaching them how to talk like a bear. The audience, represented by a blue speech bubble, interacts with their new bear friend by repeating a few common lines like “ROAR!” and “GRRR!!!” Pronunciation is important, however. For example, when readers think they have roared, “Give me your ice cream sundaes, humans,” they have in fact said, “Go get a haircut.” The intricacies of language, right? It’s plot points like these that will have readers giggling with delight as they roar at varying volumes—each roar resulting in snappy comebacks from the bear. It’s a book designed for reading aloud to large groups, and the illustrations support the text perfectly with reaction shots that will remain humorous even after several reads. The ending, which will remind young bears-in-training that they won’t always get their own way, is a lighthearted return to reality. And while the story will shine brightest when read with groups, the ending makes it equally appropriate for an evening read before starting a pre-bedtime ritual. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A laugh-out-loud take on the challenges of making ourselves understood. (Picture book. 4-6)

NO FAIR!
Grant, Jacob
Viking (40 pp.)
$18.99 | March 14, 2023
978-0-593-11769-9

Sometimes life just isn’t fair! When Pablo and his father (both tan-skinned with brown hair) visit the market, Pablo is quick to point out all the things that are unfair, from him losing their bike race because his bike is smaller (and because he’s got to wrangle the family dog) to his not being allowed to select the items that they’re planning to buy. Pablo’s father tries to be reasonable, but each new task seems to bring on the same refrain: “NO FAIR!” Finally, at the end of the market trip, Pablo and his father reward themselves with doughnuts—with Pablo taking the larger of the two. The premise will be a familiar one in many households with young readers who are ready to assert their independence, and readers of all ages may see themselves—and their struggles—related in the tale. The artwork, a mix of charcoal, crayon, pencil, cut paper, and digital enhancements, creates a welcoming feel that is both modern and classic. Caregivers, educators, and librarians will find this a useful story when addressing issues of fairness, and storytellers will
have fun voicing the protagonists and bringing both of them to life for groups. (This book was reviewed digitally.) Delightful guidance for little ones singing the “That’s not fair!” blues. (Picture book. 4-6)

WE ARE HUMAN ANIMALS
Haine, Rosie
Eerdmans (52 pp.)
$18.99 | March 7, 2023
978-0-8028-5601-2

We’re more closely related to our prehistoric ancestors than we realize.

The author opens this intriguing book provocatively—“We are human animals”—to introduce to readers a Paleolithic dark-skinned, dark-eyed family who lived in what’s now France circa 25,000 years ago. In clearly written prose, she supports her proposition that early people’s lifestyles were somewhat comparable to humans’ lives today. For example, this family’s and their neighbors’ lives were governed by the seasons and nature’s cycles; they banded together cooperatively; they were creative and made art and objects; they wondered about their world and used language. Such ideas will resonate with children, who will be fascinated to learn present-day humans are somewhat connected to very long-ago folk—and, in some ways, may still be compared to them. Adults presenting this volume should encourage kids to discuss their ideas about commonalities shared by present-day and prehistoric people and to consider the author’s use of animals to describe humans and whether they believe this word choice is apt. The digital illustrations, enhanced with handmade textures, are colorful and evocative; children will enjoy the realistic, warm scenes of the prehistoric world and appreciate the similarities portrayed between the worlds of then and now. Endpapers feature faces of racially diverse people. Excellent backmatter concludes the book. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A first-rate introduction to paleontology for young readers and a fine conversation sparker. (Author’s note, examples of prehistoric artifacts) (Informational picture book. 5-9)

LINUS
Hausmann, Stuart
Atheneum (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-1-66590-030-0

A square peg rebels.

Linus, a black-toned, big-eyed rectangle in a red bow tie, lives in Linneopolis, a black, gray, and white world full of blocky citizens who are “uptight,” “straight-laced,” “punctual,” and “orderly.” Puns about being “out of line” and “bent out of shape” abound, and everyone is urged to conform, “toe the line,” and shape up. Linus prefers unruly balloons, riotous colors, wavy shapes, and anything to disrupt the status quo. After failed attempts to get him to conform (including a stint at a cheerfully depicted hard labor camp), Linus goes adventuring into the outside world. In far-off towns and cities, he discovers the excitement and stimulation he desires in the form of rainbows, disco balls, and chaotic architecture. He brings a palatable amount of it back to Linneopolis, and the citizens there learn that “differences [are] truly worth celebrating.” The predictable metaphor, structure, and resolution are uninspiring, but the striking art helps to carry the simple story and will encourage young readers to be themselves, accept differences, and see themselves in the shoes (or tiny stick legs) of the rectangular hero. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A standard but enjoyable text about embracing diversity. (Picture book. 4-7)

NOT A BOOK ABOUT BUNNIES
Henke, Amanda
Illus. by Anna Daviscourt
Starry Forest (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-951784-09-6

Welcome to a spiky little story! After readers turn past endpapers awash with cute white rabbits, an off-page protagonist welcomes them and emphasizes that “this is not a book about bunnies. It is about someone even more dazzling...Me. Porcupine!” And with a page turn, readers will meet the porcupine in all their spiny glory, ready to share a few facts about porcupines—they’re born with soft fuzz (their quills sprout later), and they sometimes snack on cotton-tailed creatures following along as Porcupine waxes poetic. When the bunny finally works up the courage to talk to Porcupine, the bunny confesses to craving the bristly, dangerous thrills of life, and the pair visit their local library to learn more about the spiky creatures. The story works well most of the time, but there are a few misses that may distract or annoy curious readers. Although the porcupine talks about how their quills offer protection from predators, the illustrations don’t show who those predators might be. Plus, the book provides just a few other facts about porcupines—they’re born with soft fuzz (their quills sprout later), and they sometimes snack on canoe paddles. This last point is in fact more fully addressed in the backmatter, where a few more interesting tidbits are shared. The focus on the porcupine’s insecurities is amusing, but overall, this tale won’t wow readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Cute but mundane. (Picture book. 4-8)
“Intelligent rhymes and handsome folk-art patterns spin a global story of weaving through the millennia.”

WOVEN OF THE WORLD
Howes, Katy
Illus. by Dinara Mirtalipova
Chronicle Books (44 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-4521-7806-6

Intelligent rhymes and handsome folk-art patterns spin a global story of weaving through the millennia.

The narrative opens as an adult in a long black dress invites a child clothed in red (both are brown-skinned and blue-haired) to listen to the loom: “Clack. Clack. / Swish— / PULL BACK. / Bobbin and heddle, / foot pedal, no slack.” (Specialized vocabulary is defined and illustrated in a glossary.) The characters’ presence throughout, along with that of a playful blue cat, adds a personal dimension. Describing the loom’s “song” (“skeins of history / unfurled across the room...”), the text is told in first person, presented in an ABCB rhyme scheme with an appropriately lilting rhythm. A limited but vibrant gouache palette of black, blue, orange/rust/brown, forest green, and white depicts weavers throughout history and cultures—we see portrayals of the craft on Chinese porcelain, Egyptian pottery, Moorish carpets, and more. Delicate spot line contrasts with rich color on double-page spreads for a pleasing variety. Author and artist convey technical and functional information about weaving as well as the sense of community experienced by weavers and the stories and spirit incorporated into their pieces. Ending in the third person plural, Howes speaks of the beauty, purpose, and strength of the textiles and of those who create and appreciate them: “We all are tapestries... / lifelines interlacing...” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An ambitious attempt to chronicle the life of a complex artist that falls short. (author’s note, photo) (Picture-book biography, 8-10)

THE SNAIL
Hughes, Emily
Chronicle Books (88 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-79720-467-3

A glimpse into the life of an iconic sculptor.

The son of a Japanese poet and an American writer, Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) struggled for acceptance in both Japan and the United States; he “felt like a snail and called himself one,” most at home in his own shell. Hughes uses Noguchi’s creation of an akari light sculpture for an exhibition as a device to dive into the artist’s development. Curves are a motif throughout—as Noguchi works on the curves of the sculpture, he recalls being ostracized in Japan as a child for his curly hair, but he also remembers the fern tendrils of his beloved garden. He remembers the tension between his parents, each believing his future was in a different land, and he’s reminded of World War II and its destruction, when he was seen as the enemy by both America and Japan. But the akari’s paper brings comfort. Noguchi emerges from the creative process anew, at peace with himself and with the knowledge that he and his creations can’t be categorized—that they are astounding, new, and uniquely him. Though the illustrations, which use graphite to delicately render his life, are effective, the text jumps across time and space and may at times confuse readers unfamiliar with the artist. In particular, it isn’t clear why Noguchi was able to leave an imprisonment camp while other Japanese Americans remained. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An exceptional ode to the music and art of the loom. (author’s and illustrator’s notes, historical and cultural information on weaving) (Informational picture book, 5-9)

THE ART AND LIFE OF HILMA AF KLINT
Hillström, Ylva
Illus. by Karin Eklund
Trans. by B.J. Epstein
Thames & Hudson (64 pp.)
$19.95 | Feb. 14, 2023
9780500653173

This Swedish import introduces young readers to a long-obscure spiritu-alist painter who has only recently been recognized as a pioneering abstract artist.

In language that underscores the mystical character of Hilma’s art (“According to the positions of the stars and planets on the day that she was born, Hilma’s life would be filled with magic and mystery”), Hillström traces her Swedish subject’s nearly lifelong devotion to spiritualism and theosophy, which led her to create nonrepresentational “maps of the spirit world” in paint well before (the author notes) Wassily Kandinsky proudly proclaimed himself the inventor of abstraction. As she was repeatedly brushed off by leading theosophist Rudolph Steiner and, just before dying in 1944, directed that her work be packed away, not to be looked at until 20 years after her death, she long remained little known. But Eklund’s appropriately pale, ghostly scenes of an otherworldly figure practicing her art or skinning and blue-haired) to listen to the loom: “Clack. Clack. / Swish— / PULL BACK. / Bobbin and heddle, / foot pedal, no slack.” (Specialized vocabulary is defined and illustrated in a glossary.) The characters’ presence throughout, along with that of a playful blue cat, adds a personal dimension. Describing the loom’s “song” (“skeins of history / unfurled across the room...”), the text is told in first person, presented in an ABCB rhyme scheme with an appropriately lilting rhythm. A limited but vibrant gouache palette of black, blue, orange/rust/brown, forest green, and white depicts weavers throughout history and cultures—we see portrayals of the craft on Chinese porcelain, Egyptian pottery, Moorish carpets, and more. Delicate spot line contrasts with rich color on double-page spreads for a pleasing variety. Author and artist convey technical and functional information about weaving as well as the sense of community experienced by weavers and the stories and spirit incorporated into their pieces. Ending in the third person plural, Howes speaks of the beauty, purpose, and strength of the textiles and of those who create and appreciate them: “We all are tapestries... / lifelines interlacing...” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

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An ambitious attempt to chronicle the life of a complex artist that falls short. (author’s note, photo) (Picture-book biography, 8-10)
One mother-daughter dialogue is particularly poignant. Uneasy feeling uncomfortable with their respective clan members for from different clans—Sunbeam and Nightheart—who had been and a village. It is here that the narration begins by naming this alliances and uncertain decisions demand another installment. and occurrences, culminating in a literal catfight when Tigerstar a carnival. There are also plenty of unpleasant rumors, actions, of ShadowClan shows up at the still leaderless RiverClan with traits and job descriptions equally among genders and ages. to fill in gaps for readers unfamiliar with the series, making this to brave a journey to the Twolegs’ gardens to acquire necessary , healing catmint. Their journey includes a funny, feline look at the vast ocean as if embracing the entire world. The title page shows Earth in a starry universe with the continents visible in breathtaking natural beauty.

Cover art sets the tone as a group of children looks out over the vast ocean as if embracing the entire world. The title page shows Earth in a starry universe with the continents visible in their familiar shapes. Subsequent views get closer as readers see part of the Northern Hemisphere followed by a view from between parted clouds of lush green land set among hills and streams with human habitation indicated by a cultivated area and a village. It is here that the narration begins by naming this place as Earth. Mountains, sun, stream, farm, river, town, bay, ocean, and shore are introduced in lovely, descriptive cumulative verses, each ending with the title phrase. The verses appear within double-page spreads, all brightly hued and lush, glowing in the sun, and featuring racially diverse children engaging with and protecting the land and water. The perspectives vary throughout, some seen in wide angle, some from high above, and some at eye level. Young readers will appreciate the natural beauty of planet Earth and understand that they can play a part in preserving it. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A gentle message lovingly and artfully rendered. (Information on preventing pollution, resources) (Picture book. 4-9)

A posthumous gathering of short poems on themes of home and neighborhood.

All but four of the 34 poems Janeczko selected before his death in 2019 have appeared elsewhere; most were published after 2000. The roster of contributors will be largely familiar to readers of his many anthologies: X.J. Kennedy leads off with an affirmation that “Home” is “Wherever you sit down / to eat your supper, pet your cat, / do homework, watch TV,” Walter de la Mare describes peeking through window blinds to watch passersby, and Gary Soto offers a suburban “Ode to a Sprinkler.” In more reflective tones, Linda Sue Park writes evocatively of a wind in “October” playing tag with a plastic bag and Naomi Shihab Nye, of people like “leaves drifting / downhill in morning fog” on “Spruce Street, Berkeley.” Nikki Grimes and Nikki Giovanni chime in with summertime celebrations of, respectively, a “Block Party” and “Knoxville, Tennessee,” and Langston Hughes rounds things off with metaphorical images of a “City” that “Spreads its wings” in the morning and “In the evening... / Goes to bed / Hanging lights / About its head.” Yum echoes the pervasive air of peaceful serenity with colored pencil and watercolor scenes in which city, country, and suburban settings share presence with racially diverse groups and individuals, mostly children. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A luminous sendoff, rich in happy memories and sweet nostalgia. (Picture-book poetry. 6-10)
Then that all begins to change. For the first time, Eleanor starts June’s portrayal of Eleanor and Elijah gently and fondly reveals faces, fancy words, and more. Elijah enjoys being introduced to diverse in skin tone, ability, and cultural background. This title is a worthy addition to classrooms, public libraries, and personal collections. The characters throughout are described by the children who are part of them—for example, a family .

Elijah is worried until he comes up with an idea to keep his grandma from wandering. He posts memory pictures all over the neighborhood so that Grandma can always find her way .

Gentle persuation at its sweetest. (Picture book. 4-8)

Six-year-old Alma Rivera discovers that speaking up can be a good thing in this bilingual Spanish-English adaptation of an episode of the PBS Kids show Alma’s Way. Mural art adorns the gated storefronts of Alma’s Bronx neighborhood. She and her friends meet up in front of a particularly colorful mural before heading to the Huda family’s store, where Mr. Huda agrees to the kids’ idea to paint a mural on the store’s gate. Excited, Alma’s friends shout out their ideas, drowning out Alma’s pitch and each other. “Everybody has good ideas, but nobody is listening to each other. That doesn’t feel good.” Rather than leaving her friends, Alma buckles down and suggests that everyone sketch their proposed designs to show Mr. Huda, who will make the final decision. When Mr. Huda chooses Alma’s design, Alma enlists André, one of her friends, to help her paint it. But when André begins making edits—polka dots, space hippos, chinchillas—to her design, will Alma know how to speak up? Through ample repetition and empathetic problem-solving, King’s adaptation maintains a gentle pace that’s sure to resonate with young readers who have navigated similar situations. The core message—speaking up doesn’t mean invalidating others—proves worthwhile. Full of generous colors, the clean, distinct illustrations mirror the show in the best way. Alma is Latine, while André presents Black; the cast is racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A tender tribute to the heart. (artist’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

An elephant never forgets—until she does.

Elijah, a young elephant, loves his grandma Eleanor. She makes everything fun, especially cross-word puzzles and stories. Grandma remembers everything—faces, fancy words, and more. Elijah enjoys being introduced to everyone as he and Grandma walk around town together. He is always making new friends because of her wonderful memory. Then that all begins to change. For the first time, Eleanor starts to lose words, then stories, and then herself as she becomes lost one day. Elijah is worried until he comes up with an idea to keep his grandma from wandering. He posts memory pictures all over the neighborhood so that Grandma can always find her way.

June’s portrayal of Eleanor and Elijah gently and fondly reveals the passage of time until Eleanor’s death and the inevitable “goodbye.” The sadness of Eleanor’s Alzheimer’s is secondary to the thoughtful interactions that sustain a grieving community. This day-to-day celebration of a loving relationship brings both characters vividly to life. Long’s tender gouache-and–colored pencil illustrations carry the story without ever becoming overly sentimental. The expressive features are endearing. From Elijah shyly peeking out from behind a newspaper to Grandma’s heart-rendering puzzled reactions, the images evoke honest emotions. An author’s note briefly explains Alzheimer’s and its effects on families and friends. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A tender tribute to the heart. (artist’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

The creators of IntersectionAllies (2019) return for a look at family.

At the heart of this picture book are nontraditional families: LGBTQ+ families, adoptive families, transnational families, families impacted by incarceration, families with divorced parents, and chosen families, among others. Each family is described by the children who are part of them—for example, a biracial kid honors their “two legacies,” sharing how their family celebrates both Passover and Juneteenth. The colorful, digital illustrations, which resemble cut paper–style art, depict the tan-skinned child sitting down to a seder with their parents (one of whom is Black, the other of whom is light-skinned and wearing a yarmulke); on the next page, the youth jumps rope with their parents during a backyard barbecue where the African American flag flies high. Though the singsong text often prioritizes rhyming above content, the book’s thoughtful letter to readers, discussion guide, and bibliography provide ample opportunity for young readers to deepen their exploration of family diversity. This title is a worthy addition to classrooms, public libraries, and personal collections. The characters throughout are diverse in skin tone, ability, and cultural background. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The many configurations of families are on brilliant display here in all their joyful variation. (Picture book. 5-10)
DIPER ÖVERLÖDE
Kinney, Jeff
Amulet/Abrams (224 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4197-6294-9
Series: Diary of a Wimpy Kid, 17

The Wimpy Kid returns for his 17th volume.

Greg’s older brother, Rodrick, has longed to become a rock superstar, and his band, Löded Diper, is starting to generate some heat. At least, that’s what Rodrick thinks. Greg is a bit more skeptical about Löded Diper’s looming success but is just interested enough to catalog the band’s efforts to gain enough notoriety to win the Battle of the Bands as Metallichuahua, Rodrick’s idols, did when they were starting out. Setbacks abound, including late nights, a swindling night club owner, band infighting, and financial struggles, accompanied by an endless parade of diaper jokes and toilet humor. The book will be fine enough for die-hard Wimpy Kid readers, but even the biggest fans of the Heffley clan will find this one doesn’t live up to previous series high points. Rodrick has long been the weakest character in the Wimpy Kid canon, a one-dimensional lout who was never developed as well as the other Heffleys or even some tertiary characters. This book is squarely placed upon Rodrick’s shoulders, and there just isn’t enough there for him to make it pop. The rambling series of misfortunes becomes cumbersome after a while. The book is a swing for the long-running series—an attempt to center a long-neglected character—but unfortunately the effort strikes out.

A commendable effort that nevertheless misses the mark. (Graphic/fiction hybrid. 8-12)

LOVE MADE ME MORE
Kosinski, Colleen Rowan
Illus. by Sonia Sánchez
Two Lions (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Dec. 13, 2022
978-1-3420-0620-0

A square of colorful paper becomes a cherished lifelong treasure.

A boy with brown skin and brown hair makes origami with a loving older adult who has tan skin and black hair. The boy folds a crane out of orange, white, and blue paper, a recurrent color motif. The boy’s imagination brings the crane to life, and soon they are inseparable. With Kosinski’s concise, expressive prose (“I am his Origami Crane, and he is My Boy”), the crane narrates their poignant friendship. During times of sadness (when, for instance, it’s implied the beloved elderly adult has died), the crane offers comfort to the grieving boy; during a scary storm, the crane brings solace. Time passes, and the boy meets a girl with dark brown skin and dark hair who becomes his wife. The crane initially experiences jealousy at being replaced before finding renewed purpose with their new baby boy. Sánchez’s eye-catching digital illustrations, rendered in a vivid palette of warm reds, oranges, and yellows as well as cool blues, present striking angles reminiscent of the paper crane’s folds. A loose line and effective use of light and shadow draw in readers and invite repeated viewings. This storyline selection may encourage both questions about growing up and the role of a child’s treasures in their changing lives.

A visually and narratively compelling tale of childhood friendships that evolve and grow. (Picture book. 3-8)

FINDING PAPA
Krans, Angela Pham
Illus. by Thi Bui
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-06-306096-8

A family separated reunites in a new home and country. Mai loves spending time with her father, especially when they play a game called the crocodile chomp. When Papa leaves their Vietnam village in search of a new home, Mama and Mai are left behind waiting until they, too, pack and leave. They wade through waters and travel by boat and through new lands in the hope of reuniting with Papa. In this hard and hopeful history, author Krans and illustrator Bui draw from their own childhood journeys from Vietnam to America in, respectively, the early 1980s and late 1970s. Krans’ prose gently helps young readers understand concepts such as missing loved ones and displacement. Repeated phrasing and recurring elements (crocodiles, mango trees, goodbyes) create a lyrical, compelling narrative and read-aloud. The “CHOMP! CHOMP!” of the crocodile game, which reappears in various situations, particularly evokes an array of emotions, ending in a poignant reunion. Bui’s art, with its intimate portraits of family moments, is full of tenderness and expression. With minimal strokes, faces speak volumes. Backgrounds range from warm-hued dirt roads and verdant rice paddies to stormy waters navigated by crowded boat. When the trio reunite, the bustling American city backdrop fades to abstraction and the family takes the focus. While the story does not explicitly reveal the circumstances leading to the family’s journey, the author’s and illustrator’s notes provide historical context and personal anecdotes. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An affecting story of courage and hope in hardship. (Picture book. 4-8)
A blazing superpower propels seventh grader Aly into a firestorm of trouble.

Aly Theland is stuck being the helpful, unsung middle child. Whether she’s helping her 9-year-old brother, Simon, with a bully or calming her older sister, Rachael, Aly is the family peacekeeper. At her private school she tries to be invisible and avoid trouble until one day when her anger erupts in science class, engulfing her lab table—and sexist, insulting lab partner—in flames. Fires dog Aly as she struggles to control her growing temper, dealing with her nasty ex-best friend and lots of unwanted attention. Rachael tries to help her figure out what’s going on as fiery incidents at home and at school plague Aly. A surprise twist changes everything, and quick-witted Aly must save the day. Characters are minimally described: Main characters seem to default to White; names cue some ethnic diversity in the background cast. Krovatin presents readers and the push-pull of a child growing up is nicely depicted. An engagingly suspenseful story that will engender sympathy. The family dynamics, particularly the sibling and mother-daughter relationships, are well crafted. The Theland siblings support and taunt each other in equal measure, and the push-pull of a child growing up is nicely depicted. An explosive and well-earned surprise entertains while the open-ended, movieworthy ending will leave readers wanting more.

A scary and surprising cinematic horror story. (Paranormal thriller 9-12)

**HAVE A SLICE DAY**

*Krulik, Nancy*

Illus. by Charlie Alder

Pixel+Ink (96 pp.)

$12.99 | Jan. 3, 2023

978-1-64595-033-2

Chirpy the chick stows away on the school bus with a new feathered friend to learn about pizza…and, oh yes, arithmetic.

Though she avoids the attention of the racially diverse (and surprisingly oblivious) class, Chirpy sees addition, counting tally marks by groups, and fractions demonstrated before the children race out to recess, leaving 10 delectable pizza scraps for her to divide with her relentlessly curious companion Quackers the duckling. Some of that arithmetic comes in handy later when Chirpy heroically faces down Clucky, a bully who has been hogging the feeder, to show her aed fellow chicks how to divide the feed into equal piles so that everyone gets a fair share. Krulik loads her 10 easily digestible chapters with puns and jokes as well as nuggets of learning and caps the episode with a recipe for pizza muffins. Alder’s illustrations, monochrome with yellow highlights, feature a table showing different styles of tally marks commonly used in various parts of the world as well as images of cute chicks (and duckies). Chirpy is distinguished from the other nestlings by her rallying cry—“Chirp chirp cha-re!”—and the bow on her head decorated in mathematical symbols.

**STEM-ware, barnyard style, with a bit of math-odical problem-solving.** (cast profiles) (Animal fiction 7-9)

**DIM SUM, HERE WE COME!**

*Lam, Maple*

Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)

$18.99 | Jan. 3, 2023

978-0-06-239698-3

It’s dim sum time! Every Sunday, a child’s family meets at a dim sum restaurant, and right from the first page (or even the delectable endpapers), the excitement is palpable. This is going to be a full-on experience. Bright watercolor illustrations outlined lightly with colored pencil offer a charming view of this apparently Chinese extended family of a dozen members. The narrator exudes enthusiasm with expressive dot eyes and a wide mouth as they greet everyone and enter the restaurant. There’s a wait, but Uncle Irvin takes the cousins around the restaurant to see the good-fortune kumquat plant, the good-luck cat statue, and the fish tank. Then it’s time to eat. There’s jasmine tea and carts stacked high with bamboo baskets full of food—too many dim sum options to choose from. Lam’s love of both dim sum and family is infectious, and she deftly weaves cultural details into the story, such as family members tapping their fingers to thank Uncle Jeremy for refilling hot tea for everyone. “Tap tap tap! Tap tap tap! Tapping your finger on the table means thank you.” Grandma also teaches the child to wait their turn for the Lazy Susan. The spread listing every person it passes on its way around is delightfully suspenseful, worth the char siu bun at the end. Every small pleasure of this outing seems thrilling, but there’s also a comfortable ease to this family, shown in all their loving ways. (This book was reviewed digitally.) Delicious. (Picture book 4-8)
SUPERMOMS!
Lang, Heather & Jamie Harper
Illus. by Jamie Harper
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$17.99 | March 7, 2023
Series: Animal Heroes, 1

Mothers in the animal kingdom have surprising superpowers. This lively riff on superheroes, the first in a projected new series of science books, explores the mothering habits of 18 different animal species. These animal supermoms have been loosely grouped into categories. Some, like groundhogs, make good homes for their offspring. Others, like alligators and wolf spiders, carry them in surprising ways. Some, like the giant Pacific octopus, are superprotective. And animals like river otters and bottlenose dolphins teach their little ones important skills. Each species is introduced in a panel or series of panels, with cartoon illustrations of the family in its habitat and a line of text describing the mother’s behavior. (“A giraffe mom kicks to protect her calf.”) Speech bubbles carry imagined commentary, mostly from the youngsters. (“Take that!” says an impressed giraffe calf as Mom fends off some predatory hyenas.) A final spread identifies each mother by name and superpower (“super determined” penguin, “super sneaky” piping plover, “super caring” orangutan). Using speech bubbles again, each mother describes where she lives and what she eats and offers a surprising way of teaching her offspring. For young readers who like learning about the animal kingdom, this work offers a pleasing variety. A page of backmatter provides extensive options—books, videos, and websites—for further exploration, and the authors promise further resources in their own websites. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

For Mother’s Day or any day, an appealing take on animal factoids. (Informational picture book. 3-7)

THE FIRE OF STARS
Larson, Kirsten W.
Illus. by Katherine Roy
Chronicle Books (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 28, 2023

In parallel plotlines, two stars are born—one to flare in space and another sort on Earth to shed light on how.

In celestial deeps, illustrator Roy portrays dust and dirt gradually coalescing into a cloud that whirs ever more violently and at last ignites. Meanwhile, in side-by-side foreground scenes, a British child who thrills at the “lightning bolt of discovery” attendant on close observations of the natural world around her persistently chases that love through schools that discourage girls and women from such pursuits...all the way to the Harvard College Observatory. There she finds not only kindred female spirits, but also astronomical evidence leading to a blinding flash of insight about what stars are made of and in what proportions. Along with adding more detail about both the stellar career of Cecilia Payne, 25 years old when she made her revolutionary discovery in 1925, and about star formation in an afterward, Larson makes explicit her message to readers who burn to find out and to understand. “Cecilia proved not only what makes a star but also what makes a star scientist: curiosity, passion, hard work, and belief in oneself.” The swirling, whirling vortex cuts a dramatic figure in Roy’s glimmering starscapes; in the overset panels, Payne and her fellow students and associates, all White presenting, are drawn with sketchy grace in period dress and settings. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A luminous thematic pairing. (timeline) (Picture-book biography. 7-9)

BREAKING THE MOLD
Changing the Face of Climate Science
Levy, Dana Alison
Holiday House (224 pp.)
$22.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-0-8234-4971-2
Series: Books for a Better Earth

An inviting, inclusive introduction to notable figures in a critical field.

This book shows that environmental scientists no longer are limited by outdated stereotypes. The informative assemblage introduces 16 practitioners who demonstrate the value added to science by increased diversity in researchers’ backgrounds and life experiences. Two Native Hawaiians concerned with oceanography bookend the collection: Cliff Kapono and Kelly Luis. Kapono uses analytical chemistry to study the effects of ocean waste on swimmers’ and surfers’ microbiomes worldwide. Luis utilizes satellite images to determine what the colors of the ocean can reveal about important environmental changes. Readers also meet Anita Marshall (Choctaw), a geologist with a mobility disability who pushes back against ableism; Lila Leatherman, a nonbinary forest scientist who uses remote sensing technology; Marshall Shepherd, an African American meteorologist who worked at NASA; and Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist who is also an evangelical Christian. Their life stories both highlight the challenges the subjects faced in education and professional advancement as well as the ways their diverse perspectives and life experiences have enriched the progress of research in their fields and their mentorship of students. Ample color photos show the scientists in their work environments, and extensive sidebars explain related subjects and offer advice for readers. A final chapter introduces seven environmentally active nonscientists from around the world. The lively design breaks up the smoothly written text, emphasizing important points.

Unusually attractive and intriguing. (DIY activities, bibliography, source notes, photo credits, index) (Nonfiction. 10-14)
At every turn, Little Hippo says thank you by declaring, “You’re Ms. Maisie and Saxophone Joe, a grumpy, disabled war veteran, Enly’s mother, could do with more nuanced portrayal. Enly is Horned Rhino removes a log blocking the way, and Long Neck Big Hairy Gorilla offers bananas to the hungry duo. Great Pinky is cued Black.

Giraffe stretches her long neck as a barrier as a train rumbles by. Giant Crocodile helps fill the truck with sand—“snap! snap!” A fund, especially for music. But maybe Enly can earn the cash out who the lucky little cubs are, young readers will have to wait that today is “a good day to be a truck driver.”

In this latest series installment, the titular character decides to make money to attend music camp. When Enly Wu Lewis’ best friend, Pinky, shows him a flyer for a music-themed summer camp, Enly is determined to attend. It’s his chance to learn more than just the church songs and show tunes in his piano teacher’s repertoire and to become a musician like his late father. It’s an uphill battle, though—$2,800 for a two-week camp is out of the question. There’s no way his mother would divert any potential savings from his brother’s college fund, especially for music. But maybe Enly can earn the cash by busking with his keyboard. After a rough start with a new instrument (a melodica) and a possible lottery ticket payout, he might just make a dent in the camp costs. In this fast-moving tale, Liu explores the push and pull of dreams and circumstance. Readers will connect with idealistic Enly and his drive to pursue music despite the obstacles. A single parent in an increasingly gentrifying city, Enly’s mom is focused on day-to-day life and an economic path for her children. Ultimately, the family meets in the middle. Secondary characters like elderly piano teacher Ms. Maisie and Saxophone Joe, a grumpy, disabled war veteran, show the support found in community, though they, particularly Enly’s mother, could do with more nuanced portrayal. Enly is biracial (his mother is Chinese; his father was White), while Pinky is cued Black.

A quick-paced coming-of-age story exploring music and family expectations. (Fiction. 9-12)

In this latest series installment, the titular character decides that today is “a good day to be a truck driver.” Accompanied by his monkey sidekick, Little Hippo is on a mission to take sand to the little cubs—“vroom! vroom!” To find out who the lucky little cubs are, young readers will have to wait a bit. Meanwhile, Little Hippo gets plenty of help along the way. Giant Crocodile helps fill the truck with sand—“snap! snap!” A herd of zebras make way so Little Hippo can get through, and Big Hairy Gorilla offers bananas to the hungry duo. Great Horned Rhino removes a log blocking the way, and Long Neck Giraffe stretches her long neck as a barrier as a train rumbles by. At every turn, Little Hippo says thank you by declaring, “You’re the best!” Eventually, the sand is delivered, and after some play, Little Hippo and the monkey head back home, where two moms await with reassuring hugs. The terrain the duo traverse is filled with fantastical vegetation with a Seussian vibe, the charming illustrations rendered in bright, saturated colors. Young readers will easily follow this uncomplicated adventure and delight at finding out how it wraps up. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Simple and sweet. (Picture book. 2-4)

An up-close treat for bird-watchers that also contains a message about resilience. Gorgeous illustrations of birds, mostly in flight, capture readers right from the front endpaper, which features a feather across the bottom of the page, birds of all sizes and types flying up from its depths in whimsical imagery. Lowell’s artwork stops just shy of being Audubon-realistic, the eyes of her birds connecting with readers. Most spreads feature a single bird species, all of them helpfully labeled: Eastern bluebird, Canada goose, northern saw-whet owl, northern cardinal, and bald eagle are among the 10 featured. But while the illustrations are the stars, the text will be a letdown, the language and ideas far beyond the reach of a typical picture-book audience: “Catch the current of a bird’s wing. / Dance with hope into open skies. // Your wings have found you / in a moment of wonder / and caught you by surprise.” The second half of the book attempts to inspire readers to trust in themselves and their flock, as “the sun always rises to fill your sky.” Backmatter includes a spread with a thumbnail picture and short paragraph of information about each bird species in the book. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Beautiful bird images soar, but the text remains earthbound. (Picture book. 5-8)

In response to a lawyer who insulted his profession, Mali delivered a poem defending the work of teachers on a much-viewed TED Talk; he continues to laud the efforts of educators in this picture book.

The poet speaks about his own experiences with classroom teachers and other school personnel (coaches, crossing guards, drama, music, and art teachers) and notes that “Easy teachers who gave easy tests / are not the teachers I loved the best. // No,
I loved the teachers who made me work hard / in the classroom, / the theater, and the schoolyard. / Those are the teachers who stand out from all the rest.” The book-length poem has some rhyming lines and also includes internal rhyme, assonance, consonance, and repetition, but the verse doesn’t always scan well when read aloud. The stylized, digitally created illustrations appear to have some trompe l’oeil effects and are full of diverse children and teachers, including a child who uses a wheelchair and another who uses crutches. Rainbows are common images: quirkily erupting out of test tubes, providing a background for the art teacher, and playfully flowing among the musical notes streaming from a student’s mouth. The content may not be very original, but the theme and the words will speak to parents and children remembering the best parts of their school experiences. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An ode to educators that will resonate with anyone who has had a memorable teacher. (Picture book: 5-8)

**MR. LINCOLN SITS FOR HIS PORTRAIT**

*The Story of a Photograph That Became an American Icon*

Marcus, Leonard S.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (128 pp.)

$19.99 | Jan. 3, 2023

978-0-374-30348-8

A provocative study of Abraham Lincoln as a masterly media manipulator.

Infusing his typically clear and well-reasoned discourse with modern-sounding language, Marcus presents Lincoln as an early adopter of new technology, being one of the first public figures to understand the power of photography and who “loved the camera” enough to leave over 100 surviving portraits. Based on a broad array of period illustrations, looking at six iconic photos taken in Matthew Brady’s Washington, D.C., studio on Feb. 9, 1864 (and, in greater focus, at one in particular), he offers a visually based overview of the 16th president’s political career—from the earliest likeness in 1846 and an 1860 Brady shot that boosted his first national campaign by going “viral” both as a carte de visite and “morphed” into a line engraving for Harper’s Weekly—on to post-assassination memorial images. (The author makes no mention of various and possibly spurious deathbed photos.) Aside from confusingly characterizing the Emancipation Proclamation as “a watershed moment in human history” a few pages after dubbing it just “a symbolic statement” like the finishing of the Capitol’s dome, Marcus offers readers deeply enlightening views of presidential achievements and daily routines, of the era’s unfinished and chaotic Washington, D.C., and of Brady and other artists who depicted the president in various media. Everyone in the pictures is White except in occasional racially mixed engravings of crowd scenes.

A fresh angle offering yet another reason to regard Lincoln as our presidential G.O.A.T. (timelines, bibliography, notes, photo credits, index) (Biography. 11-14)

**SISTERS IN SCIENCE**

*Marie Curie, Bronia Dłuska, and the Atomic Power of Sisterhood*

Marshall, Linda Elovitz

Illus. by Anna Balbusso & Elena Balbusso

Knopf (40 pp.)


978-0-593-37758-1

978-0-593-37759-8 PLB

A strong familial bond is the true star of this dual biography. The life of Marie Curie is viewed through the lens of her relationship with her sister and fellow trailblazer Bronia Dłuska. Raised in Poland, the two were determined to have an education. After participating in secret classes at “the Flying University” (schooling that traveled from home to home), the sisters made a pact. Marie would support Bronia’s education at the Sorbonne, and, once Bronia had graduated and gotten a job, she’d do the same for Marie. Marie almost backed out of her schooling when her turn came, and only her older sister’s urging and support reminded her of their agreement. The story delves into Marie’s accomplishments but never strays far from Bronia, showing how these two lives consistently informed and relied upon one another. Appropriately illustrated by the Balbusso twins (sisters themselves), the artwork is a glorious amalgamation of math, science, and illustration. Everything from atoms to numerals and even radiation symbols are worked seamlessly into the highly detailed images. The sole fly in the ointment is that neither the main text nor the backmatter makes a single mention of the dangers of radiation, leading one to think that Marie’s discovery had no price to pay. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Genius doesn’t come out of nowhere, as this loving paean to strong sisterhood exemplifies. (timeline, bibliography, author’s note) (Informational picture book. 6-9)

**OPAL’S SPRINGTIME BIRDHOUSE**

Mattheis, Emily

Illus. by Albert Arrayás

Yeehoo Press (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Feb. 22, 2023

978-1-953458-48-3

Onomatopoeia relentlessly pursues some industrious campers as they strive to create the most imaginative birdhouse—ever.

From the “pitter-patter” of Damien’s roof to the “cling-clang-jingle jangle” of Simon’s bells, noise trails the diverse crew as birdhouses sprout up everywhere. Everywhere except in Opal’s workspace. No matter how hard she tries to come up with an innovative design, the light-skinned young girl ends up giving up on one idea after another until she decides to page through the books the counselors have left on the table for inspiration. She excitedly discovers that different birds inhabit different
Who wants a ribbon for “Good Effort”? She installs her birdhouse in a tree but feels frustrated, tossing the ribbon out her window. Hey, wait—is that a bluebird in Opal’s birdhouse? Mathies’ short, readable paragraphs follow Opal from the highs of expectation to the lows of defeat—and back up again to the satisfaction of having created a working birdhouse. Arrayas’ perky illustrations populate the story with a diverse cast of energetic characters. A short appendix features some bird habitats from around the world.

This encouraging exploration of perseverance reveals that we all have plenty of imagination—and much to offer. (Picture book. 4-8)

I AM NOT AN OCTOPUS
McLaughlin, Eoin
Illus. by Marc Boutavant
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 14, 2023
978-1-338-2505-1

What’s a “regular guy” with eight arms doing on land?
Imagine bumping into a “regular guy with a few extra arms who happens to love tuna” at the grocery store. His name is Terry, and he is not an octopus. If he were, he’d be in the sea, unless he were afraid of water, which he is “absolutely not.” But an encounter with lawn sprinklers reveals the truth. Terry still denies being an octopus but admits that he would love to learn to swim and asks readers to teach him. At the pool, Terry is full of questions. “Do I keep my mouth open or shut? Should I try to sink to the bottom or float on the top?” At the pool’s edge, Terry cuts a terrified figure. “Help! What do I do? You’re SUPPOSED TO BE TEACHING ME!” Luckily, Terry is a natural, and he finally owns his octopus identity. The interactive text is dramatic and funny—and sure to affirm readers with their own worries. The palette of the cartoonish images changes as the story progresses, from greens and browns on land to decidedly aqua poolside colors to vibrant coral reef hues under the sea. Be sure to look for the numeral 8, hidden in plain sight in many illustrations. Human characters are mostly light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An engaging and humorous lesson about diving in and facing your worst fears. (Picture book. 3-6)

SUNNY AND OSWALDO
Melleby, Nicole
Illus. by Alexandra Colombo
Algonquin (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-64375-095-8

Pets can be…complicated. When Sunny’s father adopts a scruffy gray cat he names Oswaldo, Sunny is less than thrilled. Sunny, who has light, freckled skin and straight reddish-brown hair, doesn’t like the cat’s name, his grooming habits, or the way he hisses at her. But Sunny’s father loves Oswaldo, so Sunny tolerates him—even when it seems like Oswaldo gets special privileges that Sunny doesn’t. Oswaldo often disappears all day, returning before bedtime—until one day he doesn’t. Sunny is initially happy, but her father explains that Oswaldo’s life pre-adoption was tough and they need to be a little patient with him. “That doesn’t mean he’s not a good cat. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t love him.” Thankfully Oswaldo eventually reappears, and both he and Sunny become a little more tolerant of each other. This well-paced story tells a realistic story of an adopted pet with grace and light humor. Families with strong-willed pets will love meeting Oswaldo, and those considering adopting a new furry friend from a shelter will find this an excellent way to remind younger family members that some animals, especially those who have endured difficult pasts, may be slow to warm up. The artwork has an exaggerated, cartoonish quality, though it also turns poignant; the final illustration of Sunny and Oswaldo hugging makes clear that even the most stubborn of us—human and pet—can change our opinions when we consider others. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Purrfectly charming! (Picture book. 4-7)

NO WORLD TOO BIG
Young People Fighting Global Climate Change
Ed. by Metcalf, Lindsay H., Keila V. Daw & Jeanette Bradley
Illus. by Jeanette Bradley
Charlesbridge (40 pp.)
$18.99 | March 14, 2023
978-1-62354-313-6

Profiles of 12 young climate activists and three grassroots groups, matched to painted portraits and original poems.

Similar in concept to No Voice Too Small: Fourteen Young Americans Making History (2020), by the same creators, but taking a worldwide perspective, these entries highlight successful initiatives undertaken by school-age children in locales from the Marshall Islands to Ukraine and the Americas. Though Greta Thunberg—flashing her magnificent scowl in Bradley’s digital pastel—is the subject of one of the early entries, the other chosen activists will be mostly unfamiliar to readers. The poems are largely identified as free verse, such as one by Traci Sorell that acrostically spells out the name of Indigenous Brazilian tree
The editors spread prompts for both individual and collective action throughout and add capsule biographies of the poets and descriptions of each kind of poem at the close. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Inspiring examples for fledgling defenders of the environment.** *(glossary) (Informational picture book/poetry. 6-12)*

**HOPE IS A HOP**
Moore, Katrina
Illus. by Melissa Iwai
Dial Books (40 pp.)
$18.99 | March 7, 2023
978-0-593-32385-4

Eva must find new hope after a furry friend ruins their garden.

The protagonist starts a garden with a heart full of hope. Beginning with several tiny seeds, the child cares for the garden. With the help of a parent, Eva even makes a scarecrow to protect it from a hungry bunny. But when the bunny returns to munch on the garden and the cat chases it away—making a mess in the process—Eva is overcome by anger and sadness, running into the nearby woods. Wrapped up in a hug from a parent, Eva hears a soft heartbeat (that and Eva’s mother’s burgeoning belly are hints of the new sibling we eventually see). Following a trail of petals that the bunny left behind, Eva makes a beautiful discovery—a passel of little bunnies. Filled with forgiveness and new hope, Eva starts the garden again. This charming story is about resilience in the face of challenge. Eva’s experience is a wonderful example of how a change in perspective can offer us renewed hope. The bright, expressive illustrations add context to the lovely, lyrical verse. Eva presents as biracial with light brown skin and curly black hair; one parent presents as Black, with medium brown skin and curly black hair, while Eva’s mother has light skin and straight black hair. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

*A sweet springtime story of new beginnings.* *(Picture book. 3-7)*

**VIRTUAL ME**
Morris, Chad & Shelly Brown
Illus. by Garth Brumner
Shadow Mountain (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-63993-053-1

Junior high students reinvent themselves when they attend virtual school. Amid a pandemic (Covid-19 is implied), three alternating narrators enroll in Balderstein Virtual Junior High. But this year, remote learning packs a twist: Students attend classes via virtual reality and interact with one another by creating avatars...or disguises. Bradley Horvath is fat and, thanks to bullies, has had trouble making friends. But as pink-haired K-pop fan Daebak, maybe he’ll impress his classmates with his cool dance moves. Lacrosse star Hunter Athanasopoulos appears as himself—but his long-haired blond avatar and competitive attitude hide his worries about losing his hair to alopecia. Edelle Dahan-Miller was a popular trendsetter at school thanks to social media, but her mother insists she present herself sans filters after learning of a misogynistic student website that ranked girls’ appearances. Now unrecognizable and calling herself Vanya, who is Edelle without her friends’ admiration? When a gaming tournament forces the trio to work together, they make surprising discoveries about themselves and each other. Though the ending is somewhat pat and the characters somewhat two-dimensional, the protagonists’ evolving views of friendship and self-acceptance will resonate with readers who struggle to be—or to find—their true selves. Warmly supportive parents are a welcome bonus. Edelle is Palestinian and assumed White; Hunter’s surname suggests Greek heritage; and Bradley is cued White. Secondary characters are racially diverse; one has cystic fibrosis. Illustrations not seen.

*A timely, feel-good tale of learning to accept oneself and others.* *(Fiction. 8-12)*

**SHIPWRECK ISLAND**
Murray, Struan
Harper/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Dec. 13, 2022
978-0-06-304316-9
Series: Orphans of the Tide, 2

A hoped-for refuge becomes anything but for two tween fugitives in this muddled middle volume. Somehow surviving a three-month voyage on a makeshift raft over a flooded world, Ellie and Seth make landfall at last just in time to be swept up in a power struggle between a lonely young queen and a smooth-talking aristocrat. Worse yet, the affictions met in the previous episode have followed them—Seth, a reborn god of the sea, remains tortured by ghostly voices and fragmentary memories, while Ellie is both saddled with a malign spirit insistently pressuring her to make evil choices and dogged by a crazed Inquisitor obsessed with literally burning that spirit out of her. With all this, it’s no surprise that Murray’s efforts to lighten the load with a new ally’s pet kitten or comedic touches like giving Ellie a real gift for saying the wrong thing will likely fall flat for readers, as will the local queen’s startlingly sudden shift at the climax from friendly but overwhelmed adolescent to brutally pragmatic monarch. Not to mention an island setting that, obligatory map notwithstanding, becomes small enough to get around in no time depending on the plot’s twists and turns, continuity breaks that have characters suddenly
rearranged or apparently endowed with more than two hands, and a head-scratcher of a closing scene. The island’s population reads largely White.

_A shambolic, patchwork jumble._ (Fantasy. 9-12)

OUTSIDE AMELIA’S WINDOW

_Nastro, Caroline_

_Illus. by Anca Sandu Budisan_

_Two Lions (40 pp.)_

_$17.99 | March 28, 2023_

_978-1-5420-2785-4_

Birds inspire a girl to make new friends.

When two children move in next door, Amelia doesn’t go over to play despite being “a bit lonely.” Because of an unspecified condition that requires her to use a manual wheelchair, she’s afraid she can’t play “like she used to.” One day, a bird snatches a ribbon from her treasure box to pad its nest. Amelia names its chicks Penelope and Osiris and learns the birds are redstarts; their migration takes them “past the Appalachian Mountains, across the Gulf of Mexico to the Greater Antilles, over the Mayan ruins in the Yucatán to the mangrove forests in Venezuela.” Amelia watches the chicks learn to fly. “If they can do it,” she thinks, “perhaps so can I?” When the birds depart, Amelia makes her own brave journey. As she swings, plays in a wheelchair-accessible treehouse, and makes snow angels in a season-shifting montage interspersed with the redstarts’ flight, she joyfully “soar[s] high in the sky just like the birds” with “her new friends, Peter and Maggie.” Budisan’s delicate but vivid pencil-and-watercolor illustrations subtly convey Amelia’s emotions and lend a dreamlike feel to the redstarts’ rhythmically described migration, quietly enhancing Nastro’s simple, gently encouraging text. Fledgling ornithologists will particularly appreciate the notebook-style bird facts scattered across the endpapers. Magpie appears tan-skinned, while Peter is lighter-skinned. Amelia presents as Asian. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An uplifting tale of birds and bravery. (Picture book. 4-8)

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC KIDS DINOSAUR ATLAS

_National Geographic Kids_

_National Geographic Kids (128 pp.)_

_$24.99 | Sept. 6, 2022_

_9781426372797_

Realistically depicted dinos strike alert poses in prehistoric settings in this overview of when and where they and some of their cousin creatures lived.

After opening with big-picture views of our planet’s history and a timeline punctuated by massive extinction events, the two-part presentation first introduces representative species from each period of the Mesozoic era in turn, then goes on to highlight select fossils discovered in modern times at major sites on each continent—including Antarctica. Following a roundup of dino extinction theories and a gallery of prehistoric birds other than _Archaeopteryx_, an alphabetically arranged table of dinosaur information (name, geological period, length, and more) kicks off a flurry of useful resources (including apps) and other backmatter. Expertly angled to show brightly colored skin patterns and plumage, distinctive physical features, and (especially) teeth to good advantage, the prehistoric cast shares page space with blocks of simply phrased descriptive commentary, easy-to-read maps, site photos, and portraits of paleontologists, including several of color, at work.

Unusually well organized, with plenty of appeal for both casual and confirmed dinophiles. (glossary, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction browsing/reference. 7-11)

I REALLY, REALLY LOVE YOU SO

_Newson, Karl_

_Illus. by Duncan Beedie_

_Tiger Tales (32 pp.)_

_$18.99 | Jan. 3, 2023_

_978-1-66430-018-7_

A young animal with huge eyes and outstretched arms declares their love in many ways.

In rhyming text, a little animal—possibly a ring-tailed lemur—muses on how best to show their love (“I’d like to find a special way / to show the love in me…”). They come up with a number of outlandish ideas on their own (wrestle a crocodile, climb the biggest mountain, etc.) and consider making a gift before hitting on the idea of copying other animals to see how they convey their love. After a narrow escape from an annoyed bear, the narrator describes the feeling of love and reiterates the titular message, hugging a grown-up of the same species with homemade gifts (now completed, despite earlier frustration) scattered around. It’s a familiar premise, but the silliness of the different scenarios cuts what could otherwise be cloying sweetness. Some illustrations are full-bleed, with backgrounds of either bright solid colors or different imagined scenes (ocean, mountaintop, jungle); there is enough visual detail to hold readers’ interest on multiple rereads but not so much that anything important would be lost in a larger group read-aloud. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Nothing groundbreaking but a sweet choice nonetheless. (Picture book. 0-3)
A CASE WITH A BANG
Nilsson, Ulf
Illus. by Gitte Spee
Trans. by Julia Marshall
Gecko Press (111 pp.)
$18.99 | March 7, 2023
978-1-77657-487-2
Series: Detective Gordon

There are scoundrels on the loose in Chief Detective Buffy's police district!

Former Detective Gordon (a toad) has passed on his title to his former assistant Buffy (a mouse). When forest resident Badger hears “brumbling and scorching” in the night and goes out to find his trash can destroyed, Detective Buffy is on the case. Meanwhile, Gordon, who still lives at the police headquarters with Buffy, is looking after a young squirrel named Helmer who wants to join the police when he grows up. While investigating, Buffy is injured. Gordon and the other forest animals rescue her, and everyone stays at police headquarters for the night…but little Helmer goes investigating on his own and makes a surprising friend. Beloved, award-winning Swedish author Nilsson passed away in 2021, making this (likely) the final adventure for Detective Buffy and former Detective Gordon. A little more fantastical than its four predecessors, this volume is just as charming, gentle, wry, and entertaining as the rest of the series and anything that was created by A.A. Milne or Kenneth Grahame. Spee’s squiggly colored-pencil drawings again bring everything to life.

Sadly the last but a fine addition to a fine series. (map of Buffy's police district) (Mystery. 6-10)

AN INVITATION TO PASSOVER
Olitzky, Kerry & Deborah Bodin Cohen
Illus. by Maria Kolker
Kalaniot Books (32 pp.)
$19.99 | Feb. 14, 2023
9789861965077

When Hannah’s extended family can’t attend the Passover seder this year, she invites her friends to celebrate with her.

Hannah, tan-skinned with brown hair, wants to create invitations that will excite her friends—but what should they say? Mom says that Passover is a celebration of spring and new beginnings and a time to remember Jewish history. Dad talks about the celebration of freedom for the Israelites and for everyone today and, of course, the delicious and meaningful foods. Hannah creates four invitations, each representing one of those concepts. Her diverse friends and their families bring special gifts that embrace those ideas and reflect their own cultures. Sammy brings a kite to celebrate spring as they do in India. Ha-Joon brings Korean kimchi, carefully made kosher, to match the bitter herbs of the seder plate. Monique brings song sheets for “Go Down, Moses,” a traditional African American spiritual, to celebrate freedom. Rina, Hannah’s friend from Hebrew school, brings homemade matzah (Rina’s mother notes that when she was a child in Moscow, it was forbidden by the government). Each aspect of the seder is explained, and Hannah lovingly weaves her friends’ gifts into the Passover story. Depicting smiling, hugging characters, Kolker’s cheery artwork brims with joy. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet and tender holiday tale celebrating friendship and diversity. (information on the story of Passover, glossary) (Picture book. 4-9)

WAKE UP, TRUCKS!
Parachini, Jodie
Illus. by Teresa Bellón
Tiger Tales (32 pp.)
$18.99 | March 7, 2023
978-1-66430-023-1

Meet trucks of all types in this action-packed story!

At the beginning of the day, a bevy of anthropomorphic trucks and construction equipment awaken to prepare for their busy day building a city: “Diggers like to eat and eat / when breakfast is a tasty treat. Eggs and toast and bacon? / YUCK! / THAT’S not food to feed a truck! / Shurp some oil–power BLAST! / Now we’re set for driving FAST!” The book reminds readers that different trucks have different responsibilities: Dump trucks carry heavy materials, excavators dig into the ground, cranes lift up materials safely, and so on. At the end of the day, the trucks are cleaned and get ready for the night. Caregivers annoyed at the emphasis on petroleum-based fuel earlier in the book may be slightly mollified by an image of a cement truck plugged into an electrical charger. The story adds nothing new to the canon of transportation-themed titles, but for young readers obsessed with trucks and construction sites, the book will be a welcome read. Librarians and educators will appreciate the vibrant digital illustrations that can be seen from the back of a storytime room. The bold colors and geometric art make up for the lack of originality by presenting readers with a vibrant world—one where pinks and fuchsias appear at home on a construction site. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

It treads familiar ground but does so well enough. (Picture book. 3-5)

THE BOY WHO TRIED TO SHRINK HIS NAME
Parappukkaran, Sandhya
Illus. by Michelle Pereira
Abrams (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-1-4197-6158-4

Names matter. Zimdalamashkermishkada might be a mouthful, and it may even trip up the bearer of the name. It
Twenty-four haiku / link flowers and mindfulness / in every season.

In the same spirit as her _My Mindful A to Zen: 26 Wellbeing Haiku for Happy Little Minds_ (2021), Patel-Sage addresses readers with haiku that only seem to be about flowers: “Snowdrop,” for instance—“Pushing up through snow / these delicate flowers soar, huge and proud, by book’s end. The writing pops in the moments that break down how Zimdalamashkermishkada learns to embrace his name; the bird hocks, the value of “Borage” as a companion plant is reflected in the intimate glance two young gardeners exchange, and cherry blossoms “gently fall like a / joyful springtime gift” over one child receiving a folded paper crane from another. Along with being racially and culturally diverse, the smiling, wide-eyed cast presents seem unusual: Trees eat squirrels, lava is really cheese, and volcanoes are in fact massive fondue pots. Their father seems skeptical, “But if it’s in a book, if it’s something you read… / then maybe it means that it has to be true.” Taking advice from similarly styled books, the father employs some questionable parenting habits, like feeding the kids candy and ice cream for breakfast and trying to teach 6-year-old Mikayla to drive. Eventually, the family realizes that the books they borrowed were from a “lie-brary” and that “we can’t believe everything that we read.” Cultivating healthy skepticism can be a good thing, but the messaging is off-kilter. Library workers strive to ensure that their books are up to date and don’t contain erroneous information. The American Library Association even offers free webinars to help train the public to stop fake news, so the depiction of
“Speaks to all children with music in their heads while introducing an unjustly little-known pioneer.”

LITTLE ROSETTA AND THE TALKING GUITAR

THE THREE LITTLE GUINEA PIGS
Perl, Erica S.
Illus. by Amy Young
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-374-39004-4

“Three Little Pigs” gets twisted slightly for guinea pig fans. Guinea pig sisters Rosie, Minty, and Pumpkin are old enough to leave home and go live out in the world. But as they adjust to life away from their mom, their fear of foxes prompts them to build themselves homes made of different materials (in this version, hay; cardboard; and leaves, sticks, and carrots). Each of the guinea pigs looks distinct in the warm watercolor illustrations, but their personalities don’t differ much. However, the playful text sometimes rises above the trappings of the story (“Excitedly, they popcorned down the road.” “After a lot of wheeking and woinking, the sisters admired their work”). There’s still the same huffing and puffing and “chinny-chin-chins” of legions of other takes on the tale, but here at least the clever conclusion(hwnded) they popcorned down the road.” “After a lot of wheeking and woinking, the sisters admired their work”). There’s still the same huffing and puffing and “chinny-chin-chins” of legions of other takes on the tale, but here at least the clever conclusion

We cannot tell a lie: This is an alarming misrepresentation of libraries. (Picture book. 5-8)

LITTLE ROSETTA AND THE TALKING GUITAR
Pinkney Barlow, Charnelle
Doubleday (40 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-374-57106-4

A small girl gets a big guitar…and the rest is history.

Pinkney Barlow, third generation of the renowned and artistic Pinkney clan, offers a tribute to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, “Godmother of Rock and Roll,” in swinging words and paper collage scenes featuring a child eagerly absorbing the love and harmonies of her African American community. Having listened to Momma strum a mandolin and danced to music each week with others in her hometown of Cotton Plant, Arkansas, Little Rosetta is thrilled to get a guitar of her very own and is determined to learn how to play it in time for next summer’s church anniversary. She carries it everywhere, listening to the sounds of her town, plucking the strings until her fingers are raw—and, when the time comes, letting loose with pure notes that “poured over the crowd like summer rain washing the dust off a new day.” Angled visual elements and occasional curved lines of narrative give a lively sense of musicality to the presentation, with lengths of actual string on the guitar and unglued paper edges around the dark-skinned human figures to add texture and dimension. Tonya Bolden and R. Gregory Christie take a longer look at Tharpe’s subsequent 50-year career in Rock, Rosetta, Rock! Roll, Rosetta, Roll! (2022), but both of these picture books offer high-stepping views of a child who taught herself how to make a new kind of music, one that “held the story of her people.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Speaks to all children with music in their heads while introducing an unjustly little-known pioneer. (author’s note) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

PALACE OF BOOKS
Polacco, Patricia
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (66 pp.)
$18.99 | March 7, 2023
978-1-5344-5131-5

In this tale based on one of Polacco’s childhood experiences, a kind librarian encourages a girl’s interests.

After the death of Trisha’s grandmother, her grandfather sells the family farm. Trisha’s mother moves her and her brother from the country to a converted coach house rental in Battle Creek, Michigan, until the next school year, when they are set to move to California. At school, Trisha is a little bit of an odd duck with her impressive bird knowledge, and she struggles with reading—these tensions are only barely touched on, though. Librarian Mrs. Creavy nurtures Trisha’s interest in birds by introducing her to John James Audubon’s art. Trisha’s bird drawings impress her classmates enough that they pick a bird theme for their classroom’s open house. Mrs. Creavy also provides the class with tickets for a nearby bird sanctuary, so Trisha can further share her avian adoration—her peers join her in feathered fine art creations, prompting Mrs. Creavy to bring in “the Michigan state chairman of the Audubon bird clubs of America” for the founding of their school’s chapter, with Trisha the first member. The story is sweet but slightly more geared to adult sensibilities than children’s, and it is a touch narratively unbalanced—where it shines the most is in the juxtaposition between the child artists’ charming works and the author/illustrator’s bright, exquisite birds. Most characters, including Trisha and her family, present White. (This book was reviewed digitally.)
As in previous books in the series, five middle school students—Erin, Phoebe, Drew, Izzy, and Melody—prepare for Passover. They discuss forbidden-during-Passover items such as what appear to be dotes, and helpful tips are presented in bite-sized chunks, interdispersed with playful cartoons, charts and drawings, quizzes, exercises to try, and toolboxes full of strategies. The emphasis on and repetition of important ideas make this volume an effective self-advocate. The backmatter includes many helpful resources. Because the series has already addressed social issues, this title has a tighter focus than many similar guides.

A guide for the heavy seas of middle school.

In this fourth volume in the Kid Confident series, a psychologist and an educational therapist team up to offer a manual for the middle school educational voyage. Chapter by chapter, they address readers directly, leading them through concepts like mindset, perseverance, motivation, learning styles and strategies, and practical issues like finding one’s way around a new and larger campus, planning and organizing, and managing stress. As in previous books in the series, five middle school students provide examples. These young people are portrayed as diverse in gender (one uses they/them pronouns) and ethnic background, as well as in their habits, skills, interests, and reactions to typical middle school situations. Their stories go a long way toward making this advice seem relevant. Practical information, anecdotes, and helpful tips are presented in bite-sized chunks, interspersed with playful cartoons, charts and drawings, quizzes, exercises to try, and toolboxes full of strategies. The emphasis on and repetition of important ideas make this volume an effective learning tool. Step by step, the writers lead readers to exercises to try, and toolboxes full of strategies. The emphasis on and repetition of important ideas make this volume an effective self-advocate. The backmatter includes many helpful resources. Because the series has already addressed social issues, this title has a tighter focus than many similar guides.

Useful for both the intended readers and the adults in their lives. (Author’s note) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

Celebrate Passover, buccaneer style. Capt. Drew and a racially diverse pirate crew are getting ready for Passover: swabbing the deck, polishing rails, raising sails, and getting rid of chamez—leavened foods—illustrated as those containing wheat plus other forbidden-during-Passover items such as what appear to be doughnuts, corn, and crackers. Drew explains that matzah will be eaten instead and prepares the seder plate with foods that serve a symbolic function at the festive dinner. All isn’t smooth sailing, however. A heavy storm arises as the crew sits down to eat. Heavy rain, high waves, lightning, and matzah balls rolling down the plank and sinking into the turbulent sea destroy any hope for a shipboard seder. When the ship washes ashore on a tropical island, Captain Drew leads the crew to a house, where they’re welcomed to join the seder hosted by the family living there. All the traditional rituals are observed, and even Drew’s parrot, Bernie, participates. The evening ends pleasantly, with improved weather, and the pirates sail away on calm seas. This is a sweet, original take on the holiday, expressed in lilting rhymes that read and scan well. Children will enjoy the cheerful pirate theme, and Jewish youngsters who understand Passover rituals and traditions will appreciate the textual and depicted nods to recognizable customs. Illustrations are colorful and lively. Drew is light-skinned; the island family is tan-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An enjoyable treat for the holiday. Don’t pass this one over. (Picture book. 4-7)

A somewhat predictable tale enlivened by vivid emotions. (Author’s note) (Science fiction. 8-13)
**WHERE ARE YOUR SHOES, MR. BROWN?**
Rhodes, Justin  
Illus. by Heather Dickinson  
WorthyKids/Ideals (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | March 14, 2023  
978-1-5460-0389-2

Mr. Brown can’t help with farm chores because his shoes are missing—a common occurrence in his household and likely in many readers’ as well. Children will be delighted that the titular Mr. Brown is in fact a child. After Mr. Brown looks in his closet and sorts through his other family members’ shoes with no luck, his father and his siblings help him search the farm. Eventually—after colorful pages that enable readers to spot footwear hiding—the family gives up on their hunt, and Mr. Brown asks to be carried around for the chores. He rides on his father’s shoulders as Papa gets his work done, as seen on a double-page spread of vignettes. The resolution is more of a lesson for the adult readers than for children, a saccharine moment where father and son express their joy that the missing shoes gave them the opportunity for togetherness—with advice for other parents to appreciate those fleeting moments themselves. Though the art is bright and cheerful, taking advantage of the setting, it occasionally is misaligned with the text (for example, the text states that Mr. Brown is wearing his favorite green shirt while the illustration is of a shirt with wide stripes of white and teal blue, which could confuse readers at the point where they’re trying to figure out which family member is Mr. Brown). The family is light-skinned.  
*Pedestrian.* (Picture book. 4-7)

**CECE RIOS AND THE KING OF FEARS**
Rivera, Kaela  
Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022  
978-0-06-321389-0  
Series: Cece Rios, 2

A 13-year-old girl embarks on a supernatural quest to restore her sister’s heartbeat. In *Cece Rios and the Desert of Souls* (2021), Cece saved her sister, Juana, from Devil’s Alley, the magical dimension inhabited by monsters like El Sombrerón and criaturas, humanlike beings who can transform into animals. But Juana has been acting strangely since her return, and it turns out that a piece of her soul is still back in El Sombrerón’s lair. Accompanied by kindhearted criatura friends, Cece embarks on a dangerous trip in search of the Ocean Sanctuary to try to heal her sister’s heart. Tired of waiting to be saved, Juana also secretly sets off to recover the missing piece of her soul. Written in alternating first-person chapters narrated by each of the sisters, the gripping, suspenseful story follows the girls’ parallel journeys through a lush fantasy world that incorporates Mexican, Mayan, and Aztec influences. Danger lurks at every turn, but warm, loving Cece possesses an uncanny knack for finding the humanity inside monsters—supernatural and human alike. Meanwhile, brave, no-nonsense Juana is more than willing to confront any evildoer who dares get in her way with the family’s heirloom fire opal knives. Their journeys see the main characters develop in touching ways, with Cece discovering powerful strengths and Juana befriending and going to great lengths to protect a loyal criatura she’d initially misjudged and mistrusted.  
*Heartfelt, fast-paced, and entertaining.* (glossary) *(Fantasy. 8-14)*

**THIS BOOK IS MY BEST FRIEND**
Robinson, Robin  
Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | Jan. 31, 2023  
978-1-66590-681-4

A picture book about books—and, of course, BFFs. A light-skinned, red-haired child and a South Asian child both reach for the same book in the library. Turns out both kids consider *Factory Friends* their best friend. As the children explain to each other why they each love this book so much, they offer little glimpses into their worlds as well as the one in the pages of the story they have befriended. One child finds the book makes them feel less lonely, especially when they spend hours in the hospital because of their mother’s health issues. For the other child, who has a large and often loud family, the book is a way of disappearing into their own world. Each kid tries to recommend different books for the other, but that doesn’t quite work...until they find a deeply satisfying solution as they spark up a friendship. At times, the text veers toward overexplaining the children’s emotions. However, the gracefully composed illustrations—peppered with speech bubbles, rendered in a muted palette, and alternating effectively between full spreads and vignettes—tell more of the story, offering warm looks at the two characters’ worlds, which are so different and yet each child is seeking the same thing—a friend. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*  
*A tender reminder of what books offer—comfort, escape, and connection.* *(Picture book. 4-7)*
An illustrated book about vaginas and the bodies that have them.

In an ideal world, young people would freely access accurate information about bodies, including those with vaginas. Inspired to fill the deep information gap that exists on this topic, Rodgers, a gynecologist with daughters, has created an educational and empowering book that normalizes change and difference. With inviting sections that reflect genuine questions (“Why do we have vaginas?“ “What’s it supposed to smell like down there?”), Rodgers addresses key topics like puberty, pubic hair, and periods and offers thoughtful discussions of gender identity, consent, and sexting. She acknowledges that some topics may rouse discomfort but enthusiastically asserts, “You own your body! You deserve to understand it so you can be empowered to make decisions about how to take care of it.”

Rodgers’ body-positive tone and Le Large’s inclusive illustrations make for a fun, accessible book that offers readers from any gender an entry point to understanding vaginas, their function, and their care. Highly effective double-page spreads feature a spectrum of vulvas and hymens in different skin tones and shapes and period blood in a range of colors. People depicted are racially diverse, too, and this visual inclusivity underscores Rodgers’ resounding message: Everyone is different, and we can be just like Grandma.

Reinforcing this intergenerational bond is a caring grandfather who feeds and nourishes the family, all the while remaining in the background, allowing grandmother and child to take center stage. Illustrator Flett’s (Cree-Métis) signature, spare style pairs well with author Rodgers’ (Wichita) simple, repetitive text. Readers will infer from the activities mentioned and the visual cues in the illustrations that the family is Native American. Though no specific nation is mentioned, the use of the Wichita word *tokie* (a kind of meat dish) may imply the family is from the same nation as Rogers. All characters depicted have brown skin and straight black hair. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

*A sweet celebration of family, intergenerational bonds, and traditions. (publisher’s note, author’s note, a note on beadwork, glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)*

**THE HUMAN KABOOM**

Rubin, Adam
Putnam (416 pp.)
$18.99  |  Feb. 21, 2023  
978-0-593-46239-3
Series: Tales From the Multiverse, 2

Rubin returns with six new tales—all featuring the same title—to tickle the funny bone.

Rubin and the wizard, Rubin returns to the multiverse with tales packed with laughs, a pun on the word *kaboom*—the magical energy that powers his pranks, and an out-of-this-world adventure. Rubin’s collection is a blend of humor and fantasy, featuring characters like the protagonist与his/Her pet alien, the wizard, and a group of brave heroes on a mission to save the universe. These stories are perfect for readers who love adventure and a good giggle. *(Humor. 8-12)*
“The buildup and arrival of a wild thunderstorm offers both eye-widening drama and lessons in atmospheric phenomena.”

ZAP! CLAP! BOOM!

NUMBERS DE LA RUNWAY
Fashionable Counting in English and French
Ruth, Clarence
Schiffer (64 pp.)
$19.99 | Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-7643-6573-7

A fashionable, high-style display book.

In the same lofty mode as Ruth’s Colors de la Runway (2019), this book aims to amuse adults while teaching little ones their numbers, from one (bag) to 20 (polka dots). If “artsy, meaningful” style can never be imbibed too early or displayed too prominently, this book provides plenty. It highlights the work of Balenciaga, Gucci, Schiaparelli, Fendi, and their ilk. Adding to its considerable chic, number words appear (parenthetically, in small capital letters) in French beneath their English equivalents, in larger type. Object names (“finger glove,” “hats,” etc.), however, are in English only. In contrast to strikingly English equivalents, in larger type. Object names (“finger glove,” “hats,” etc.), however, are in English only. In contrast to strikingly

UNLIKELY TO HELP LITTLE ONES MASTER COUNTING, BUT FASHIONISTAS AND THEIR OFFSPRING MAY ENJOY IT. (INFORMATION ON THE CLOTHES AND ACCESSORIES HIGHLIGHTED) (CONCEPT PICTURE BOOK 5-8)

SOMETHING WILD
Ruttan, Molly
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-593-11234-2

Hannah imagines outlandish scenarios to prevent her from performing in a recital.

The first page shows a small child inside a violin shop, with a bespectacled adult gently guiding her posture as she holds a violin. Readers next see Hannah at home with her violin when she is a few years older, the simple text clarifying that she loves to play the violin—but only when alone. On recital day, “she secretly wishes something wild would happen...so she wouldn’t have to go!” Realistic portrayals of Hannah and her family are cleverly interwoven with beautiful, fantastical artwork each time Hannah hopes for “something wild” to occur. Her first fantasy shows bright blue birds flying away with her concert clothing; next, she is seen wearing her concert clothing as her family gapes while russet rabbits abscond with her violin. These lively juxtapositions continue as the family walks together—Hannah holding her violin—to the school hosting the event. A few simple words describe Hannah’s feelings of anxiety, both at home and backstage. The denouement is a lovely testament to the best magic of which we are capable. The simply drawn, expressive, light-skinned characters are reminiscent of those in Barbara Samuels’ Faye and Dolores series. The familial closeness continues throughout the book, which combines sweetness, imagination, and gentle humor. Though this tale will appeal to all readers, it will especially resonate with introverts. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Brava! (Picture book 3-8)

ZAP! CLAP! BOOM!
The Story of a Thunderstorm
Salas, Laura Purdie
Illus. by Elly MacKay
Bloomsbury (40 pp.)
$18.99 | March 28, 2023
978-1-5476-0225-4

The buildup and arrival of a wild thunderstorm offers both eye-widening drama and lessons in atmospheric phenomena.

Three gracefully posed children, the eldest slightly dark-skinned than the younger pair, and a trio of goats cavort over island hills until a squall rises in the distance and sweeps violently in before they then venture outside again to enjoy a world made “dazzling, / sparkling, / fresher.” Blending paper collage and digital paint, MacKay artfully captures the changing light on steep meadows as a “blue-forever day” gradually darkens under heavy, windswept clouds that “hover over, / tower, / loom, / then... // ZAP! CLAP! BOOM!” before at last melting away to leave a sunny, washed world. For the story behind the storm, Salas switches from free verse to prose in the backmatter to explain in specific detail how cumulus clouds, various kinds of lightning, and thunder are produced before closing with leads to useful weather-related sites, books, and even time-lapse videos on the web. Arthur Geisert’s Thunderstorm (2013) portrays a more massive tempest as a rural catastrophe; here, the swirling wind, torrential rain, and crashes of lightning are seen as a safely exciting but brief interlude in an otherwise serene setting. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A crashing success. (selected sources) (Informational picture book 6-9)
THE MONKEY TRIAL
John Scopes and the Battle Over Teaching Evolution
Sanchez, Anita
Clarion/HarperCollins (192 pp.)
$18.99 | March 21, 2023
978-0-358-45769-5

Sanchez expertly sifts a mountain of documentary evidence to present a coherent account of the event—which ballooned from a publicity stunt instigated by local businessmen to a “circus” featuring squads of lawyers, herds of spectators, and even a few trained chimpanzees—and to even-handedly portray the profound clash of values it exposed. She carefully analyzes the characters of John Scopes, a naïve but intelligent and ultimately disaffected substitute teacher, and charismatic populist William Jennings Bryan, among other figures. She explains why all the jurors and other participants were White (and male) but notes some people of color among the crowds of spectators. Along with a generous array of contemporary photos, she also inserts substantial extracts from the high school biology textbook Scopes used—which, it turns out, promoted racist eugenics as well as evolutionary theory—and from the book of Genesis as well as scorching commentary from observers like H.L. Mencken and W.E.B. Du Bois. And if readers aren’t drawn in by the compelling views of courtroom battles and strategy, they will be absorbed by the issues of scientific versus religious truth, of rights to free speech, and divisive regionalism that motivated all the ruckus, being as contentious today as ever. As the author, mulling the question of “Who won the Monkey Trial?” concludes: “The jury is still out.”

Perceptive, well written and reasoned, and (unfortunately) at least as topical as ever. (author’s note, glossary, timeline, source notes, bibliography, annotated resources for young readers, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 11-14)

WHAT TO BRING
Schultz Nicholson, Lorna
Illus. by Ellen Rooney
Owlkids Books (32 pp.)
$18.95 | March 14, 2023
978-1-77147-490-0

How do you decide what’s most important?
Malia, a young girl with a dark brown bob, is playing in her sandbox near her mother and younger brother when she notices a cloud of smoke. Then a brown-skinned woman in a yellow vest stops by, Malia’s father comes home early from work, and it’s clear that something is wrong. A fire has broken out in the nearby hills, and the family is going to have to leave. Colorful, digitally rendered spreads show Malia in her warm and cozy home as the family packs. Malia wants to bring something, too, but she can’t decide what to choose—her sandbox, her favorite stuffed animals, tons of books? Daddy suggests, “Pick small toys. Things important to you.” Mama limits her to three things and tells her, “Put the rest in your heart.” The text doesn’t share Malia’s choices, but we see her two favorite stuffed animals peeking out of her backpack. And as Malia walks from the car to Grandpa’s house, the accompanying image, of her family in silhouette, makes it clear what the most vital thing of all is. Reassuring to children facing a similar situation, this selection also offers a subtle, heartfelt message to all about the importance of family that young listeners can discuss. Malia and her family are tan-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A straightforward and comforting exploration of an emergency evacuation. (Picture book. 3-7)
**THE TIGER WHO CAME FOR DINNER**

Smallman, Steve
Illus. by Joëlle Dreidemy
Tiger Tales (32 pp.)
$18.99 | March 14, 2023
978-1-66430-022-4

A lost tiger cub is fluffy, cuddly, and...conniving.

Readers were introduced to the odd household trio—paternal Wolf, childlike Little Lamb, and their alligator, Omelet—in Smallman’s previous works (The Lamb Who Came for Dinner, 2006, etc.). Omelet has since grown and now loves to play fetch. The couple’s visiting grandson (slightly lighter-skinned than they are) delights in Little Bird, and everyone is glad when her babies hatch. The grandfather cheers on everyone’s creative efforts. His encouragement continues even as his strength wanes and the grandson takes over at the piano. A strikingly composed, somber aerial view of the grandmother and grandson embracing shows the piano sitting idly in the house, the birds still (“Then one morning, all was quiet”). It’s clear that Grandpa has died. Grief silences the once-happy home until a cardinal (which some readers will regard as a sign of a deceased loved one) asks Little Bird about the music that used to play in the valley. Culminating scenes show the old man’s legacy in action as people and birds alike gather to make music outside the house on the hill. The text has a folkloric quality, movingly grappling with grief, loss, and legacy, while warm illustrations that evoke Lauren Castillo’s style create both idyllic scenes of enjoyment in art and music and moments of heartache. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A heartwarming tear-jerker—bravo, indeed. (Picture book. 3-8)

**BRAVO, LITTLE BIRD!**

Silcestro, Amie
Illus. by Ramona Kaulitzki
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-1-66590-692-0

Musings on loss.

An old man and his wife (both tan-skinned) spend their days playing piano and painting, respectively, in their little house high on a hill. The music travels to the valley below, attracting the eponymous Little Bird, who builds her nest outside the man’s window and sings as he plays. The couple’s visiting grandson (slightly lighter-skinned than they are) delights in Little Bird, and everyone is glad when her babies hatch. The grandfather cheers on everyone’s creative efforts. His encouragement continues even as his strength wanes and the grandson takes over at the piano. A strikingly composed, somber aerial view of the grandmother and grandson embracing shows the piano sitting idly in the house, the birds still (“Then one morning, all was quiet”). It’s clear that Grandpa has died. Grief silences the once-happy home until a cardinal (which some readers will regard as a sign of a deceased loved one) asks Little Bird about the music that used to play in the valley. Culminating scenes show the old man’s legacy in action as people and birds alike gather to make music outside the house on the hill. The text has a folkloric quality, movingly grappling with grief, loss, and legacy, while warm illustrations that evoke Lauren Castillo’s style create both idyllic scenes of enjoyment in art and music and moments of heartache. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A heartwarming tear-jerker—bravo, indeed. (Picture book. 3-8)

**MR. MCCLOSKEY’S MARVELOUS MALLARDS**

The Making of Make Way for Ducklings
Smith, Emma Bland
Illus. by Becca Stadtlander
Calkins Creek/Astra Books for Young Readers (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-63592-392-6

Making a picture book isn’t all it’s quacked up to be.

First published in 1941, Make Way for Ducklings is still a popular book for children thanks to its perfectly paced plot and lighthearted illustrations. But fans of the book may not know how it came into being. Smith and Stadtlander reconstruct how Robert McCloskey wrote and illustrated the story, meticulously rearranging words until the text was perfect and agonizing over how ducks would behave in the story. While the former took time, for the latter, the author/illustrator needed inspiration, which came in the form of two groups of ducks (adults and ducklings) living for a time in his shared studio apartment. The gouache and colored pencil illustrations are a far cry from McCloskey’s style but capture both the quiet moments of work and the hectic life of multiple ducks living in a New York apartment. For readers looking for more, the backmatter includes a note from McCloskey’s daughter, an author’s note, information about McCloskey and his editor May Massee, a bibliography, a timeline, a list of McCloskey’s works, and small reproductions of sketches and family photos. Without doubt, this will be a favorite for both older and younger generations alike! Background characters are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Make way for a wonderful tale about the creation of a classic children’s book. (picture credits) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

Wolf think the attention is adorable, but Omelet sees through the ruse. When they make it to Fluffy’s home, will Little Lamb become dinner? Little Lamb’s and Wolf’s obliviousness amps up the silliness, eliciting groans from readers, who will be well aware of Fluffy’s true feelings. Omelet may not be a fuzzy or cute pet (slippery scales and pointy teeth and all), but he’s a devoted one who saves the day. Making use of vignettes and graphic novel-esque panels, Dreidemy’s cartoonish illustrations brim with warmth. Text and art make crystal-clear that found family can be the best family. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sly tale of trickery and familial bonds. (Picture book. 3-6)
"So engrossing a tale and world that readers won't want to come up for air."

SISTERS OF THE LOST MARSH

GARDEN WALK
Snow, Virginia Brimhall
Gibbs Smith (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-4236-6252-5

Four grandchildren spend the morning with Grammy, helping with chores, spending time together, and exploring the world of her garden. The grandchildren, all with short hair and either pants or shorts, are clearly comfortable in Grammy's yard, and they explore both new things and old favorites like the swing and the clubhouse. Workmanlike rhyming verses, sometimes from one child's perspective, sometimes from a collective "we," tell about their morning: "From prickly bushes / I picked juicy berries. / I nibbled a few— / there were too many to carry." Eventually, Grammy rests in the grass with a book while the grandkids play before they all share a picnic (mystifyingly, the blanket gets spread twice). A final page shares some picnic food families can make. Snow's sketchlike drawings—purple on white pages—resemble the output of an old school ditto machine. One item is pulled out on each page to be highlighted and labeled in full color: pine, robin, butterfly, Freddie (the dog). These appear to be digital illustrations and are not to size; some replace the item with names—"snubnose eelpouts," "sea pigs," "blob sculpin"—that delight. The smoothly written text is set directly on evocative blue-toned underwater scenes that make good use of light and texture. The backmatter's added facts about the 22 animals featured will inform science-inclined older readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An intriguing and effective look at an unfamiliar world, well suited for reading aloud. (more information on whale falls, selected sources, resources for further exploration) (Informational picture book. 4-9)

WHALE FALL
Exploring an Ocean-Floor Ecosystem
Stewart, Melissa
Illus. by Rob Dunlavey
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
$18.99 | March 14, 2023
978-0-593-38060-4

The carcass of a whale is a gift to the sea. When a whale dies, its body sinks to the ocean floor, but that's not the end of its useful life. For the next 50 years, it will continue to provide nourishment to a series of deep-sea creatures. Stewart takes her readers 5,000 feet down into the East Pacific Ocean to watch the procession of scavengers who will feast on the remains of a 70,000-pound gray whale—and sometimes each other. First come the hagfish and the sleeper sharks. Later there will be zombie worms and the squat lobsters who eat them. Some microbes "form thick, colorful mats that spread across the bones," while other microbes live inside the mussels and tubeworms that are also attracted to the carcass. It's a thriving new sea floor ecosystem. The exemplary backmatter tells us that scientists have identified over 500 species that are in some way connected to a whale fall. The author has chosen examples with names—"snubnose eelpouts," "sea pigs," "blob sculpin"—that delight. The smoothly written text is set directly on evocative blue-toned underwater scenes that make good use of light and texture. The backmatter's added facts about the 22 animals featured will inform science-inclined older readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An intriguing and effective look at an unfamiliar world, well suited for reading aloud. (more information on whale falls, selected sources, resources for further exploration) (Informational picture book. 4-9)

SISTERS OF THE LOST MARSH
Strange, Lucy
Chicken House/Scholastic (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 3, 2023
978-1-338-68646-3

In Hollow-in-the-Marsh, having six daughters is considered a curse. Third daughter Willa’s Dadder firmly believes in the curse: He trades Grace, his eldest, for a fine horse from a rich man who abuses his animals. The morning after a trip to the Full Moon Fayre—where Grace, second-oldest daughter Freya, and Willa learn that the fayre has an opening for a dancer—Grace is suddenly gone. In contrast to their father, their beloved, clever Grammy says that “superstitions do us harm—they bind us up with fear” and instead offers made-up stories that are “full of truth” and that are places “where we learn and feel and dream”; she has also secretly taught the girls to read, in opposition to a cultural taboo. Despite her love for her remaining four sisters and Grammy, when her father’s cruelty goes too far Willa runs away, setting off on an adventure to find Grace—and she steals her father’s fine horse to do so. The writing is impressively beautiful and sophisticated without sacrificing the reader-friendly clarity of the straightforward narrator. Willa’s innate goodness and iron will carry her through adventures and physical trials, pitting her against superstitions and fairy tales alike. Her eventual happy ending is rich and bittersweet thanks to new revelations and understanding. Characters read White. An author’s note details inspiration and geographical notes for the setting, which is British with an otherworldly feel.

So engrossing a tale and world that readers won’t want to come up for air. (Fantasy. 8-15)
“A moving, grooving snapshot of urban life where kids create the fun and beckon everybody in.”

JUMP IN!
Strickland, Shadra
Bloomsbury (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 31, 2023
978-1-63819-130-8

A high-energy ode to double Dutch and summer days of fun.

It’s a sizzling morning, and when one freckle-faced, curly-haired, tan-skinned kid yells, “Jump in!” kids of every hue and size come running with balls, with jump-ropes, and with arms and legs ready for moving. When the “Double Dutch divas,” the Delancy twins, arrive to jump-rope, their long cornrows go flying as they “Jump over, jump under” and “spin ‘round.” Next, long-legged basketballer Leroy Jones, with a frohawk and fiery moves, twirls a ball on one finger then jumps in with hip-hop acrobatics...until hip-swinging Ms. Mabel tosses Leroy her purse and exhausts the jump-rope turners with her “funky wiggle” and her cartwheel in the ropes. Lots of neighbors, including the reverend, join in, and the jumping joy permeates the day as Strickland’s free-verse poetry turns this tale into a singable jump-rope rhyme. When a skateboard-loving youngster finally joins in after homework’s all done, the child takes their dog and board into the ropes. Strickland’s innovative low-angle and bird’s-eye views and gatefolds that open in various directions give readers expansive vantage points for this day of participation, while her colorful and highly textured digitally rendered illustrations, inspired by the Italian futurists, effectively capture the heat, verve, and energy of the city. This city community is a diverse one; most of the named characters present as Black.

MARKETS
A World To Discover
Sucarrats, Josep
Illus. by Miranda Sofroniou
Trans. by Tony Pesquera
Bushel & Peck Books (48 pp.)
$19.99 | March 30, 2023
978-1-63819-130-8

A foodie writer revels in the wonders of local markets worldwide.

“Be bold and be curious!” Originally published in Spanish, this enthusiastic, though occasionally awkwardly worded, celebration of markets and their wares (mostly the edible sort but with a few glances at other types of merchandise) invites readers to not only savor with all their senses the bounty of familiar types of fresh foods, but also to be open to new experiences—like dried Greenland shark (hákarl) from Reykjavík’s Kolaportíð Market (which gives off a “terrifying stench” to the uninitiated) and fried spiders at the markets in Skuon, Cambodia (“crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside”). Though Sucarrats never mentions online or financial markets and refers only vaguely to markets organized by “Native Americans” (depicted generically sporting feathered headbands and rowing canoes) and Australian Aboriginal people, he expands tremendously on Ted Lewin’s classic Market! (1996) by specifically naming more than 40 active sites (all of which are located on a numbered map at the end). Also, along with crowing over distinctive products offered at many markets, he rightly highlights their double nature as both commercial and social centers whatever form they take. Sofroniou follows suit by blending glimpses of select actual locales with luscious spreads of different sorts of food-stuffs in roughly equal measure and populating indoor and outdoor scenes with a racially and culturally diverse mix of sellers, buyers, laborers, and browsers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A foodie’s delight, though with occasional half-baked morals. (index) (Informational picture book: 7-10)

GERTIE, THE DARLING DUCK OF WWII
Swanson, Shari
Illus. by Renée Graef
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$18.99 | March 15, 2023
9781534411714

War-worried Midwesterners rally round an imperiled fowl family.

By choosing to nest in an exceptionally risky public spot—far above the dirty Milwaukee River—darling Gertie offers a perfect distraction to humans in the last anxious days of World War II. Protective heroes—bridge tenders who rescue the mallard and her six cute ducklings in bad weather—ensure a happy ending: After a brief period on display in a department-store window, Gertie and her family are released into a nearby park. From the first high duck’s-eye view, we are drawn into her story through careful, sepia-toned illustrations that seem lifted out of an old scrapbook. Everyone dresses soberly; quotes from people are sourced. An occasional brown face can be seen in the crowds, but most are light-skinned. Varied perspectives, including close-ups of Gertie, atmospheric changing weather, and rich background details, pique interest. Strong backmatter, with archival photos, provides historical background, focusing first on the role of women and children in the war effort and then on the extraordinary efforts of Milwaukee officials and residents to save and celebrate Gertie and her offspring. Like Robert McCloskey’s Make Way for Ducklings (1941), this is a nonanthropomorphized animal story featuring caring humans. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Gertie’s heartwarming tale delights and distracts today as it did in 1945. (Informational picture book: 5-9)
Tiffany proves to be the Shining Star Mimi always said she was. There's a lot of heart and humor in this book; Tiffany is a quirky, confident, and humorous character. Keller's See You Trap a Tiger and Kyle Lukoff's Too Bright To See, this story is at times unsettlingly creepy, at other moments too bright to be true.

**THE TALENT THIEF**
*Thayer, Mike*
Feiwel & Friends (256 pp.)
$17.99  |  Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-316-27711-2

After two meteors collide, Tiffany is able to take on another person’s talents, but she has to learn how to use her powers for good.

Tiffany lives in a mobile home with her single dad. She used to be more colorful and expressive, but since her grandmother passed away, she’s felt cursed. The 12-year-old hides in the shadows, trying to avoid mean girl Candace’s bullying. Her social life consists of her school’s online video game club and a few old friends at Sunny Vistas Assisted Living who really are old—in their 90s! Maybe her new ability is a corrective measure sent by her grandmother from above? Mimi always called Tiffany her Shining Star, and after all, Tiffany does need help. If she wants to win the fundraiser contest that could save the dilapidated planetarium where her father works, she has to enter the spotlight. There’s a lot of heart and humor in this book; Tiffany is a quirky, honest narrator. Initially giddy about her strange new capabilities, she soon faces the ethical consequences of taking another’s talents—but talents freely given are another matter. With the support of her gaming club and the shared life experiences of her elderly friends, Tiffany finds her voice and reclaims her confidence. Readers will laugh out loud and be moved to tears as Tiffany proves to be the Shining Star Mimi always said she was. Main characters default to White.

**THE HOUSE THAT WHISPERS**
*Thompson, Lin*
Little, Brown (336 pp.)
$16.99  |  Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-316-27711-2

Three siblings unravel family mysteries. Simon is not the name that everyone calls the middle Bradley sibling, but it’s the name he picked for himself. Ever since he realized he was trans or maybe nonbinary or something else, he’s been mentally fixing the name and pronouns others use for him. Simon, big sister Talia, and little sister Rose are staying with their maternal grandmother, Nanaleen, for a week in a creepy old family home bordering the Appalachians while their parents figure out how to repair their marriage. Simon becomes convinced the house is haunted and wonders if it’s related to the decades-old disappearance of his Great-Aunt Brie, a butch farmer from above? Mimi always called Tiffany her Shining Star, and after all, Tiffany does need help. If she wants to win the fundraiser contest that could save the dilapidated planetarium where her father works, she has to enter the spotlight. There’s a lot of heart and humor in this book; Tiffany is a quirky, honest narrator. Initially giddy about her strange new capabilities, she soon faces the ethical consequences of taking another’s talents—but talents freely given are another matter. With the support of her gaming club and the shared life experiences of her elderly friends, Tiffany finds her voice and reclaims her confidence. Readers will laugh out loud and be moved to tears as Tiffany proves to be the Shining Star Mimi always said she was. Main characters default to White.

**MY RED, WHITE, AND BLUE**
*Tyson, Alana*
Philomel (32 pp.)
$18.99  |  Jan. 17, 2023
978-0-593-52570-8

An African American child learns about the Black community’s complicated relationship with the U.S. flag.

The nameless young narrator expresses pride in the flag that waves at their home, greeting friends and strangers who pass by. For the child, the flag is part of their diverse community, a message reinforced by their teacher. The narrator’s grandpa agrees

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Pick a Pumpkin (2019) cover each step of a popular Easter tradition.

The first stop for a light-skinned caregiver and child is the farm. Peering into the henhouse, they spot an egg (reminding readers that eggs don’t originate at the grocery store). More eggs are collected throughout the spring countryside and brought home, ready to hard boil. While the eggs are cooling, it’s time to prepare the dye! The lively text highlights natural methods first ("Stew some plants / to make a brew: / beets turn red! / Spinach? Green! / Berries? Blue! / Try some herbs / or spices, too") but also gives a nod to store-bought kits. After a full day of egg decorating, the youngster wakes up the next morning for a festive neighborhood egg hunt. Happily, treats found inside plastic eggs are not limited to sugar only; they include secret notes, tiny toys, and coins, too. (The child adds their dyed eggs to this bounty) Sprays of bright greens, a shining sun, and dotted buds on trees as well as pastel bunting and fuzzy bunny ears and flower crowns on little ones bring a light, airy lift to this joyful community gathering. The children involved in the egg hunt are diverse in skin tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Egg-stra special. (Picture book 3-6)
but shares that the flag is also a reminder of the nation’s history of injustice. For many, there are still problems that cause some citizens to protest the flag as a symbol of a country that has not lived up to its creed. Grandpa emphasizes that everyone has the right to protest—for instance, by kneeling during the singing of the national anthem—but notes that they can also take pride in the flag, and he reminds the child of contributions of Black Americans like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., who helped make this country what it is. Grandpa’s strongest message to his grandchild is that they have a choice in how they use their voice. Tyson uses age-appropriate language and examples to bring clarity to an abstract concept. The warm relationship between Grandpa and the child gives the narrative a reassuring tone. Ladd’s bold, painterly illustrations, crafted with acrylics, textured cut paper, tissue paper, and colored pencil, illuminate and expand the ideas in the text. (This book was digitally reviewed.)

An effective, accessible acknowledgment that both the U.S. flag and history are deeply fraught. (author’s note) (Picture book: 4-8)

**MY EXTRAORDINARY MOM**

Vee, Dani
Illus. by Alexandra Colombo
Larrikin House/Trafalgar (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Jan. 1, 2023
978-1-922503-89-3

You don’t have to be quirky to be extraordinary!

This very active mother-child combo lives in the moment with smiles. Mom has a fair complexion and vibrant red-orange crimped hair, and the child narrator has light skin and red-brown pigtails. They make daisy crowns and art, rescue animals in need, climb rocks, take road trips, and meditate on mountaintops. Mom is comfortable singing out of tune and breakdancing at the grocery store and has a “canvas” of tattoos. Out in their diverse community, the two share Sunday barbecues and personal stories and join drum circles under the stars. But Mom also embraces quiet days that “are made for staying home in our pajamas eating chocolate cake” and the idea that “extraordinary isn’t always colorful and bold. It can also be found under blankets telling stories we remember by heart.” Mom shares smiles to make someone’s day and words of encouragement like “it’s okay not to be okay.” Brilliantly colored and detailed illustrations make this a good book for sharing with a group, but readers should take the time to scout out the expressive pets that accompany the duo on many of their adventures. This mom is like no other, but that is the point. “It’s important to be exactly who you are,” and who you are is extraordinary. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Gently encourages readers to be comfortable with themselves every day and to embrace their extraordinary natures. (Picture book: 4-8)

**THE NOT-SO-BRAVE LITTLE LION**

Walker, David
Atheneum (32 pp.)
$18.99 | March 21, 2023
978-1-4814-4347-0

A young lion must find bravery within to help a friend.

A pint-sized cub sees other lions roaring and chasing, but those actions are much too intimidating for him. Even his moppity little tail is frightening when it accidentally hops him on the back. Little Lion shares his deepest wish with his friend Bird (who’s fairly diminutive herself): “Someday we’ll be big, / with no fears at all.” But when Bird finds herself at the top of a tree, unable to jump down and unsure how to fly, she cries out in fright. The bigger lions rush to help, but they are much too large to climb the tree. Little Lion gathers his courage and springs into action. “Bird looks at her friend, / her eyes open wide. / ‘You’ve found your BRAVE— / it was right there inside.’”

Inspired by Little Lion, Bird does something quite brave—she flies! Walker’s jaunty, gentle rhymes convey both Little Lion’s timid nature and his triumphant growth. Soft pencil and acrylic illustrations, relying heavily on muted greens, browns, and oranges, create a cozy environment perfect for this roly-poly lion to finally unleash his roar. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Welcome affirmation that tiny cubs (and humans) can do mighty things. (Picture book: 3-6)

**BOLDLY GO**

Walters, Eric
Orca (256 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Feb. 14, 2023
978-1-4598-2876-6
Series: Teen Astronauts, 2

A trip to the International Space Station turns out to be only the first step for a trio of teenage space travelers.

Along with not being the Star Trek spinoff its title might suggest, this sequel to 2021’s Houston, Is There a Problem? is less a novel than an informational tour of duty aboard the space station with a perfunctory gloss of wish fulfillment. Picking up where his opener left off, Walters takes 14-year-old overachievers Houston Williams and Ashley Ling through liftoff and orbital maneuvers to the station (Teal St. Jermaine, the third member of the teen team, joins them later), and then on to weeks of routine tasks, question-and-answer sessions with schools and other earthbound audiences, and simulated practice flights for an upcoming mission to Mars that they are supposedly not going on. Of course, they do go, thanks to a massive contrivance—but not before readers get a full picture of life in space, from toilets (“basically sitting on a vacuum cleaner and hoping for the best”) to tech talk (“although it’s commonly called a spacewalk, we call it an EVA, which is a short form for extravehicular activity”).
“Weinersmith’s richly evocative turns of phrase run the gamut from hilarious to heart-rending and maintain the flavor of the original.”

BEA WOLF

Weinersmith, Zach
Illus. by Boulet
First Second (208 pp.)
$19.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-1-250-77629-7

The first third of the ancient epic Beowulf adapted for a young audience.

Long ago, in an unnamed suburb, lived Carl, “detector of gold,” who, with toys and treats, cemented a lasting legacy of childhood revels. As time claimed countless kid-kings, the cardboard crown was passed on. Roger, king of our age, turns his ambitions skyward and constructs Treeheart, a stronghold against such evils as bullies. But the safehouse is besieged by detractors, the worst of them the dreaded Mr. Grindle, a cranky middle-aged man able to condemn kids to the pall of adulthood with a single withering touch. One wild night, Grindle desecrates the hall, heralding an age of silent sorrow. Hope washes in from foreign ’burbs in the form of Bea Wolf, “bride of battle,” with “sixty kids’ strength” in each hand. Will she reclaim Treeheart from Grindle’s fell grasp? Weinersmith’s richly evocative turns of phrase run the gamut from hilarious to heart-rending and maintain the flavor of the original without bogging the pace down amid the kennings. Boulet’s illustrations imbue the shenanigans with gleeful energy and a touch of dark absurdity that children, seeing their own fears and triumphs reflected, will delight in. However tempted time-broken adults might be to scoff at the slapdash magical realism and sympathize with Grindle, doing so in the face of such an unabashedly joyful ode to the freedom of the child’s mind is an impossible task. The cast of characters is diverse.

Wonderfully weird. (note detailing the history of the original and the author’s adaptational techniques, sketchbook) (Graphic novel. 8-12)

CUT!
How Lotte Reiniger and a Pair of Scissors Revolutionized Animation
Winters, C.E.
Illus. by Matt Schu
Greenwillow Books (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 24, 2023
978-0-06-306739-4

The creator of the world’s oldest surviving full-length animated film is celebrated in this straightforward biography.

Born in 1899, Lotte Reiniger was enthralled by the cinema and would tell her own stories to other children by creating tales with cut-paper silhouettes. That skill turned out to have big benefits when she caught the attention of director Paul Wegener. Soon she was designing and directing short films of her own. It was when she was offered the daunting proposal to try her hand at a full-length animated feature film—The Adventures of Prince Achmed—that she invented the tricktisch, a wooden tower that would allow her to film scenes with multiple panes of glass, aka the first multipane camera. Winters keeps the storytelling crisp and to the point, avoiding any mention of Achmed’s racial stereotyping. Schu’s art, meanwhile, brings the magic of Reiniger’s cut paper technique to life on these pages, integrating the silhouettes with her trials and triumphs. The book is not without its charms but sadly lacks the originality that made Reiniger the master of visual arts as we remember her today. Pairing this book with Fiona Robinson’s Out of the Shadows: How Lotte Reiniger Made the First Animated Fairytale Movie (2022) could allow for a more rounded look at this pioneering artist’s life. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An unadorned telling of an artist deserving of additional praise. (timeline, author’s note, sources, glossary) (Picture-book biography. 5-10)

A TAKE-CHARGE GIRL BLAZES A TRAIL TO CONGRESS
The Story of Jeannette Rankin
Woelfle, Gretchen
Illus. by Rebecca Gibbon
Calkins Creek/Astra Books for Young Readers (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-66268-012-0

A picture-book biography of the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress. Jeannette Rankin (1880-1973) may not be a household name today, but Woelfle and Gibbon’s book seeks to change that. Although some may pause at the use of the word girl in the title to refer to the first U.S. congresswoman, Woelfle wisely begins the narrative in Rankin’s youth, then leads into her suffragist activism and her political career. The text as a whole grounds Rankin’s ambitions in her determination to advocate...
for children, and such framing will likely make the book more accessible to young readers, as will the energetic illustrations. Gibbon’s acrylic ink and colored pencil pictures have a homespun, folk-art quality to them, offering readers depictions of Rankin’s early life in Montana (the state she eventually represented), her stints in San Francisco and New York, and, eventually, her time in Washington, D.C. Robust backmatter with an author’s note, timeline, and bibliography fleshes out the necessarily spare account of Rankin’s life, particularly in its documentation of her pacifist voting record in Congress and her peace activism during the decades after her final term. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A yes vote for this title’s inclusion on children’s bookshelves. *(Picture-book biography. 5-8)*

**WHAT TO DO WITH A STICK**

*Yolen, Jane*
Illus. by Paolo Domeniconi
Creative Editions/Creative Company
(32 pp.)
$16.99 | March 14, 2023
978-1-56846-365-0

With an active imagination, the sky (er…the stick) is the limit!

When an expressive young child with straight brown hair and pale skin—and their equally expressive dog—finds a stick in the yard, the child recognizes it as a “remarkable toy” that can be used for a variety of purposes, from battling nighttime closet monsters to pretending to be a seal balancing it on their nose to using it as a magic wand. The story is a love letter to both creativity and the childhood exuberance of imaginative play. Yolen’s verse is pithy and direct: “A stick is a sword / to tame monsters of dread. / Or bend it to use as a / large bow instead. // It can anchor a ship. // It can hold down a pulley. // A stick draws the line / between you and a bully.” The real stars of the show, however, are the illustrations, which capture the actions and joys of the child, although at times their excitement is overshadowed by the expressions of the black-and-white dog, who skirts the line between realism and caricature. Readers, both solo and in large groups, will love the rhymes, the big, bold illustrative choices, and the message that imagination is the best playmate of them all. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Stick with this story—it’s a winner. *(Picture book. 4-8)*
VLADIMIR PUTIN
Russia’s Autocratic Ruler
Allen, John
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95  |  Dec. 15, 2022
9781678204884

A quick account of the rise and (perhaps) beginning of the fall of Russia’s current bête noire.

Allen relies largely on recent news stories for source material, and the general picture is a grim one—of “a dangerously unpredictable rogue leader” who rose to power at the head of a “party of crooks and thieves” to murder hostile journalists and meddle in the elections of his own and other countries until, having “poached Crimea,” he launched an invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The author leaves off shortly after that invasion, with the war at “a bloody stalemate” and its promulgator sounding “dangerously unstable” and, according to a former U.S. ambassador to Russia, “unhinged” in public statements. Along with photos of Putin—from a deeply disturbed looking child to the present (but not the macho one of him riding a horse bare chested, though it’s mentioned in the narrative no less than three times)—images of bombed buildings, corpses, and memorial displays add suitably alarming visual notes. Readers wishing to dig deeper will find plentiful lists of print and online resources at the end.

Useful for assignments, though ongoing events are likely to give it a short shelf life. (photo credits, source notes, timeline, index) (Biography. 12-18)

NIGHTBIRDS
Armstrong, Kate J.
Nancy Paulsen Books (480 pp.)
$19.99  |  Feb. 28, 2023
978-0-593-46327-7

Opposing forces seek leverage in a world in which intrinsic magic, widely believed to have been eradicated, is traded in secret.

Long ago, women known as Fyrebirds wielded powerful, even deadly magic. Accused of witchcraft and persecuted by the patriarchal church, the remaining Fyrebirds survived by concealing their abilities and marrying into the Great Houses, whose wealth and influence offered protection. Generations later, the Fyrebirds
When they are set on the ground, Alfred is shaken but unharmed. White; queer identities are woven into the story.

He rescues the frightened stallion from a wire fence, and a bond fiercely guard and regulate access to the Nightbirds' identities and gifts, those who fear—or have tasted—the Nightbirds' magic are determined to unmask them. Socialite Matilde has never questioned the system in which she participates; she enjoys having (and being) a rare secret. But soon after she's joined by street-wise Sayer and country girl Æsa, two new Nightbirds, an attack in the Nightbirds' inner sanctum sets the three girls on a different path, one with massive personal and political implications. Their present-tense narrative perspectives establish clear distinctions between them as they navigate boldly question the intersections of patriarchy, privilege, and fear that shape their world. Lush settings, careful world-building, and taut exposition are seamlessly presented through the characters' internal observations. Main characters read White; queer identities are woven into the story.

An electrifying, high-stakes series opener grounded in feminist themes. (maps) (Fantasy. 12-18)

**THE ROAN STALLION**

Beartrack-Algeo, Alfreda

7th Generation (128 pp.)

$9.95 paper | Feb. 28, 2023

978-1-939053-48-0

Series: The Legend of Big Heart, 2

The adventures of a wild stallion, a Lakota boy, and a big race.

In the second book in this Depression-era series following 2022’s *The Land Grab*, 13-year-old Alfred Swallow meets a blue-eyed roan stallion. The horse’s rare Medicine Hat markings show that he has special powers, making him sacred to Lakota people; Alfred believes the horse may even be descended from Chief Sitting Bull’s own herd. As the horse and boy eye one another, a tornado touches down and lifts them into its funnel. When they are set on the ground, Alfred is shaken but unharmed. He rescues the frightened stallion from a wire fence, and a bond is forged between them. The story unfolds with Alfred training the roan for the annual White River Frontier Days’ relay race. He hopes to win the purse and buy his grandfather a much-needed tractor for the family farm, but there isn’t much time to prepare. A side story involving the untrustworthy nephew of Alfred’s rancher employer ramps up the tension. When robbery and horse-rustling plans are discovered, Alfred and two of his friends overpower six armed men. Following the success of this takedown, the boys head off to the race. Beartrack-Algeo (Lower Brule Lakota Nation) incorporates interesting details about rural South Dakota and the training of wild stallions into the story, but the quantity and delivery of the information at times impedes the narrative flow.

An accessible novel for reluctant readers that highlights Lakota lives. (Historical fiction. 12-18)

**PROMISE BOYS**

Brooks, Nick

Henry Holt (304 pp.)

$18.99 | Jan. 31, 2023

978-1-250-86697-4

When someone murders the renowned founder of an oppressively rigorous Washington, D.C., school, three students—all boys of color—emerge as prime suspects.

The police haul in a trio of Urban Promise Prep students, two Black and one Salvadoran, for questioning following the murder of Principal Kenneth Moore. For J.B. Williamson, Urban Promise’s strict rules and regulations are suffocating, but his luck seems to turn when he finally makes a tentative move forward with his crush. Jokester Trey Jackson, meanwhile, does his best to ensure his place in the big basketball game, and no one—not even his tough-as-nails Uncle T—can stop him. Ramón Zambrano dreams of one day owning a restaurant. In the meantime, he gets by hustling pupusas at school and refusing to succumb to pressure from his beloved cousin César, the feared leader of the Dioses del Humo gang. At Urban Promise, one false move can cost a college-bound future. Unfortunately, all three boys engaged in public spats with Principal Moore before his death; to clear their names, they must investigate and uncover the killer’s identity. In a masterful use of multiple points of view from both the main protagonists and secondary characters, Brooks weaves a tale of intrigue, doubt, and hearsay with ease, doling out crucial tidbits and clues. Each gradual reveal prods readers to reconsider and reassess. Featuring a sharp examination of systemic inequality in urban schools and Black and Latinx boyhood, this novel delivers in spades.

Breathtakingly complex and intriguing. (Mystery. 14-18)

**STAR EATERS**

Carter, Brooke

Orca (80 pp.)

$10.95 paper | Feb. 14, 2023

978-1-4598-3467-5

The conscience of a star-snuffing space raider is sparked by a stowaway.

The moral quandary in this science-fiction tale for reluctant readers is sharply articulated and deeply felt, but neither the sketchy plot nor the far-fetched premise will invite much, if any, buy-in from readers. Plucked from a prison for orphans and trained by the heartless IRIS Corp to be a Raider and harvest the energy of entire suns, 17-year-old Destin’s fear of losing his job and being cast back is at war with his regret over much, if any, buy-in from readers. Plucked from a prison for orphans and trained by the heartless IRIS Corp to be a Raider and harvest the energy of entire suns, 17-year-old Destin’s fear of losing his job and being cast back is at war with his regret over what the theft does to each star’s planets. His dilemma reaches a tipping point when, following a brief visit to the surface of one such doomed but supposedly uninhabited planet, a white-haired, tan-skinned, golden-eyed girl named Calla comes out of
hiding to demand that he turn his spacecraft around and return what he took. That deed accomplished, he blows up his ship and settles down to an idyllic future, exchanging hugs and kisses with his barefooted new companion. The decision to pitch the tale in accessible language doesn’t excuse the near absence of credible action or science. Most characters are not physically described.

Inner conflicts may be worth discussing, but the story is too thin to lift off. (Science fiction. 12+-18)

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A LANTERN
Chao, Gloria
Viking (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 14, 2023
978-0-593-46435-9

Best friends reunite to make other people’s wishes come true—and maybe even their own.

Chicago teens Liya Huang and Kai Jiang, childhood friends whose families own a lantern shop and a bakery respectively, have been avoiding one another ever since Liya threw up her boba tea on Kai and he assumed it was because he had asked her out. Their friendship is further strained by the fact that their families have been feuding since a dumpster incident in their shops’ shared Chinatown alley. Nānāi, Liya’s paternal grandmother, was the peacekeeper, but since her passing, every argument between the families has only escalated. Also, Liya has stopped trying to make customers’ wishes—written on the shop’s lanterns—come to pass, something she used to secretly do with Nānāi. Eager to fight her loneliness from missing both Kai and her Nānāi, she decides to start working on granting wishes again, beginning with arranging a meet-cute between two community elders. Liya enters the Jiang’s bakery to order a mooncake as part of her plan, and Kai, who misses her and is dealing with strained family relationships, offers to be her new wish-granting partner. Their friends-to-lovers romance is an endlessly frustrating yet adorable cycle during which there are frequent misunderstandings and oh-so-close moments. Chao immerses readers in Chinese culture, incorporating a variety of Chinese traditions and folktales that are relevant to the couple’s story.

As delectable as a mooncake. (note about Mandarin, author’s note, glossary) (Fiction. 12+-18)

HUNTERLAND
Claire, Dana
CamCat Books (272 pp.)
$19.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-7443-0734-4

A family of monster hunters investigates mysterious happenings in the Midwest.

Liam Hunter and his younger sister, Jac, travel around with their father, Agent Jack Hunter, working for Hunterland, a global network of people dedicated to tracking and slaying all sorts of monsters. A new lead sends them to Falkville Falls, a small town recently plagued by a string of suspicious deaths—and the latest in a string of Wisconsin schools whose nurses have died. As the Hunters descend on the town, they wreak havoc in sheriff’s daughter Olivia Davis’ life, shedding light on the secrets her 14-year-old sister, Pepper, has been keeping from her family and sparking a chain of events that show that there is a lot about the world of monsters that Liam’s family doesn’t know. While he may have distractingly blue eyes and a fantastic body, Liam’s bad-boy attitude and sarcastic tone infuriate Olivia. But as the Hunter and Davis families grow closer, the two young people cannot deny their feelings for one another. The fast-paced narrative is mostly split between Liam’s and Olivia’s perspectives, with the odd chapter from Pepper’s viewpoint. While the story has unexpected twists, the treatment of the monsters—ghosts, vampires, and werewolves—feels like a stale addition to this popular genre. The romance between snarky, overbearing, seductive Liam and meek Olivia is formulaic, and their dynamics feel uncomfortably coercive and emotionally abusive. Main characters are assumed White.

Derivative and unremarkable. (Paranormal. 14+-18)

THE BEAUTY TRIALS
Clayton, Dhonielle
Disney-Hyperion (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 14, 2023
978-1-368-04692-3
Series: The Belles

Now that Regent Queen Sophia is locked up, her sister, Queen Charlotte, decides to revive an ancient tradition: the Beauty Trials, a deadly competition to be the next Queen of Orléans.

This stand-alone fantasy picks up three years after the events of The Everlasting Rose (2019), with the point of view shifting from Camille to her spirited sister Edel. The Belles, who have magical arcana powers and a range of skin tones, are expected to provide beautifying services to the gray-skinned, red-eyed Gris. However, Sophia and her lackeys have little regard for the Belles, seeing them as property to be auctioned off. Having Sophia imprisoned is not enough; the next queen of Orléans should be committed to freeing the Belles from servitude...
and bloodletting for their arcana. When Queen Charlotte announces the Beauty Trials—a lethal contest that will allow the Goddess of Beauty to choose Sophia’s successor—Edel enters, hoping she can win and liberate the Belles. Edel is tenacious and brave, but the line between bravery and foolishness is fine. Both Camille and Edel’s love interest, Gaelle, urge her to rein in her outspoken ways and try to charm others during the competition. An intriguing relationship develops between Edel and the Trials’ Gamekeeper Quentin, tempting her into a love triangle. This atmospheric novel delves into social and political issues, although the worldbuilding feels less deliberate than in previous entries. The plot intensifies quickly, with dangerous tasks and an earthshaking twist that leaves Edel scrambling.

**A reflective and gripping return to an imaginative world.**
(Fantasy. 12-18)

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**GOING DARK**
de la Cruz, Melissa
Union Square & Co. (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 31, 2023
978-1-4549-4764-6

A gripping mystery that addresses deeper social issues.

American college students Josh Reuter and Amelia Ashley had a wonderful European adventure—or they should have, but they got in a fight, and at the end of the trip, Amelia never boarded the plane in Rome to head back to California. On top of his girlfriend’s abandonment, implied White Josh is dealing with lost baggage. Meanwhile, attractive blond foodie influencer Amelia’s nearly 1.5 million Instagram followers are saying that she’s missing, and the hashtags about her disappearance are going viral. With questions piling up, Josh becomes the prime suspect even in the eyes of his friends, and he must prove his innocence to the police as evidence against
him starts appearing. One of Amelia’s friends asks Harper Delgado, a brown-skinned San Diego State sophomore and well-connected hacker, to search for Amelia in ways the police can’t. Harper scour Amelia’s online content for clues and finds a disturbing unlisted video that puts her on the right track for discovering the truth about the couple’s relationship. Playing with different points of view and narrative tools, including prose, descriptions of videos, blog posts, and diary entries, the book will draw readers in through its engaging storytelling and compelling characters they can’t help but care about. The novel probes questions of the types of victims who garner public sympathy and those who are overlooked.

An edge-of-your-seat thriller with a deeply satisfying ending and a message that lingers. (Mystery. 14-adult)

**REBEL, BRAVE AND BRUTAL**

*Dittemore, Shannon*

Amulet/Abrams (400 pp.)

$18.99 | Jan. 10, 2023

978-1-4197-5770-9

Series: *Winter, White and Wicked*, 2

In this sequel to *Winter, White and Wicked* (2020), Sylvi’s band of rebels returns to fight for their future—using Winter as a weapon.

After Sylvi discovers the truth about who she is and the power she holds over Winter, she, her brother, Mars, and her revolutionary friends are on the run from the Majority. As they cross the Kol Sea on their way to meet the king of Paradyia, hoping he will lend his army for their fight against their oppressors in Layce, Sylvi comes up with a different option, one that could avoid an all-out bloody war. It’s a daring and dangerous plan that sends them home, back to where everything started. In the meantime, the curse-bond between Kyn and Sylvi starts to take a toll on their budding romance, and Sylvi’s long-lasting, turbulent relationship with Winter comes to a standstill. This volume sees Sylvi embracing her role as the chosen one and the de facto leader of a revolution—but not without some thoughtful rumination about her feelings for Winter, easily the highlight of an otherwise superficial story that doesn’t flesh out the Majority as a villain and relies on a deus ex machina infodump for its denouement. The fast-paced, plot-driven narrative leads to a rushed, simplistic resolution to a story hundreds of years in the making. The main characters read White; racial diversity exists in the world.

A flat and compressed duology closer. (Fantasy. 12-18)

**BLITZKRIEG**

*Falkner, Brian*

Scholastic (368 pp.)

$12.99 paper | Jan. 3, 2023

978-1-338-85782-5

A teen working for Britain’s MI6 during World War II infiltrates the Hitler Youth.

Joseph St. George is 12 on Nov. 9, 1938—Kristallnacht—when the Gestapo takes his father away. Joe’s family isn’t Jewish, and he believes his New Zealander parents are diplomats. He’s grown up in Berlin and, with his best friend, Klaus, nephew of Martin Bormann, Hitler’s secretary, has witnessed both military parades and the persecution of neighborhood Jews. When he and his mother have to flee for their lives, Joe realizes there’s more to her life than he knew—especially once she shoots a man. The story then flashes forward two years. Joe, who was sent to live with family on a sheep farm in New Zealand, stows...
Knowing he won’t remember their time together, Ren struggles away to London in search of his mother only to discover that the address she gave him doesn’t exist. His attempts to find her lead to mayhem, death, and an interesting invitation from the British government. With a cracking pace and an interesting assortment of largely White characters (excepting Black British musician Ken “Snakehips” Johnson, a historical figure who makes a cameo appearance), it’s a compelling trip presented through the eyes of a natural spy. The wartime details are spot-on. Joe’s initial admiration for Hitler and willingness to target his Jewish neighbors are hard to read about but help show readers his growth from boy to man.

Smart, satisfying, and leaving room for a sequel. (bibliography) (Historical fiction. 12-16)

PROJECT NOUGHT
Furedi, Chelsey
Clarion/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Feb. 21, 2023
978-0-358-38169-3

A New Zealand teen is dragged from 1996 into the future by a shady company in this work that expands on a popular webcomic.

When Kieren Mittal, who is cued as being of Asian Indian descent, learns that his mother plans to send him to stay with his aunt for the summer so he can work and not just sit around playing video games, he impulsively decides to go visit his pen pal. After tripping and hitting his head on the bus, however, he wakes up in the year 2122. Ren discovers that he’s among 50 subjects transported through time by Chronotech to assist University of Time Expansion students with their history projects. After five months, the subjects’ memories will be wiped, and they will be returned to the moments from which they were taken. Knowing he won’t remember their time together, Ren struggles with growing closer to Mars, the White boy who will be his roommate, receives dire warnings from former student Jia about the experiment’s risks and Chronotech’s cover-up of a death. Ren and Jia must investigate to find the truth. Ren and Mars’ developing relationship is both adorable and full of angst, while rising tension mounts into a stunning twist ending. The attractive artwork is reminiscent of classic comics and features interestingly varied panels and a charmingly expressive, queer, and racially diverse cast.

A joy ride that will take readers from crying to gripping their seats and back again. (Graphic science fiction. 13-18)

A TALE OF TWO PRINCES
Geron, Eric
Inkyard Press (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-0-593-11199-4

Accidentally separated at birth, gay identical twin brothers Edward and Billy are thrown into a royal whirlwind when their unexpected reunion interrupts both of their plans for the future. Crown Prince of Canada Edward Dinnissen is starting his senior year of high school at an elite prep school in New York City. He’s ready to shed the bad press from a mishap on his last birthday and is busy preparing for his upcoming investiture ceremony. Meanwhile, Montana native Billy Boone is trying to find his place in the world, torn between working on his family’s ranch and carrying on his recently deceased father’s legacy and feeling like he’s meant for something bigger. A gifted violinist, Billy is elated to be invited to try out for Juilliard. The two boys’ worlds are turned upside down when an accidental run-in while Billy is in New York City for the audition leads to the discovery that the presumed White 18-year-olds are in fact long-lost twins. Pax, Billy’s best friend from home, is a Black, nonbinary aspiring fashion designer whose attraction to Prince Edward takes an exciting turn. The plot is relatively engaging, with scenes that will keep many readers interested. Unfortunately, character development is weak, and as a result, the characters’ motivations come across as inconsistent and ungrounded. Since many deeper themes and feelings are spelled out rather than emerging organically, events that should evoke serious emotions often fall flat and lack resonance.

A pleasant but unremarkable coming-of-age tale. (Fiction. 13-18)

THE GIRL I AM, WAS, AND NEVER WILL BE
A Speculative Memoir of Transracial Adoption
Gibney, Shannon
Dutton (256 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-0-593-11199-4

An ambitiously authentic adoption story where fiction does the work of truth, and archives, correspondence, and health records provide the roots of fantasy.

When she was 19, Shannon Elaine Gibney met Erin Rebecca Powers via a letter from Child and Family Services of Michigan. Yet their existences had already been deeply and intimately interwoven. Shannon was adopted by middle-class White parents Jim and Susan Gibney soon after her birth in 1975, but her alcoholic White birth mother, Patricia Powers, had named her Erin. Narratively, time and space become impressively distorted.
as Gibney relays autobiographical accounts of Shannon and Erin that complicate her conceptions of self as a transracial adoptee, biracial Black woman, writer, and science-fiction fan. Erin is imagined at dinner tables with extended family whom Shannon would never know well, if it all, facing the racist familial micro-aggressions she can’t quite avoid in any timeline. Biographical elements are similarly reconfigured: A maternal genetic predisposition to cancer and discovering parts of her Black biological father and his family tree that had all but been erased help flesh out Shannon and Erin in fuller, more embodied ways. Gibney invokes poet Audre Lorde as a sort of third mother, a source of creative inspiration and guidance. As both Erin and Shannon proceed through the spiral wormhole that threads this text together, Gibney offers up the singularly essential connective tissue of a robust and personal body of work.

An innovative and captivating reflection on identity and self. (author’s note, further reading) (Speculative nonfiction. 14-adult)

**JUNKYARD DOGS**
Higgs-Coulthard, Katherine
Peachtree Teen (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 21, 2023
978-1-68263-540-7

While struggling to care for his little brother, an unhoused teen goes looking for their absent father and finds himself in over his head—literally as well as figuratively.

In a mean-streets–style tale raw in language and feeling alike, Higgs-Coulthard propels 17-year-old Josh—desperate to raise the rent his flinty, pot-addicted grandmother demands to share her decrepit trailer with him and 9-year-old Twig—into the deceptively welcoming arms of his missing dad’s longtime pal. Uncle Stan, full of big, vague plans and reassurances, is hanging out in an abandoned building and running a clandestine scrapping operation, diving into manholes to harvest the copper wire and plumbing beneath. Distressing events in Josh’s family history add further grit, and once he begins finding dead bodies with the pipes underground, betrayal as well as escalating illegal activities ramp up the danger and suspense. But it’s the succession of cold nights in filthy settings; the daily rounds of opportunistic snatching of scraps of cast-off and barely edible food to assuage constant, gnawing hunger; the pressure to present a facade of normalcy at school; and the pervasive lack of any sense of safety or trust that will likely evoke the strongest reactions in readers. Josh’s unwavering loyalty to his brother offers a bright spot, and the story ends on a note of catharsis, if not resolution. Main characters are cued as White.

A visceral story; not utterly tragic but grim and sad overall. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

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**THE WINTER SOLDIER**
**Cold Front**
Lee, Mackenzi
Marvel Press (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-1-368-02227-9
Series: Marvel Rebels & Renegades, 3

Can an origin story for Bucky Barnes as he becomes the Winter Soldier be anything but painful?

In this volume, Lee continues exploring Marvel’s misunderstood antagonists. It’s 1954, smack in the middle of Bucky’s journey from hero to villain and back again. Instead of Bucky, there’s only the Winter Soldier, a brainwashed torturer and assassin for the (slightly Cold War-caricatured) Soviet Union. The Soldier—confused by his lack of memory, wishing he knew his own name—is nonetheless an obedient asset and a loyal partner to his handler. As the Winter Soldier performs his mission, in a storyline interspersed with
movie-style action scenes, some chapters flash back to 1941: The U.S. hasn't yet entered the war, and 16-year-old Bucky pesterers his snarky, affectionate guardian to let him enlist (roughly following comics canon, not the movie). Teen Bucky's an incorrigible flirt and smuggler (or entrepreneur!), but he wants to serve his country. Knowledgeable readers and new fans alike will see the forthcoming disaster in young Bucky's eagerness to fight for people who he's beginning to realize are morally compromised. He starts up a doomed but profound romance with a girl he meets on his first mission. Meanwhile, in 1954, the Soldier's resurfacing memories of Captain America reveal an extremely close affection between the two. All characters appear to be White.

Cinematic, CGI–ready action—but also a moving exploration of memory and identity. (Science fiction. 13-18)

SEVEN FACELESS SAINTS
Lobb, M.K.
Little, Brown (400 pp.)
$19.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-316-38688-3
Series: Seven Faceless Saints, 1

Ex-sweethearts–turned-enemies Rossana Lacertosa and Damian Venturi work together to find a killer.

In Ombrazia, all disciples descend from the seven faceless saints, but descendants like Damian who do not possess magic are the unfavored. They can't attend the magical Mercato night market or reside in the opulent Palazzo. Instead, they live in poverty and are drafted into war, like Roz's father, whom Damian's general father, a disciple of the saint Strength, killed for deserting. Shortly after, when she was 16, Roz's magic revealed itself. She became a disciple and a rebel, pledging to use her power to bring about justice. Two years on, Damian has returned from the war. Now 18, his father makes him head of Palazzo security. Then two unfavored children are murdered, and the Palazzo ignores their deaths—yet a disciple's murder requires Damian's investigation. Roz confronts him, and Damian agrees to work with her; he, too, suspects all the murders are connected. They rekindle their romance and uncover a web of politics, lies, and power that is anything but holy. This fantasy murder mystery, set in an alternate Italy and laced with romance, is slow to start and sometimes hard to follow, but queer Roz is the saving grace. Layered and authentic in her trauma, anger, and strength, she far outshines Damian. However, both read as much older than teenagers.

Full and detailed worldbuilding, but the characters and plot struggle to compete with it. (Fantasy. 14-18)

REMEMBER ME TO HATE YOU LATER
Mason, Lizzy
Bloomsbury (316 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 28, 2023
978-1-5476-0918-5

The fallout and sustained ripple effects of a young woman's death by suicide are explored in this realistic novel. Jules has long struggled with her social media–obsessed mother Britt's posts about parenting and family life. They often share a great deal more about Jules' life than is comfortable for her and also push an image and weight consciousness that damage her well-being. Her best friend, Natalie, and boyfriend, Carter, try to help her negotiate the difficult position she is in with her mom and to support her as she also experiences depression and suicidal ideation and copes by cutting herself. Shifting from the first section, in which Jules' first-person voice is centered, to the second, in which Nat is the narrator, this poignant, honest story is complexly layered, pulling in Jules' loved ones' various perspectives in unfussy, descriptive language. The backstory of Nat's family, who still grieve the death of her mother years earlier, evocatively illustrates the different ways grief can manifest and how it can defy expectations of being a linear process. The auspicious ending is welcome, though Nat's growing understanding of Britt may strike readers as coming about a bit too quickly. Main characters are cued White.

A worthwhile, authentic meditation on loss, difficult family dynamics, and emotional growth. (Fiction. 13-18)

COUNTDOWN
McIsaac, M.J.
Orca (80 pp.)
$10.95 paper | Feb. 14, 2023
978-1-4598-3535-1
Series: Orca Anchor

A high school overachiever learns one final, important lesson just before graduation.

An anonymous texter's threat to post an incriminating picture proving that Myles was at an ugly hazing event—after he'd lied about it to protect his scholarship—turns class valedictorian Myles' graduation day into a nightmare scramble. In a promised exchange for the file, his nemesis forces him to revisit one by one the scenes of past misdeeds and to get in touch with some of his victims, from a classmate whose beloved teddy bear he stole in third grade to the girl with whom he lost his virginity and then dropped and a longtime friend he likewise ghosted after seeing him blamed for the hazing and expelled. Myles must apologize to each one and acknowledge his wrongdoing. Along with keeping to a low page count and using accessible, straightforward language, McIsaac tells her tale entirely in text messages, which
has the effect of ramping up the pace and expertly capturing the troll's taunting tone as well as Myles' increasing desperation as the ceremony approaches. By the end, he has at last identified his tormenter, but more importantly, he's figured out that posting the photo himself—with a short, sincere speech about owning up to failures and taking responsibility for them—is the right thing to do. The characters are minimally described and racially ambiguous.

A page-turner aimed at reluctant readers but apt to find a wider audience. (Fiction. 12-18)

OUT OF CHARACTER
Miller, Jenna
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(384 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-06-324332-3

Can a 17-year-old with her first girlfriend prevent real-life folks from discovering her online fandoms?

Cass is proudly queer, happily fat, and extremely secretive about being a fan who role-plays on Discord. Back in middle school, she had what she calls a gaming addiction, playing "The Sims" so much her parents had to take the game away. Now, turning to her role-play friends to cope with her fighting parents, she worries that people will judge her for her fannishness and online life. To be fair, her grades are suffering. And sure, maybe she's missed a college application deadline. Also, her mom has suddenly left Minneapolis and moved to Maine to be with a man she met online. But on the other hand, Cass is finally dating her amazingly cute longtime crush, Taylor. Pansexual Taylor is a gamer, a little bit punk, White like Cass, and so, so great—but she still can't help comparing her to Rowan, Cass’ online best friend and role-playing ship partner. But Rowan doesn’t want to be a dirty little secret and doesn’t see why Cass can’t be honest about this part of her life. The inevitable train wreck of her lies looms on the horizon for months in an overlong morality play building to the climax that includes tidy resolutions to all the character arcs that are quite heartwarming but, in the case of Cass’ estranged mother, narratively unearned.

Despite the well-meaning warmth, a wearying plod. (Fiction. 13-16)
“A satisfyingly accurate account of zealotry and personal growth.”

**Imposter Syndrome and Other Confessions of Alejandra Kim**

A satisfyingly accurate account of zealotry and personal growth. (Fiction. 13-18)

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the high-powered guests and secure an internship at New England’s top event management agency. The wedding presents another unexpected opportunity: spending the entire summer with Swedish and Korean American Nancy Lim, the long-distance friend she met at a symposium for queer teens. Nancy invites Felicity to use her family’s Vermont apple orchard as a destination wedding venue. In the midst of relationship-centered conflict, Felicity grapples with her ace-spectrum sexuality, her deepening feelings for Nancy, insecurities about her personality, and her overwhelming anxiety. An important aspect of her satisfying character growth comes from learning to let go of her shame around accepting help. High emotions and an impending deadline drive the story at a fast pace that fits Felicity’s character.

An engrossing, emotionally dynamic coming-of-age story. (Romance. 14-18)

**THE WICKED BARGAIN**

Novoa, Gabe Cole

Random House (368 pp.)

$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Feb. 28, 2023

978-0-593-37801-4

978-0-593-37802-1 PLB

There’s nothing more treacherous or binding than a deal with the devil. El Diablo sent the storm that sank La Catalina, one of the last pirate ships in the Caribbean. Mar León de la Rosa grew up hearing how their father traded his soul to save Mar’s life and gain 16 years of prosperity, but they never believed it. Not even Mar’s magia, their secret, dangerous powers of fire and ice, could save their family and shipboard home. Fished out of the sea by Bas, the son of a pirate captain, 16-year-old Mar flounders to hide and control their magia so they can make a new life aboard La Ana, a ship that aids revolutionaries fighting Spanish colonization. Then el Diablo returns with a new bargain: Mar can hand over their own soul to free Papá’s. Set in the summer of 1820 but written in language that feels contemporary, this romantic coming-of-age fantasy offers endearing, flawed heroes, an enticing villain, and high emotional stakes. Bas, Mar’s romantic interest, swaggers with characteristic piratical charm that’s all the more appealing for his earnest eagerness for friendship, gentle kindness, and moments of sweet dorkiness. Novoa heightens the suspense by introducing key details that both foreshadow the danger ahead and reveal more about the world. The characters are primarily Latinx; Cuban and Mexican Mar’s magia is connected to their Mayan heritage. The crew of La Ana includes formerly enslaved Black sailors.

An alluring high-seas adventure. (author’s note) (Fantasy. 13-18)

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**Imposter Syndrome and Other Confessions of Alejandra Kim**

Park, Patricia

Crown (304 pp.)

$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Feb. 21, 2023

978-0-593-56338-0 PLB

A Manhattan private school senior caught between cultures navigates microaggressions while grieving the death of her father.

Alejandra Kim, daughter of second-generation Korean Argentines, feels like she fits in nowhere. She’s uncomfortable at elite Anne Austere Prep, a progressive school where she’s surrounded by wealthy classmates who are clueless about her life as a scholarship student. But with her Korean face and Spanish name, she doesn’t fit in her ethnically diverse neighborhood of Jackson Heights either. Worse still, Papá, the parent she felt really understood her, died eight months ago, leaving her alone with critical, perpetually exhausted Ma. Ale just wants to get through this year and attend her dream liberal arts college in Maine with her White best friend, Laurel. But her life turns upside down when aggressively self-righteously activist Laurel—without Ale’s approval—starts a petition against a teacher who insinuated that Ale’s heritage made her a shoo-in for college. Ale must figure out and stand up for what she believes in. Weighty topics such as appropriation, passing, privilege, and inclusivity are seamlessly addressed in this entertaining, well-paced story. The characterization, both of main characters and of the supporting cast members, is well-rounded and spot-on, wry and vulnerable at once. This skillful depiction of a common sort of subtle, pervasive, and multilayered racism and classism rings true.

A satisfyingly accurate account of zealotry and personal growth. (Fiction. 13-18)

**Iron Wolf**

Pettersen, Siri

Arctis Books (400 pp.)

$20.00 | Feb. 21, 2023

978-1-64690-015-2

Series: Vardari, 1

In Pettersen’s new series opener set in the same universe as her Ravens Rings trilogy, a young wolf hunter is drawn into an ancient struggle to which her family holds the key.

Born into a leading family of blood readers, Juva, 19, left home to hunt wolves rather than read blood samples and craft fake fortunes for the vulnerable, like the desperate blood users whose addiction will kill them. Hunting’s a messy but vital job;
wolf blood fuels the city of Náklav’s magical stone gates that serve as travel gateways. Her hunting companions are Juva’s chosen family now, but confused images from her father’s death haunt her. Did the devil kill him? Was the devil a wolf? Why did her mother insist Juva saw nothing, then demand she tell no one? What impels Juva to sketch wolves, then burn her drawings? Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Juva, the Might, a long-banished magical force, is returning to upend the powers of the vardari, shadowy immortals like Nafraim, who supplies readers with blood and bribes Juva’s blood-addicted ex-boyfriend to inform on her family. Taut and suspenseful, the intricate plot unwinds and repeatedly resets as Juva (and readers) uncover truths buried in ancient lies and traumatic memories. More human than superhero, anxious, ethical, passionate Juva’s an apt heroine for hard times. The masterful worldbuilding and vivid Nordic setting populated with compelling secondary characters (most read as blond, Scandinavian analogs) are well served by the stirring prose. An immersive, darkly exhilarating read. (Fantasy. 14-adult)

REVELLE
Smith, Lyssa Mia
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (464 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 14, 2023
978-0-06-323926-5

The island of Charmant is a dazzling place where liquor flows freely despite its prohibition on the mainland and a single jewel can bring one’s wildest fantasies to life.

Beneath the glamour, all is not as it seems, and none knows that better than Luxe Revelle, whose family teeters on the brink of starvation while others exploit their own magic to prosper. When Dewey Chronos, the passed-over scion of Charmant’s mayor, offers not only everything the Revelles need to keep their business alive, but a chance to put all of the island’s magical families on equal footing in exchange for Luxe’s help in securing his victory in the upcoming election, she can’t refuse. Meanwhile, orphan Jamison Port finds himself...
“A beautiful tribute to young people who find themselves on the margins of their social settings.”


Ed. by Strong, Karen
Viking (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Jan. 10, 2023
978-0-593-52509-8

A compilation of vibrant entries spanning multiple genres. The 18 stories from Black authors such as Jordan Ifueko, Leah Johnson, Kwame Mbalia, and Tochi Onyebuchi focus on Black teenagers who are trying to affirm their humanity and figure out their places in the world—and, occasionally, beyond. Themes, including familial reconciliation, friendship, and identity, are embedded in many of the stories, threading the book together seamlessly. In Ibi Zoboi’s “Earth Is Ghetto,” Ingrid, a Haitian American teenager far from her hometown, often feels “like an abandoned building” as the jewels the island runs on. On the surface, this fantastical romance ticks all the standard boxes. However, the carefully orchestrated plot unfolds, revealing new layers, twists, and revelations at every turn and building to a crescendo. A great deal of thought has been put into the worldbuilding, and the characters are richly and sensitively drawn. This attention to small details makes it easy to lose oneself in the story, and if the ending feels a bit rushed, the story’s strengths more than make up for it. Lead characters are White.

An enchanting debut. (Fantasy. 14-18)


This One’s For You
Sweeney, Kate
Viking (288 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 7, 2023
978-0-593-35027-0

Former best friends redefine their relationship and themselves while on a spontaneous road trip.

Caspian Forrester’s mom, the guitarist in an all-woman rock band called The Darlas, died when he was a baby. His dad is still traumatized by the loss, so Cass keeps it a secret that he also plays the guitar, regularly busking in a San Francisco train station. Sydney Greenfield, Cass’s former best friend, sticks out in her family of high-achieving siblings—and not in a good way. Though she’s landed an internship at an illustrious music venue, she hasn’t told her parents about it yet. Meanwhile, Cass learns that The Darlas are reuniting for one last tour. When their paths cross after high school graduation and Cass gives Syd a ride, they spontaneously decide to go to the first show in Sacramento together. One show leads to another, and as they follow the band, the two White teens have a lot of time together on the road to work through their respective issues with their parents, what happened with their friendship, and what comes next. Though the protagonists end the book as a couple, the focus is on the characters’ individual journeys, which include realistically dealing with issues around grief, mental health, and finding the confidence to follow their own paths.

Music fans will especially enjoy this story of two people learning to trust themselves—and each other. (Romance. 12-18)

Stress Less
A Teen’s Guide to a Calm Chill Life
Tompkins, Michael A.
Magination/American Psychological Association (312 pp.)
$16.99 | Feb. 14, 2023
978-1-4338-3704-3

Explores the myriad factors that lead to teen stress and offers solid strategies for coping with it.

Two opening chapters describe in physiological, mental, and emotional terms what stress is, its causes, and some coping mechanisms that can combat it. Charts and tables break down levels of stress, coping skills, and physiological symptoms. Subsequent chapters go even further in identifying different kinds of stress and their causes as well as providing solutions, which psychologist Tompkins calls Stress Hacks and that are included as boxed sidebars. These subcategories of stress include ones related to school and work, performance and tests, family and friends, dating and relationships, media and technology, and health and hormones. Quandaries and quotes from teens are peppered throughout. Each chapter ends with concise

in over his head (and heels) when pursuing a strange sense of déjà vu catapults him into a world of intrigues as multifaceted as the jewels the island runs on. On the surface, this fantastical romance ticks all the standard boxes. However, the carefully orchestrated plot unfolds, revealing new layers, twists, and revelations at every turn and building to a crescendo. A great deal of thought has been put into the worldbuilding, and the characters are richly and sensitively drawn. This attention to small details makes it easy to lose oneself in the story, and if the ending feels a bit rushed, the story’s strengths more than make up for it. Lead characters are White.

A fearless and satisfying collection of expansive stories. (contributor bios) (Anthology. 12-18)
“Absolutely brilliant!”

“For the past 20 years I’ve been watching the superhero genre and been waiting for someone to make a breakthrough—advancing the superhero genre to new heights by dealing more maturely and seriously with its underlying themes. Some people have managed to do it in the comics themselves, but I haven’t seen anyone do it in novel form. I think you did it.”
—David Farland, Bestselling Author of The Runelords

For All Inquiries, Please Email author@talanhorne.com • talanhorne.com
takeaways summarizing the most significant points. While Tompkins’ treatment is certainly comprehensive, it can also feel repetitive and verbose. The narrative tone ricochets from formal to colloquial, favoring the former. The author often uses a lengthy paragraph to explain what could be expressed in a single sentence. Still, though the book ultimately feels more like a reference book than a self-help guide, teens can find what they need in the numerous sidebars, charts, and bullet points. The backmatter begins with a very helpful chart identifying exercises targeted to alleviating specific stresses by page number.

A dense but all-inclusive treatment of stress, with reader-friendly tips, tables, and checklists. (resources, index) (Nonfiction. 13-18)

**ABANDON SHIP!  
The True World War II Story About the Sinking of the Laconia**

_Tougas, Michael J. & Alison O’Leary_  
Christy Ottaviano Books (272 pp.)

$18.99 | Feb. 21, 2023  
978-0-316-40137-1  
Series: True Survival, 1

The story of the fates of passengers on a British former luxury liner torpedoed by a German U-boat in September 1942 off the west coast of Africa.

The _Laconia_, with nearly 3,000 passengers aboard—Italian POWs, Polish guards, British military personnel, and civilians—was traveling from Egypt to England via the Cape of Good Hope. After being hit by the German submarine, survivors scrambled to board the insufficient number of lifeboats and rafts. After realizing the POWs—Germany's allies—were onboard, along with women and children, U-boat Cmdr. Hartenstein tried to save as many people as he could and radiated for assistance. However, during the rescue, an American plane bombed the U-boat, forcing another evacuation of the frightened passengers. The personal stories of a few of the British survivors of varying ages and backgrounds will especially grab readers’ attention. This powerful account of human resilience and behavior during crises will inspire contemplation of the impact of war. The book explores extremes: the British mistreatment of the POWs, Hartenstein’s humanitarian actions, stronger survivors throwing a weakened sailor off a lifeboat, and an ill doctor who drowned himself, sacrificing his own life to avoid infecting others on his lifeboat. The lengthy lifeboat voyages under the brutal sun with little food and water and the experiences some survivors had in a Vichy French prison camp in Morocco are vividly described.

A gripping wartime story that probes moral uncertainties. (main characters and vessels, epilogue, glossary, bibliography) (Nonfiction. 12-15)

**ALWAYS THE ALMOST**

_Underhill, Edward_  
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)

$18.99 | Feb. 14, 2023  
978-1-250-83520-8

Sixteen-year-old Miles has two goals for the year: beat his rival at the Tri-State Piano Competition and win back his ex-boyfriend.

Miles Jacobson, a White trans boy from Wisconsin, had been dating Shane McIntyre for a year before Miles came out and Shane broke up with him. He believes that if Shane really loved him, his gender shouldn’t matter. But Miles’ New Year’s resolution to win Shane back is complicated by the arrival of Eric Mendez, a cute Latine guy who actually is queer and also likes Miles. As Miles works toward his piano goals with Stefania Smith, his demanding new teacher, a romance blossoms with Eric—even though Miles still has Shane on the brain. Underhill makes it clear in a preface that this is a joyful queer story, and it lives up to that promise. The book captures the delight of being not just accepted, but also understood—as well as the pains of being misunderstood. It celebrates Miles’ real triumphs, from finding a suit that fits to mastering a Tchaikovsky concerto. Miles is likable and relatable as he tries to discover who he is on his own terms, not based on what others think of him. The author has chosen to include Miles’ birth name prominently; this is uncomfortable but realistic for someone early in his transition. The supporting characters, especially Stefania, are well developed and bring life to Miles’ world.

A warm, optimistic transgender coming-of-age and queer romance. (author’s note) (Romance. 14-18)

**THE SEVERED THREAD**

_Veder, Leslie_  
Razorbill/Penguin (416 pp.)

$19.99 | Feb. 7, 2023  
978-0-593-32585-8

A team of treasure hunters and an enchanted prince must save a magic kingdom while evading magic-hating pursuers.

Filore, Shane, Briar Rose, and Red continue their journey in this sequel to _The Bone Spindle_ (2022). Briar, now free of his sleeping curse, must find a way to defeat the Spindle Witch and save his lost kingdom with more than a little help from Fi. Shane, the huntsman, is still struggling with her feelings for Red, who betrayed them. On the run from the Spindle Witch and the vicious Witch Hunters, the group seeks out the hidden Witch city of Everlynd. The story is inspired by fairy tales without being a simple retelling. Both the action and the romance are heart-pounding, but perhaps the most touching aspects are the friendships among the characters: Their world is full of magic, mysteries, and
“Endlessly imaginative, superbly crafted.”
*THE SCARLET CIRCUS*

danger, and they support each other through it all with love and compassion. Unfortunately, this novel does suffer from a common problem affecting second books, lacking a clear narrative arc and largely feeling like a setup for Book 3. Luckily, there is enough excitement and a climactic conflict to leave readers satisfied. Briar and Shane are White; tan-skinned Fi and Red have dark hair.

Fans of the first book should definitely not miss this second entry. (Fantasy. 12-18)

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**THE SCARLET CIRCUS**
*Yolen, Jane*
Tachyon (256 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Feb. 14, 2023
978-1-61696-386-6

Surprising, entertaining, romantic stories in the tradition of folktales and legends reimagined.

As skillful as *The Emerald Circus* (2017), thematically warmer than *The Midnight Circus* (2020), this volume’s central thread is love. Featuring an introduction by Brandon Sanderson, it collects more of Yolen’s reimagined narratives, many of them previously published. But fairy-tale endings are not guaranteed: Characters choose badly, and death and other sadness enters in. Julie appears from her grave, mourning Roman, in a wry rewrite of *Romeo and Juliet* narrated by an elf. Several tales are about the power—for good or ill—of belief; merfolk, djinn, and ghosts play major roles. There is time travel and some real history as well as appearances by Merlin and Arthur, Alice Liddell, and many brave and independent young women. The rich and varied plots and tones are matched by advanced but suitable vocabulary—fortuitously, lambent, incorporeal, slatterns, sepulchral, and legerdemain, for example—much of which young readers will be able to decipher from the context. Occasional poems are interspersed among the stories. The fully realized details bring to life both this-worldly and otherworldly settings. Yolen enthusiasts will be rapt, and new fans will be won.

Endlessly imaginative, superbly crafted tales that stir the heart. (story notes and poems) (Fantasy. 14-adult)
In her latest book, retired teacher and long-distance hiker Alcorn offers a collection of vignettes by female hikers with the goal to encourage other older women to get out and hike.

The editor states that this book has something to offer for any hiker, but the primary focus of this book is “on, and for, women 45 years of age or older.” However, one can easily forget this intention, as many of the tips here are great for all age ranges; for example, they encourage buying the correct shoes, investing in lightweight clothing, and stretching before a hike.

Each chapter presents a Q&A with a different woman, with a brief introduction by Alcorn, and they each offer distinct perspectives. For example, Marion Davison, who goes by the trail name “llamalady,” is a skilled backpacker who also hikes with pack llamas; she describes her backpacking experiences with her husband. She’s one of the few women in the book who’s adamant about not hiking solo; she mentions the 2013 death of Geraldine Largay, who became lost while hiking the Appalachian Trail in Maine, and uses it to make a point about “unnecessary death.” Nancy “Why Not?” Huber, on the other hand, says that she believes that life is too short not to take hikes by oneself. She has decades of hiking experience and describes how, at 67, she’s had to adjust her hikes to accommodate the fact that her body is aging. Initially, the format will feel jarring if one expects more traditional memoirs; however, after the first few chapters, the Q&As feel approachable, and the photograph of each hiker puts a face on each story. The stories are diverse and contain nuggets of wisdom that women of all ages will find relevant, as when hiker Diane Spicer says, “I think women are taught to underestimate ourselves from Day One….My advice? Delete old fear-based messages….Replace them with appreciation for your wonderful hiking body. Respect your ability to make good decisions.”

An inspirational collection of older women’s trail tales.
Alice wanders through the wilderness, following the storyline Indeed, those who desire clear explanations for every aspect Rivers sisters and the Bailiwick brothers stumble into a rebel Carroll-esque aspects of the novel come out in full force, as quies like those found in the former’s Avery’s near-future dystopian novel mixes climate change SF with surreal children’s fiction à la Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland in a provocative adventure tale. One day, late in the 21st century, everything went blank. That is, no one could remember anything about the past, including about themselves. The resulting centuries of chaos led to the occupation of the world and oppression of its people by those with the most resources, as technology, for the most part, also reset during the blank. Seeds eventually became the most prominent currency for the common person, including the young children at the center of this book’s action: Amazon and Danube Rivers and their friends Alabama and Nebraska Bailiwick. The story begins in earnest when the Rivers sisters discover an interloper eating their seeds. Alice, who becomes a major character later in the book, reveals secrets about the world to the other children and to the reader. However, Avery leaves readers in the dark, just as the main characters are, about most details of the world. Indeed, those who desire clear explanations for every aspect of a novel’s plot should look elsewhere, as this book instead revels in obscurity. After becoming embroiled with Alice, the Rivers sisters and the Bailiwick brothers stumble into a rebellion against the occupiers, all while they attempt to assist Alice with her strange machinations. Avery’s prose is akin to that of Ray Bradbury and Lewis Carroll, by turns, with long soliloquies like those found in the former’s Something Wicked This Way Comes (1962). Part V of the novel, “Alice’s Journey,” is where the Carroll-esque aspects of the novel come out in full force, as Alice wanders through the wilderness, following the storyline of a nursery rhyme and meeting an array of colorful characters who impart wisdom upon her. The novel’s latter half intriguingly veers away from the typical tropes of dystopian fiction to unveil a cautionary parable.

An artful and offbeat speculative work.

TUX
The Adventure Begins
Beka, Donika & J.F. McKeever
Freeze Time Media (312 pp.)
978-1-946702-69-2

A YA fantasy stars a collection of uniquely gifted animals.

Tuxedo is a sweet, 11-month-old huskita (a husky/Akita mix). In the series opener’s action-packed opening, he and his human, Julian Larsen, are returning home after a weekend visit with Julian’s mother. Kidnappers force Julian off the road and, leaving Tux trapped in his travel crate, push the man’s SUV into the lake. As the water inside the car rises, the terrified Tux howls and gasps what he assumes is his final breath. Suddenly, he is rescued by two industrious beavers and one quick-witted, indomitable red fox called Machias. Readers have now entered the magical world of the Chigakwa, chosen animals imbued with the gift of Sosha, an ancient human who communicated with the spirit world. Sosha transformed into a large wolf with extraordinary skills and a mission to protect humanity from evildoers. Today, the Chigakwa are an international coalition of select representatives of almost all animal species who can converse with one another. Their current leader is the great she-wolf Maheeni. Tux’s traumatic experience has suddenly “awakened” his inner Chigakwa. Through a cascading series of adventures with Machias and Chigakwa cohorts, Tux will put his newly discovered talents to work trying to save the missing Julian. But first Machias must bring Tux to the Mountain, the secret Chigakwa headquarters, where Maheeni will evaluate the canine’s potential. Beka and McKeever’s Disney-esque adventure is delightful and amusing, filled with witty dialogue that builds the major players, especially Machias, into characters solid enough to allow for easy suspension of disbelief. Despite an overly ambitious plotline (there turns out to be more at stake than Julian’s survival), the authors limit their use of the animals to activities that remain consistent with their species’ conventional physical abilities, making them more credible. The beavers use their strong teeth to pull Tux’s crate out of the car; the fox manipulates the locking mechanism with his mouth; and an adorable, newly recruited owl, Huckleberry, is a stealthy messenger. Their superpowers rest in their cognitive and communicative abilities.

A charming, imaginative, and magical tale that will leave animal lovers of all ages smiling.

THE ISLANDS OF IROS
Bracklow, L.M.
Manuscript

In this YA fantasy, a tween trains to fight in a swiftly approaching war.

Twelve-year-old Luke Weiler lives on the isle of Zuturo. His best friend is Damien Berlinger, a quiet boy of the same age who excels in drawing and standing up for Luke when he’s in trouble. Luke’s older brother, Finn, is a member of the Crimson Raiders, soldiers who defend Zuturo and explore the continent’s other islands. One day, the isle celebrates the Crimson Raiders’ latest expedition, and Finn stands aboard The Fallen Rose in the harbor. Tragically, the ship explodes. It’s determined that Elvos Kreen, a vicious pirate from the neighboring island of Mokrull, is responsible. Meanwhile, 12-year-old Kaori Takenouchi works in the Hangar’s Lair, a pub run by Blacktooth Ramsey. Having killed Kaori’s parents, Blacktooth keeps the girl as his pub wench. But she dreams of visiting every island of Iros like her hero,
Time-travel tales have been popular since H.G Wells penned his 1895 novella, *The Time Machine*, and later writers, such as William Gibson, in his 2014 novel, *The Peripheral*, have further refined the genre. YA authors have also made key contributions, such as Madeleine L’Engle’s 1962 classic, *A Wrinkle in Time*. Here are three more books about time treks, all recommended by Kirkus Indie:

**The Time Travel Team: The Great Historic Mystery** (2018) by Jordyn Had- den tells of four teens—Tyme Newton, Luna Edison, Avia Wright, and Olympia Van Gogh—who go on an adventure through time to remedy an over-loading “cosmic generator.” Along the way, they decipher clues from relatives Isaac Newton, Thomas Edison, Orville Wright, and Vincent Van Gogh. It’s “a winsome [YA] tale with a reverence for science and the humanities,” according to Kirkus’ review.

In Scott P. Southall’s YA fantasy sequel, *The Order of Time and Odin’s Door* (2022), 12-year-old twins Anastasia and Edward Upston end up marooned in medieval Denmark when their test to join the Order of Time—history’s protectors—goes sideways. Soon, the pair, along with famed Viking Erik the Red, go up against a dragon and its undead minions. Kirkus’ reviewer calls the book “a lively, entertaining time-travel tale that nicely blends history, myth, and adventure.”

Stanlei Bellan’s debut story collection, *T is for Time Travel* (2021), features 10 works that look at time skipping from various angles and genres. In one, a djinn can grant three trips to any place and time; another, riffing on *Star Trek*, tells of a spaceship caught in a time loop, repeatedly losing the same battle; and still another sends a present-day man to ancient Pompeii—before the volcanic disaster. Our reviewer writes that “a tone of hopefulness and fun runs through the stories” in this “promising and nostalgic collection.”

David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.

**I REMEMBER MY EIGHTH BIRTHDAY**

*Carr-Harris, Philip M.*

Illus. by Jo Spencer

Palmetto Publishing (58 pp.)

$30.31 | $20.26 paper  |  Aug. 3, 2022

979-8-88590-976-1

979-8-88590-977-8 paper

On a youngster’s eighth birthday, a note sparks a scavenger hunt for “common and uncommon things” in this illustrated children’s book.

The sun rises through the wood-framed window in a dimly lit green room. It is the unseen narrator’s eighth birthday, and the child is woken by the weight of the rucksack that sits at the end of the bed. A note in verse tucked in the rucksack prompts the narrator to search for “thingamajigs” for each of the eight years, with the promise that the scavenger hunt will help the child understand the poem. Spencer’s watercolor and pastel illustrations use flat space inventively. The muted skies, first-person point of view, natural landscapes, and objects whose sizes are proportional to their importance add an enchanting mystery to the narrator’s quest. Carr-Harris invites young readers to imagine themselves as the narrator, but the objects collected paint a more specific, less universal portrait. The narrator’s friend, the son of a “professor of divinity,” gives the child a Canaanite pottery fragment, and they discuss the meaning of civilization before moving on to Grandma for a photograph. A trip to the quarry yields a trilobite fossil—taking the narrator even further back in time. Blocks of text on each page deftly describe the flora of the neighborhood and the feeling of walking and meditating on the sensation of searching without knowing what you are looking for. Not every child will be
Chinquee’s measured prose breaks over the reader like shallow, slow-moving waves.”

Chinquee, Kim
Ravenna Press (140 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Oct. 31, 2022
978-1-73691-690-2

A woman confronts her personal demons against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic in Chinquee’s novel in flash fiction.

Elle appreciates order. She’s an Air Force vet with an adult son (who is currently serving in the military himself) and lives in Buffalo with her partner, the fitness-obsessed Henry, and their four dogs. She teaches fiction writing at a local college. She jogs. She tries to learn to ski, though she finds it exhausting and terrifying. In therapy, she explores her relationship with her late father and the ways his schizophrenia affected their relationship. She also consults her spirit guide—whom she imagines as a man in a beret—who helps her reconnect with her memories of childhood. Henry’s emerging Trumpism proves a strain on the relationship—one that gets even worse when he loses his job at a car dealership. Henry kicks Elle out of the house they share, and immediately after she moves into a new neighborhood, Covid hits. In this new life of isolation, Elle adjusts her priorities. “The mattress in the guestroom is comfy, and the frame is broken, so the mattress just sits on the floor....Sometimes I fall asleep to the TV. Some nights I get up and go to the master bedroom, which is clean and organized. Most nights I fall asleep in one bed, wake in the night and move to the other.” As the pandemic wears on, she confronts her troubled relationships with the now-dead men in her family—her father, her uncle, her paternal grandfather—as well as her attachment to dogs and her compulsion to stay in shape. But while John is an ambitious perfectionist on his way to build a $1 million house—Steve feels trapped in an unfulfilling career requiring his to relax her grip on the ordered life she’s long struggled to build?

Chinquee’s measured prose breaks over the reader like shallow, slow-moving waves. Here, Elle jogs in the early days of the pandemic: “The park is pretty bare now. I miss the bustle of bikers, children, people on the golf course. There’s a zoo on one portion of the park and I see some cars there. The zoo is closed. I breathe and take my steps. I opt for another loop. My legs feel heavy. My heart feels heavy. My lungs are pretty healthy.”

The novel unfolds as a series of flash fiction stories, most less than a page long, each with its own title. The reading experience is not so different than that of an autofiction novel—The Department of Speculation (2014) by Jenny Offill and The End of the Story (1995) by Lydia Davis come to mind. The narrative unfolds slowly through the accumulation of trivial details: the positions of the dogs on the couch, the exercises Henry is doing, the meals Elle makes with her Vitamix. Chinquee’s moves are oblique, and they often take Elle and the reader away from the most engaging material in favor of the mundane. In doing so, however, the novel replicates a bit of what it’s like to repress or avoid or deny one’s personal issues, sprinting (or biking or skiing) ever forward in hopes our problems can be outrun.

A quiet, fragmentary novel about the chaos roiling beneath life’s surface.

Steve Galanos didn’t initially like his colleague John Goertz. When John warned the phone company for which they worked of the impending disaster that came to be known as Y2K, Steve thought it was an opportunistic career move, especially since it was only 1994. But John’s case proved convincing, and he was rewarded for what was seen as his diligent prescience, an outcome that rankled Steve: “This was his master plan all along. Point out this ridiculous problem, scare everyone, and get himself a promotion.” Nevertheless, while working together on the newly created Year 2000 Conversion Team, they both discover they have a lot in common, and the two become best friends. But while John is an ambitious perfectionist on his way to building a dream life—he weds Mary, makes a killing when a new company he works for launches a successful IPO, and buys a $1 million house—Steve feels trapped in an unfulfilling career without any hopes for improvement. Not surprisingly, his feelings of inadequacy emerge in the form of profound envy: “I was completely jealous, just like on that first day I had met him. Who was this guy and what had he done to deserve all of this?”

Cuesta delicately portrays Steve’s mounting discontent mixed with genuine fraternity—in fact, his jealousy is only explicable in the context of his very real affection for his best friend. But when John hosts a housewarming party at his new home in swanky Los Gatos, the friendly competitiveness between them turns sinister.

The author paints a rich tableau of Northern California during the frenetically optimistic days of the tech industry and—as Y2K demonstrated—the feverish capacity for overheated fearmongering. It was a time when considerable fortunes were eagerly made and quickly lost. As John climbs the ladder of corporate success, Steve is laid off. In addition, Cuesta limns a devilishly complex psychology of envy, which plumbs the peculiar relationship between love and loathing. Finally, the author captures an emotional emptiness at the core of corporate striving,
Even the terrible death that opens “Those Beneath, Devour,” is a shorter novel—and the granular presentation of drearily flat imagery, most stories simply imply savage turns, even when they involve things that bite. In other instances, the visuals are simply unnerving, as in the knockout “Rig Rush.” This tale’s narrator aims to settle in Sanctuary, a town that’s just struck oil. All seems fine until a foul-smelling, oily substance oozes out of seemingly everything—including, most frighteningly, living things. The book’s sublime descriptions zap all kinds of sights to life: a long driveway like a “sloping serpent,” tree branches resembling “tentacles, or reaching arms, or a hundred snakes,” and a crowd of nameless faces “painted red and blue from [a police cruiser’s] flickering lights.” Other stories feature more familiar horrors; more than one deals with domestic abuse, and loyalty to friends or family drops several characters into harrowing circumstances. In “The Guest,” scenes of everyday life preface a simmering horror, as when a seemingly innocuous university professor’s prolonged stay at the narrator’s childhood home coincides with a harsh winter and an inexplicable sickness that pervades the household—much like the terror throughout this entire collection. 

A host of disturbing and entrancing short stories.

**LES FEMMES GROTESQUES**

*Dalpe, Victoria*

Clash Books (274 pp.)

$18.95 paper | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-955904-23-0

Dark houses, ravenous creatures, and malevolent entities appear in this collection of unsettling tales. In Dalpe’s grim tales carry a strong tone of foreboding. Many characters find themselves drawn or led to things, as if they’re inescapable. Creepy homes call to them; strange people push them toward their apparent fate; and in the case of the woman in “The Drowned Siren,” a ghost of the sea becomes a relentless obsession. Although the author doesn’t shy away from violent imagery, most stories simply imply savage turns, even when they involve things that bite. In other instances, the visuals are simply unnerving, as in the knockout “Rig Rush.” This tale’s narrator aims to settle in Sanctuary, a town that’s just struck oil. All seems fine until a foul-smelling, oily substance oozes out of seemingly everything—including, most frighteningly, living things. The book’s sublime descriptions zap all kinds of sights to life: a long driveway like a “sloping serpent,” tree branches resembling “tentacles, or reaching arms, or a hundred snakes,” and a crowd of nameless faces “painted red and blue from [a police cruiser’s] flickering lights.” Other stories feature more familiar horrors; more than one deals with domestic abuse, and loyalty to friends or family drops several characters into harrowing circumstances. In “The Guest,” scenes of everyday life preface a simmering horror, as when a seemingly innocuous university professor’s prolonged stay at the narrator’s childhood home coincides with a harsh winter and an inexplicable sickness that pervades the household—much like the terror throughout this entire collection.

**CONJURE SEVEN**

*Day, Erik*

Self (381 pp.)


979-8-78745-744-5

In Day’s debut fantasy thriller, an explosion at the SoCal Arcane Exchange entangles a crystal engineer known as “the Maker” in a dangerous mystery.

Sam “Rick” Rickard is capable of manufacturing magical crystals that are more powerful than any seen before. He sells an especially powerful one for $10 million to the SoCal Arcane Exchange with a stern warning to his buyers not to split it, as “bad things will happen” if they do. He plans to use the money to help his recently orphaned nephew, Ben. But just moments after he leaves the SAE representatives, a massive explosion rocks the city, suggesting that his customers didn’t listen to what he told them—and now the authorities, including the FBI and an arcane-certified investigative squad, are after him. In addition, the larger-than-life magic-user Aka’weyo and his ever growing army of foot soldiers want Rick’s crystals for their own purposes. The powerful, charismatic leader has figured out a way to harness the power of crystal magic to control people’s minds with a simple touch; the devastation he could wreak if he obtained Rick’s crystals is unimaginable. Day’s tale is a thrilling mix of police procedural and fantasy adventure; he’s particularly deft at weaving magical touches into an otherwise realistic and familiar world. Such details, from an image of a wand casually sitting on a desk in an arcane engineer’s office to a stern warning to his buyers not to split it, as “bad things will happen” if they do, as he plans to use the money to help his recently orphaned nephew, Ben. But just moments after he leaves the SAE representatives, a massive explosion rocks the city, suggesting that his customers didn’t listen to what he told them—and now the authorities, including the FBI and an arcane-certified investigative squad, are after him. In addition, the larger-than-life magic-user Aka’weyo and his ever growing army of foot soldiers want Rick’s crystals for their own purposes. The powerful, charismatic leader has figured out a way to harness the power of crystal magic to control people’s minds with a simple touch; the devastation he could wreak if he obtained Rick’s crystals is unimaginable. Day’s tale is a thrilling mix of police procedural and fantasy adventure; he’s particularly deft at weaving magical touches into an otherwise realistic and familiar world. Such details, from an image of a wand casually sitting on a desk in the opening pages to a bird’s-eye view of Aka’weyo’s astral projections, transform this straightforward story into something that’s far more than the sum of its parts. Perhaps most impressive is that the relationship between Rick and Ben manages to be just as engaging as the countless explosions and battles that occur around them, and Ben later makes a discovery that raises
Once she decides she wants to remain with Justin, she creates a plan to overcome his phobia, including outings to challenge his anxiety triggers. But the climactic event in Justin's recovery is a misunderstanding that occurs when a former lover returns, leading to a rift with Norah. The message that Decker deftly conveys is that the world is more complex than Good and Evil, and though the confused protagonist soon escapes, their words linger in his mind. When he finds himself on a mission accompanied by several figures of indeterminate allegiance, he is forced to consider whether the stories he’s heard his whole life about Good and Evil might not be true. In this sequel, DeLauder’s prose has an effortless simplicity to it, painting the galaxy with the soft brush strokes of a fairy tale: “Nestled in the great wide emptiness of space, an ever-so-tiny spherical space station moved through the darkness between tumbling asteroids like a disconnected carriage wheel bouncing across the wasteland.” The novel is reminiscent of the interstellar fables of Italo Calvino and Stanislaw Lem. The rich, intriguing world does not do much to hide DeLauder’s thematic intentions, and yet the story never feels didactic. Fans of hard SF may be underwhelmed by Ace’s adventures, and it’s unclear precisely how this book fits into the author’s series given its self-contained story. Even so, DeLauder offers a delightful and witty flight of fancy.

An entrancing and philosophical SF adventure.

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**OF ASH AND ANGELS**

*Decker, K.C.*

Circumstances throw together two broken souls in a torturous romance in this novel.

Decker introduces readers to Justin Abernathy, a man being smothered by grief, most recently losing his beloved mother, and Norah Carpenter, who gets dismissed from her teaching job. Norah’s vengeful ex-boyfriend posted nude photos of her on social media. Unemployment doesn’t work well for Norah, so she takes a temporary job with the Hand to Heart program, visiting and helping shut-ins. At the prodding of his best friend, Davis, the homebound Justin signs up for the program, and he meets Norah. Initially, they annoy each other, but still there is a strong pull of lust between them. Their relationship grows closer when Justin tells Norah the secret that usually kills his relationships: The firefighter-turned-digital marketing strategist is agoraphobic. He developed the condition after the tragic death of his 14-month-old son, Jaxson. Norah wonders if she can be with a man who may never leave his house again. Once she decides she wants to remain with Justin, she creates a plan to overcome his phobia, including outings to challenge his anxiety triggers. But the climactic event in Justin’s recovery is a misunderstanding that occurs when a former lover returns, leading to a rift with Norah. The message that Decker deftly delivers is that you can never be sure what’s happening inside someone’s head. Justin is self-confident and sexy, yet loss is crushing him to the point that he can’t leave his home. “The fact is, some things can break you. I mean, shatter your soul and cast it into the wind in a billion tiny pieces.” The last thing the rebounding Norah needs is to be fixing a troubled man. Yet each is just what the other needs, as they slowly discover. The author alternates between Justin’s and Norah’s takes on their romance, an inspired choice that allows readers to see both lovers’ perspectives. The fact that physical attraction is a bedrock of their relationship also comes through clearly in this edgy, engaging story. Readers will find it refreshing that Justin and Norah manage to recognize that they are soul mates after such a rocky start.

This engrossing tale skillfully shows two lovers sanding off each other’s rough edges.
Laura Formentini writes a book to honor her son and help others

BY ALEC HARVEY

Three years ago, writer, photographer, and archaeologist Laura Formentini was on assignment in Ethiopia when she received a phone call from her oldest son, Shane, with news a mother never wants to hear: Her youngest son, Blaise, had killed himself. “The pain was unbearable,” she recalls. “And that’s when I started writing. In the beginning, I was just writing to heal myself.”

What she began writing were fables, each containing a specific moral. “I had already written a couple of fables, and out of the blue I had this dream that I [would] write 21 fables,” she says. “I decided to write 21 fables honoring the 21 years of my son’s life.”

The result is the book Twentyone Olive Trees: A Mother’s Walk Through the Grief of Suicide to Hope and Healing, which Kirkus Reviews calls “an offbeat and uplifting contribution to the literature of grief.” Each fable is followed by a note, often written in the form of a poem, to Blaise.

For Formentini, writing was a way to cope with the overwhelming grief she felt after losing her son. “In the beginning, I realized I had all these emotions and energy swirling inside me,” says the author, who practices Transcendental Meditation. “Writing was the very first step for me—poems and letters to Blaise and, eventually, fables. Little by little, [they] became a book.”

Twentyone Olive Trees is the first book for Formentini, who says her job “focuses on nonprofit, ethical photography,” which includes a lot of work and fundraising for animal welfare organizations. At the time of his death, Blaise, a filmmaker, was working on a documentary with his mother.

“He was a highly sensitive person, an empath just like [me],” she says. The two had a close relationship, living together in the U.S. and Europe (Formentini splits her time between Northern California and the south of France) and traveling all over the world. “We could oftentimes finish each other’s sentences,” she says. “We really understood each other. It was more than being a mother and son. It was a true friendship.”

The poems and letters in Twentyone Olive Trees, including “One Thing,” one of the first in the book, follow Formentini’s journey to deal with her grief:

And you know that
I am so hurt
I am so hurt
Because my Love for you was the best
And it still is
But you are no longer there to listen
And no longer there to take from me
With a smirk you left me
In this motionless reality
That makes no sense

“The poems can be very raw, especially at the beginning,” Formentini says. “I just let everything out without editing anything. You see how this book traces my evolution and transformation from the initial, uncontrollable pain to all the steps back. It was back and forth, back and forth. It’s really the five stages of grief that this book portrays.”

The writing process was an interesting phenomenon for Formentini. “Once I reached that momentum of creativity, I knew that I was on a mission to really complete a book,” she says. “One very early morning, maybe [around] four…I woke up with a lot of ideas. I went into my office, lit a candle, and started writing. I wrote by hand. The following morning, I’d get up and write again. Something happened to me almost every night. I’d reread it and say, ‘Did I write this?’ I always felt Blaise’s presence as I wrote this book.”

She also realized something in the writing process. “It wasn’t just for myself anymore.”

After she received the call about Blaise, she was befriended by an Ethiopian she didn’t know. “The beauty about this person is he not only was with me all day long, [but] he [also] held my hand all day long,” she remembers. “I was shaking, crying, desperate, and he kept saying, ‘Are you OK, sister? I’m your brother, and I’m here for you.’ He calmed me down. I truly thought he was an angel.”

Formentini later asked him why he did what he did. “He said, ‘Sister, I didn’t do anything special. It was simply my human responsibility.’ ”

Writing *Twentyone Olive Trees* instilled that responsibility in Formentini. “I felt it just like my friend as he was holding my hand that day,” she says. “With this book, I can hold as many hands as possible of people who are grieving, sort of like a friend who is there to hold your hand while you’re grieving but lets you go at your own pace.”

Formentini has already finished a second book, *Coming Home*, about her experience working with an orphanage in Kenya. “The book is meant to create a perspective for the so-called ‘First World kids,’” she says. “The third book is going to be *Sanctuary*, [which] includes interviews with several people who have created animal sanctuaries. It includes one in the States, one in Africa, and one in Puerto Rico.”

In the meantime, she’s working on a TED Talk based on lessons learned from *Twentyone Olive Trees*. “It’s based on my message that I’ve been refining all these months about what grief really is,” she says. “For me, [it’s] love that has nowhere to go, that is stuck inside the body. It’s negative energy…that we haven’t been able to release.”

Formentini’s planned healing center is also in the works. Her hope is to build it and to plant 21 olive trees in Assisi, Italy. “The olive tree is a symbol of strength, of regeneration and peace,” she says.

She talks about Blaise in the present tense when asked what he would think of *Twentyone Olive Trees*. “I think he’s very proud,” she says. “It’s about grief, but another message of this book is that if you are an empath, you have a gift, and the gift is you are able to spread this love and tenderness that the world needs. It’s very [difficult] to live in this harsh world, and he left before understanding he had a gift. We were able to help a lot of people and animals. The con to that is it’s very difficult to live with a lot of the materialism and harshness.

“But I definitely think he’s proud,” she adds. “It’s something we did together.”

*Alec Harvey, past president of the Society for Features Journalism, is a freelance writer based in Alabama.*
People may think of presentations as being confined to the world of businesses and PowerPoint, but their essence—delivering a message and some version of oneself to other people, including strangers—is something all of us do almost every day, and this has only become truer since the initial outbreak of Covid-19, when many people effectively became onscreen performers overnight. Professional coach Farrington draws on both her past as an actor and her long experience of helping clients with public speaking in order to make and reinforce her central point: that making any kind of presentation is giving a performance. It requires research, rehearsal, and backup plans in case of disaster. She organizes much of her advice around what she terms the “Three C’s” of a good presentation: confidence, conviction, and connection. Each chapter is designed for maximum utility, featuring chapter summaries, visuals, bulleted points, key takeaways, and links to further online resources. Many illustrations and charts accompany Farrington’s discussions of every aspect of giving a presentation, from nonverbal communication to aspects of one’s voice, including resonance, pitch, projection, and hellers—Farrington’s term for filler words and sounds, such as um, like, and yknow, which many people use during gaps in their speech.

Readers will likely be hard-pressed to decide which aspect of Farrington’s authority is more useful to them as they read: her background in public-speaking coaching or her background in acting. Fortunately, they don’t need to choose, as both are wonderfully represented throughout this book. Intriguingly, she tells tales of anonymized clients whose intelligence and authenticity seemed to vanish the moment they got in front of an audience, at which point they went mute or droned on like robots. She’s coached many such people to better results, but her theatrical background is equally vital to the advice she gives here—particularly when it comes to rehearsal, a key element that she warns is often neglected in an age of seemingly casual Zoom meetings. For instance, she mentions how actors divide their scripts into “beats” (“any time you have a change in emotion, a new thought, a new tactic, or a new engagement tool”) to help them to master the whole. Likewise, she provides readers with extensive tips on vocals, observing that “it’s a cruel betrayal when a highly intelligent person is sabotaged by the sound of their own voice.” She’s insightful and empathetic on a range of other topics, from audience engagement to the “ick factor” of using green screens during at-home video presentations. She always seems to be operating from the assumption that her readers are smart and capable of any improvement they want to make. In the undeniably vast crowd of books about public speaking, this one stands out for its intelligent, direct approach.

An indispensable manual on all aspects of public speaking and a boon to those who may be anxious about it.

**KLIPPE THE VIKING**
*Fyrre, Bjorn*  
*Illus. by Ankitha Kini*  
*Boogamedia (60 pp.)*  
*$19.99 | Oct. 1, 2022  
*978-0-648-81602-7*

A young Viking worries about being different in this illustrated children’s book.

Klippe, a pale-skinned, redheaded Viking who wears a helmet with two horns, doesn’t think she fits in: “Klippe feels that she cannot keep up at School. That she does not understand the jokes the other kids make. That she cannot play the games, she wants to.” But one by one, other kids reach out to Klippe to show her that she belongs. Kanin reveals to Klippe that she also faces difficulties in school; after studying together, they find the answers to the questions they didn’t understand. When Klippe feels left out in a boisterous Viking group, one of the children thanks her for being caring and supporting others. Klippe realizes that even though she acts differently than the other kids, they see her strengths and love her. When Tyr invites Klippe to spar, she hesitates because she has never tried it. But Tyr makes her feel comfortable and Klippe realizes that she is a natural; all she had to do was try. While Klippe’s struggle is internal, these big emotions are very real, and her conflict with her own thoughts and feelings comes to an empowered resolution that young readers will appreciate. In this enjoyable and uplifting tale, Fyrre’s sentence structure is sometimes stilted, but the simple vocabulary makes the book accessible. Kini’s cartoon illustrations are eye-catching, full of funny hats, swords, and shields for the Vikings as well as a goose companion for Klippe. The characters’ varied skin tones reflect both modern diversity and the many lands where historical Vikings roamed, though the setting itself is far more fantastical and reminiscent of Cressida Cowell’s Berk in the How To Train Your Dragon series. The kindliness of Klippe’s community offers an entry point for young readers to discuss their own feelings of being different.

A sweet, comforting, and encouraging Viking tale about friendship and compassion.

**SAILING AT THE EDGE OF DISASTER**
*A Memoir of a Young Woman’s Daring Year*  
*Garber, Elizabeth W.*  
*Toad Hall Editions (330 pp.)*  
*$24.95 paper  
*978-1-7369925-5-5*

This elegant nautical memoir tells the story of a young woman’s courageous personal struggle for independence.

Garber’s debut coming-of-age memoir, *Implosion* (2018), was about trauma and healing. The author’s latest book revisits her troubled teenage years when she and her siblings were allegedly tormented by their abusive architect father. She focuses on time spent seafaring with her brother Woodie on a sailing-school ship
when she was 17. The two were sent away after their father, complaining that he had “two problem kids,” declared that 14-year-old Woodie needed to “get his life in shape.” The book opens in 1971 with Garber fearfully climbing the rigging of a ship, terrified further by the voice of her father telling her she is “weak.” She recounts her growing sense of independence as she learned about sailing—everything from celestial navigation to splicing ratlines. Garber vividly animates her and Woodie’s voyage on the 360-foot Antarna (now called the Sea Cloud), which set out from Miami; visited Grand Bahama, Key West, and Veracruz; and ended its journey abruptly in Panama. The crew faced numerous terrifying moments, including nearly sinking and being held by Panamanian soldiers for a drug search. On returning home to Ohio, Garber felt like she slipped back into the unbearable trap of family life, and she and her brother contemplated patricide. Her father’s sudden illness, however, allowed her to escape.

The prose here is courageously frank; Garber is unafraid to explore even the darkest, most unsettling moments of her father’s alleged abuse. When recalling the secret “backrub” he gave her when her mother was away, she writes: “I declared to myself in a silent cold fury, I will feel nothing, when his hand stroked below my waist, across my belly and hips and thighs.” One of the pleasures of the book is watching the experiences at sea teach the author to be resilient: “I’d learned that liberation was sweeter than holding on. I would risk everything I had to save us.” The author also effortlessly evokes the exhilaration of sailing: “My hair whipped across my face. I loved looking up at the taut white sail, the way the wind again.” Readers familiar with Garber’s memoir will be aware of the author’s troubled growth into adulthood. Some details are naturally repeated in this book but elegantly reframed in context with her sea voyage. Still, fans of straightforward nautical memoirs may hope for an even more detailed account of the journey—coordinates and all. But although the reader is allowed to taste the sea, the emphasis here is on Garber’s psychological odyssey. At one point Garber writes: “Each dawn I watched the transformation of one thing into another, of night into day, as it spread and expanded.” As the memoir progresses, it is interesting to observe Garber’s own incremental transformation into a strong young woman. A detailed diagram of the Sea Cloud is included.

Powerful, confessional writing combined with vivid depictions of sailing.

YOU WEREN’T WITH ME

Ghosh Ippen, Chandra
Illus. by Erich Ippen Jr.
Pipilo Productions (52 pp.)
$19.95 | $11.95 paper | $3.99 e-book
April 18, 2019
978-1-950168-01-9
978-1-950168-02-6 paper

Two recently reunited rabbits discuss their feelings about their separation in Ghosh Ippen’s picture book.

Little Rabbit sighs and tells Big Rabbit, “When you weren’t with me, I missed you so much.” Little Rabbit wanted to be held, and Big Rabbit wanted to hug the youngster. Big Rabbit apologizes for not being there and reassures Little Rabbit that they’re together now. They acknowledge that Little Rabbit likely felt confused, scared, hurt, sad, angry, and alone. Big Rabbit wants to know what Little Rabbit did during their separation and if “good people” helped, although readers may wonder if they meant “good rabbits.” Ghosh Ippen, the associate director of the Child Trauma Research Program at the University of California, San Francisco, and illustrator Erich Ippen Jr. previously collaborated on Once I Was Very Very Scared (2017). The images effectively use washes of color; Little Rabbit is surrounded by orange when mad, dark blue when worried, green when having a stomachache, and mauve when frightened. Using nongendered rabbits helps to make the story universal and child-friendly. The rabbits start out quite far apart on green grass, but their distance lessens until they’re “quite close” and blue sky appears. The typeface is pleasant to read but uses only uppercase N’s, which may be confusing to young readers.

A sensitive, reassuring, and well-illustrated work.

YOU WEREN’T WITH ME

Ghosh Ippen, Chandra
Illus. by Erich Ippen Jr.
Pipilo Productions (52 pp.)
$19.95 | $11.95 paper | $3.99 e-book
April 18, 2019
978-1-950168-01-9
978-1-950168-02-6 paper

A boy with a fatal disease sets out to help a political refugee restore his shattered family in Gordon’s debut coming-of-age novel.

In the late 1970s, Lee Adams is just 12 years old and has a rare condition called Hutchinson-Gilford progeria syndrome, which causes his cells to age rapidly. He weighs only 35 pounds and has the wizened appearance of a bald, 102-year-old man; he’s also plagued by arteriosclerosis and arthritis and is likely to die from a heart attack or blood clot in his teens. He has a sharp mind and a keen interest in American history, especially Benjamin Franklin’s motivational wisdom; he wants to indulge this interest during a long-anticipated trip from his Newark, New Jersey, home to Washington, D.C., accompanied by his mom, Cass, and soul mate, Kira Throop, a 13-year-old girl who also has progeria. After Kira dies suddenly, Cass finds herself unable to take off work, so she insists that Lee make the trip anyway, accompanied by newly hired caretaker Tomás Concepción. Lee is suspicious of Tomás, who drags him around Washington on mysterious errands, but the boy finally gets him to tell him what’s going on: He’s an Argentinian journalist who was jailed and tortured in his home country three years ago along with his wife, Violeta; he’s now searching for news of her and their baby, who he fears may have been taken away and sold on the black market. Lee eagerly joins in Tomás’ quest, and they’re helped by Margaret, a Washington Post reporter, and Alicia, an Argentinean expat connected to the “Abuelas,” an underground network of women who gather information about the disappeared. Lee and the others finally uncover leads that may result in the reunion...
of Tomás’ family—and also learn why this might be a bad idea.

Gordon’s novel is a plangent study of a fearsome disease, depicted in language that’s aptly evocative but never sentimental: “There weren’t any words created that could say why he was on this treadmill with time, or why his collarbones were disintegrating like limestone, or why his spine felt like a brittle trail of broken teeth.” It’s also a dark, gripping investigation of Argentina’s experience with brutal dictatorship in the 1970s and ’80s, full of paranoia and sinister, Kafkaesque atmospherics, as when a character watches secret police descend on her family’s house in Buenos Aires: “She...saw the shadows of two figures being hauled out of her parents’ house—first her father, who had difficulty walking, then her mother sagging behind...She knew she would never see her parents again.” Gordon’s prose is vivid and subtly allusive, conjuring character and feeling from details of appearance and behavior, as in a description of Tomás’ “industrial lunch box and paratrooper shoes” and how he has the “depressed cross-eyed delirium of an undertaker.” The end result is a searching meditation on mortality and hope that’s all the more powerful for being filtered through the quirky point of view of a child.

A soulful journey that offers surprises and unforeseen victories.

THE LYONS OF RABBIT
Guise, Darby
Bear Skin Bob Press (324 pp.)
$16.00 paper | $7.99 e-book | June 22, 2022
978-1-77795-981-4

Guise presents a dark, fantastical novel of rabbits in trouble.

In a series of short chapters, the book tells the tale of a ferocious beast called a Jack that will seemingly kill and eat anything, though it seems to have set its sights on taking down rabbits left and right. The sophisticated, humanlike bunnies have their own complex community, including law enforcement and even a local diner. (Many have a fondness for coffee.) Bill, a rabbit, is a writer, but his literary career doesn’t progress very far, as he’s an early victim. Kristen, a young rabbit whose parents are described as “hucksters with a fondness for coffee,” tells the tale of a ferocious beast called a Jack that will seemingly kill and eat anything, though it seems to have set its sights on taking down rabbits left and right. The sophisticated, humanlike bunnies have their own complex community, including law enforcement and even a local diner. (Many have a fondness for coffee.) Bill, a rabbit, is a writer, but his literary career doesn’t progress very far, as he’s an early victim. Kristen, a young rabbit whose parents are described as “hucksters with a fondness for coffee.”

A persistent fox tries to re-create the perfect gingerbread recipe in this debut illustrated children’s book.

It isn’t easy making gingerbread. Fox once ate the most
Although it isn’t clear why only some speech is in bubbles while Fox’s “Where could they be?” are integrated into the text, the灰。
Heller’s memoir follows his early education and college years
Hayes’ characters and Scebold’s images behind. This story is an
Greyson escape to a nearby town, first hiding in a bakery before
doctorate; it also details his relationship with his wife, Sue, and
format isn’t hard to follow. The same is true for rhyme. Most of
and Greyson jump right off his cookie sheet and make a break
twists and turns of this story keep them on their toes. The
bright, warm illustrations by Scebold bring depth and movement
that take the tale to the next level, integrating with
the text through speech bubbles inspired by graphic novels.
Although it isn’t clear why only some speech is in bubbles while
lines like most of those belonging to the gingerbread twins and
Fox’s “Where could they be?” are integrated into the text, the
format isn’t hard to follow. The same is true for rhyme. Most of
the lines, mainly belonging to Fox, are rhymed but not all, and
the transition is abrupt. But Fox’s rhythmic baking mantra is
cute and simple and could be used to create a call-and-response
between storyteller and audience in a read-aloud situation. The
tale’s end seems sudden, perhaps because it is a shame to leave
Hayes’ characters and Scebold’s images behind. This story is an
engaging addition to the genre of runaway gingerbread fairy
tales that has been popular for almost 150 years.

A fun and enjoyable gingerbread tale with striking
illustrations.

COWBOY FROM PRAGUE
An Immigrant’s Pursuit of the American Dream
Heller, Charles Ota
Atmosphere Press (306 pp.)
$18.00 paper | $9.00 e-book | July 19, 2022
978-1-63988-354-7

Writer and lecturer Heller’s fifth memoir explores the immigrant experience and the reconciliation of identity, family history, and ambitions for a better future.

In 1948, the author, along with his parents, escaped their native Czechoslovakia to come to the United States via a refugee camp in Germany; they’d lost the rest of their family during the Holocaust. Heller arrived in New York’s Long Island at the age of 12 with barely any knowledge of English and an interrupted education. His father told him that in their adopted country, “You’re going to be thrown into the river and will have to swim in order to survive.” The author did just that, quickly learning the language and excelling in school and, in particular, sports. Heller’s memoir follows his early education and college years closely as well as his early days as an engineer working toward a doctorate; it also details his relationship with his wife, Sue, and

the birth of their son, David, recalling amusing, difficult, and
thought-provoking anecdotes from a life well lived. Some chapters focus on the sports that Heller loved—such as skiing, golf, and baseball and their impact on his life—a little too closely but every tale effectively aims to give readers an understanding of his journey from Holocaust survivor to wealthy American businessman. The passages in which Heller focuses on understanding his own identity and connecting with his Jewish heritage despite not being religious are among the most compelling, as in passages about his family’s background, such as how he had to hide on a family farm while his father fought in the armed forces and his mother was forced to work in a labor camp. Heller writes of the pursuit of the American dream and the contributions of immigrants to the fabric of the United States with nuance and reverence. It will surely strike a chord with many readers, particularly those who’ve lived through similar experiences.

An emotional and engaging story of exploring one’s past and building a new life.

REMEMBER HENRY HARRIS
Lost Icon of a Revolution: A Story of Hope and Self-Sacrifice in America
Heys, Sam
Black Belt Books (387 pp.)
$14.95 paper | $3.95 e-book | Sept. 10, 2019
978-0-578-56578-4

This biography salutes a basketball phenomenon who integrated a bastion of racism.

Heys recaps the life of Henry Harris, the first Black athlete to play for a Deep South college in the Southeastern Conference when he started for the Auburn University Tigers basketball team in 1968. Hobbled by a knee injury that ended his dreams of NBA stardom, he killed himself in 1974. The writer—a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and author of The Winecoff Fire (1993)—makes Harris a potent symbol of the successes and shortcomings of the civil rights movement. Born to an impoverished family in harshly segregated Greene County, Alabama, Harris benefited from the quickening pace of desegregation in the 60s, which prodded the previously all-White athletics programs at Auburn and the University of Alabama to offer him scholarships. But when he began playing at Auburn, Heys notes, Harris ran a gauntlet of racial insults and threats at many of his games, struggled to find integrated accommodations on the road, and had to hide a relationship with a White girlfriend. More insidiously even as his talent and fortitude made him a fan favorite, he felt a persistent loneliness and alienation on the overwhelmingly White campus—White teammates avoided rooming with him—and a sense of being disposable when his value to the Tigers waned. The author sets Harris’ experiences against a sweeping account of Jim Crow in Southern sports and the arduous struggles of Black athletes, who braved physical
danger—one football player died when his White teammates suddenly piled up on him in a scrimmage—and ostracization. Heyes’ narrative deftly untangles the complex evolution of racial politics in sports in the '60s, while his lucid, sensitive prose lays bare the psychological pressures Harris faced and waxes lyrical about his quiet heroism. (“Harris was the tip of a spear heaved by his forebears...all the field hands who persevered in the South for decades, waiting for a chance to prove themselves...as if they had ushered him out of the cotton fields, a basketball in hand, to meet this appointed hour.”) The result is a gripping and poignant saga of an unfinished revolution.

A stirring account of the dubious battle waged against Jim Crow by an unsung pioneer.

BULL BY THE HORNS

In Higgs’ debut modern-day Western novella, two young Oklahoman brothers must transport a bull to a neighboring state and encounter unexpected danger. Times are tough on the McConnell farm, as drought and hailstorms have ravaged their crops. Indeed, Robert and Rachel McConnell are one step away from foreclosure on their 320-acre ranch in Northeastern Oklahoma. They’re forced to sell their beloved purebred Hereford breed bull to satisfy the bank, and they find a buyer online who has one caveat: The animal must transport a bull to a neighboring state and encounter unexpected danger. Robert is injured trying to herd the animal into a trailer, so it falls upon their two sons, 20-year-old Tommy and 17-year-old Andy, to make the delivery. However, their journey is anything but straightforward. After the bull escapes from the trailer while the boys are changing a flat tire, local police and a TV news team unexpectedly get involved. Later, the siblings pick up Cassie Henshaw, a diner server who has dreams of making it big in Los Angeles; Andy saves her from an enraged chef at her job, and, from this beginning, Higgs delivers a sweet romance. Although Tommy is reluctant to bring her along, Cassie later saves the day after Tommy loses his wallet. Overall, the author delivers a feel-good Western that retains all the familiar hallmarks of that genre, but he places them alongside present-day obstacles. The action effectively culminates in a theft that’s followed by an adrenaline-fueled chase, which ends in a rather lopsided shootout. Through it all, Higgs makes sure that the brothers’ love for their family—and their determination to do what they must to keep their livelihood intact—shines through.

A coming-of-age tale with a dynamic pair of brothers and plenty of light action.

DEATH THROES OF THE BROKEN CLOCKWORK UNIVERSE

Hubbard’s debut collection features elusive images and ideas in brief poetic forms.

In a preface, the author states that his poems are akin to “objects in space existing as neither planets nor stars.” This quality of liminality, of existing within a state between form and formlessness, most readily appears within his cycle of haiku, using the succinct Japanese form to capture moods: “frozen ice droplet / clinging fast to window screen / space on either side” (“winter view (d)”). But the limits of science and the language of mathematics also weave in and out of many of Hubbard’s other works, as in his observation that “now galaxies / hang like grape clusters / on invisible vines of dark matter” (“In a Time Lapse”). Sometimes a passage will strike with intense feeling and seems to yearn to break out of compact formal structures; when Hubbard writes that “Our hearts were wild; / our minds incendiary, / as we drank raw the violence” (“Lamentation”), one longs for more description and insight. Indeed, the solipsistic nature of some poems sometimes shades into the opaque, as in this complete poem: “nightmare shadows day / tucked ring and necklace / under cross to assess / a willful blindness” (“Classified”). The latter half of Hubbard’s collection (“The Love Studies”) seems as if it were composed for someone specific, as the works within it are filled with clues and details only a specific lover could decode: “If mercy mixed with turmeric and honey / Tastes something like cloud” (“How I Might Be Spectacularly Wrong”). Although the book’s first part, “The Time Studies,” frequently escapes concrete meaning, as well, its blending of scientific jargon with poetic form remains appealing throughout, such as when “Matrices” alludes to “a dream unfolded in linear equations. / But the numerals vanished when I tried to solve.”

A set of concise, sometimes-powerful poems that often escape concrete definition.

FAT WITCH SUMMER

In this YA novel, four teenage witches flee their families’ expectations.

Thrash wasn’t guaranteed to get a knack and be a witch in her own right, but she had a better chance than most. The Lunes may
“A sublime cross-genre tale of old-fashioned detective work and otherworldly creatures.”

**THE DAMAGED ANGEL**

In this urban fantasy, a former soldier–turned–amateur sleuth investigates a murder in a world teeming with magic and mythical creatures. Ex-soldier Ingrid Nielsen could not have predicted how horrible her first day at a new job would play out. Someone shoots and kills the city councilwoman who hired her—with Ingrid’s gun. Crooked cops in West Coast Kaliphornia try beating a confession out of her, though there’s little evidence against her. So Ingrid, along with fellow staff member Jack Polidori, looks for the killer herself, as other creatures are more familiar to the newly minted gumshoe. Ladd deftly merges a detective story with a fantasy. Elements of the latter genre, such as magic and spells, naturally pop up in Ingrid and Polidori’s case, including a potential “magical murder.” Still, the engaging novel keeps the investigative duo (and readers) primarily in the dark while puzzles surrounding Ingrid and her history take precedence over everything else. How, for example, can she heal so quickly? One thing is for sure—she’s an appealing, motorcycle-riding, purple-skinned hero. She uses her military skills to dominate in fights, whether armed or hand-to-hand. At the same time, her often spirited banter with Polidori—her loyal and accommodating pixie, Pip. This mystery isn’t just about murder; Ingrid, who was born with unique purple skin, has intermittent flashes of a past she doesn’t remember. Those apparent memories may have ties to the murderer. Ladd deftly merges a detective story with a fantasy. Elements of the latter genre, such as magic and spells, naturally pop up in Ingrid and Polidori’s case, including a potential “magical murder.” Still, the engaging novel keeps the investigative duo (and readers) primarily in the dark while puzzles surrounding Ingrid and her history take precedence over everything else. How, for example, can she heal so quickly? One thing is for sure—she’s an appealing, motorcycle-riding, purple-skinned hero. She uses her military skills to dominate in fights, whether armed or hand-to-hand. At the same time, her often spirited banter with Polidori and Pip offsets the story’s more violent scenes. Questions about Ingrid, the murders, and even the narrative’s world pile up, and Ladd seems to be aiming for a mystery series.

A sublime cross-genre tale of old-fashioned detective work and otherworldly creatures.
A family and their friends face an evil presence who has rolled into their small North Carolina town in this supernatural thriller.

The opening of a new tech company in Capers comes with many job opportunities. But its founder, Noigel Braddock, puts some people on edge. Before even meeting Katy Leonardis and her husband, Braddock asks if they “have a child yet.” Surprisingly, Katy is soon pregnant despite medical claims that she’s unable to have kids, and the couple welcome a baby boy with mesmerizing, teal-colored eyes. Her son, Teal, grows into a capable young man with eccentricities, such as an ability to predict the occasional future event. Frighteningly enough, demons and even snakes seem intent on killing him, but he has protection from a warring angel and the family’s wonderfully loyal German shepherd, Cotton. All of this is apparently foretold in a century-old prophecy, in which a chosen one will save people from a “darkness” that brings destruction. Teal is likely savior, but the increasingly wealthier and more powerful Braddock is almost certainly the evil that townsfolk may want to escape—if he doesn’t stop them. In this engaging story, Lane quickly creates a grim atmosphere as Braddock slowly drives into Capers. His loathsome arrogance and menacing glare give him a fierce presence, one that’s felt even in scenes he doesn’t appear in. In the same vein, the once-quiet town’s crime rate rockets, and the angel that pops up in Teal’s dreams delivers ominous warnings of an impending Armageddon. The author’s prose is crisp and lucid, but she still retains ambiguity regarding certain motives as well as the prophecy. Some of this is clear by the end, though questions linger, and Lane ostensibly has a sequel planned. A sequel could also shine a brighter spotlight on some captivating characters, such as Katy’s best friend, Chris Edwards, and her razor-sharp older sister, Marlene, who, unlike most folks, immediately distrusts Braddock.

A town faces an eerie villain in this engrossing tale about a prophecy and demons.

THE LAST TEMPTATION
Lewis, Amy O.
Arrow Road Press (310 pp.)
$6.99 e-book | Dec. 6, 2022

In the third of her Colorado Skies series, Lewis gives us a mayhem-filled mystery.

Kim Jackson, a woman with a dicey past, works as a tax accountant in Creede, a small mountain town in southern Colorado. She is drawn, as are others, to Laurie Beltran, a quietly charismatic young woman who holds services every Sunday morning in the basement of the town hall. Laurie, not the easiest of Kim’s clients, has suffered severe trauma and is very rich (trust fund), which scares her silly: She wants none of that money. In fact, between the traumatic event and the present, she spent a couple of years in a convent. Anyway, a local fellow named Trip Garrett has been found dead in Willow Creek, and the town drunk has implicated Laurie as the woman who hit Trip over the head and pushed him in. Kim knows in her gut that that could not be so. But what did happen? She is determined to find out and save Laurie, who is dangerously naive. Laurie doesn’t want her money, but there are plenty of grifters who do, and they are closing in. At one point, Laurie and Kim are kidnapped, and the finale is a tense and bloody one. Will justice be served? And will readers ever learn the real culprit? Lewis is a talented, experienced writer, and Kim Jackson is a good choice for an amateur sleuth. The author gives her a sixth sense for recognizing bad guys and the courage to be a snooper when snooping is called for (“Kim had stared blankly, wondering if the priest had profited privately from Laurie’s largesse”). Kim’s own dark past is delicately hinted at—just enough to lure readers into Lewis’ fictive world. Much of the backmatter is a preview of the next Colorado Skies novel featuring the indefatigable Kim Jackson.

THE SWEETHEART FIX
Liasson, Miranda
Entangled: Amara (352 pp.)
$8.99 paper | $5.99 e-book | Nov. 29, 2022
978-1-64937-142-3

In the second installment of Liasson’s Blossom Glen series, a bighearted therapist and a reluctant mayor clash and then fall in love.

Juliet Montgomery and Jack Monroe are “fixers” by temperament and reputation. Juliet has started a marriage and family therapy practice after years of study inspired by a bout with serious depression as a teenager following her father’s death. The only problem is, her fellow townspeople of Blossom Glen, Indiana, are aware of Juliet’s multiple broken engagements and are reluctant to accept relationship counseling from her. Meanwhile, Texas transplant Jack has successfully become Blossom Glen’s mayor, leaving behind his dreams of a career as an architect in order to help the beloved grandmother who raised him. However, Jack’s people skills are severely lacking. When a suddenly underemployed Juliet stumbles into a town meeting and helps Jack resolve several conflicts among Blossom Glen’s quirky and spirited residents, Jack decides to employ her as a temporary “town counselor” while he tries to save his grandmother’s land from the Omnibuild corporation. Soon, a working relationship becomes much more, but Juliet has resolved to curb her emotional spontaneity and Jack is wary of getting serious owing
to trust issues stemming from his mother’s abandonment and his father’s unreliability. Can Juliet and Jack make it work and help preserve Blossom Glen? This series entry is a quintessential small-town romance that provides gentle humor and strong character development in abundance. Both Juliet and Jack are intelligent, accomplished, and deeply sympathetic to their friends’ and loved ones’ needs; in Juliet’s case, those loved ones include her sisters Tessa (the pastry chef protagonist of 2022’s The Sweetheart Deal, now happily married and pregnant) and Vivienne, who’s newly returned from Europe and working at The Sweetheart Deal.

However, the novel’s brisk pace and short timeline give it a straightforward simplicity. The work sometimes struggles to maintain a tone of playful sexiness while also providing exposition: “After making sure that everyone scheduled to cover the café wouldn’t need my intervention, I’d met Jason at his home and from there, well, from there we’d had the most amazing few days.” However, the story becomes more nuanced as it goes on, and the quirky, passionate, and humorous storytelling ultimately makes for a fun and romantic read.

A sassy, sweet, and gently provocative love story.

THE ABLE ARCHERS
Morra, Brian J.
Koehler Books (296 pp.)
$29.95 | $19.95 paper | $7.99 e-book
March 22, 2022
978-1-64663-562-7 paper
978-1-64663-564-1

Two intelligence officers—one American, the other Soviet—must work together to stave off a nuclear apocalypse.

Based on the undertold true story of the severest Cold War superpower standoff since the Cuban missile crisis, this thriller builds inexorably to its potentially calamitous conclusion. The year is 1983. The Soviet Union shoots down Korean Air Lines Flight 007, killing 269 civilians. The already strained tensions between America and the Soviet Union (which President Ronald Reagan calls an “evil empire”) escalate against a backdrop of mutual military maneuvers that culminate in a joint American-British nuclear war exercise.

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A sassy, sweet, and gently provocative love story.
THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL

Olson, Al
Self (360 pp.)
$60.00 | $50.00 paper | Dec. 16, 2021
979-8-78254-219-1
979-8-84645-447-7 paper

In this nonfiction book, a figure in America’s Renaissance festival movement celebrates the history of the popular fairs. More than just serving as venues for giving “paying customers the illusion of stepping back in time to a sixteenth century village immersed in celebration,” for more than a half-century, Renaissance festivals have offered “real-life adventure” and “the opportunity to invent yourself.” Despite being the occasional butt of jokes, the once-maligned festivals have only grown in popularity in the 21st century, with yearly attendance in the millions. This history, from the movement’s origins in the California Pleasure Faires of the early 1960s to contemporary festivals that are found across all regions of the United States, forms the basis of Olson’s account. While much of his welcoming text is celebratory, the volume also draws on the theoretical work of C. Wright Mills and other social scientists (who are cited in the book’s rich body of footnotes). These experts provide insights into the social and psychological value of the ubiquitous “fantasy playgrounds,” from comic conventions to theme parks that transport visitors to the worlds of Star Wars and Harry Potter. But the work’s strength lies in its profiles of “rennies,” the insider term for those who organize and work at festivals. A rennie himself, the author toured the country for more than two decades as a member of Smeel and Bogg, the Singing Executioners, and offers readers an intimate, behind-the-scenes perspective of “camping out in forests, mountains and seaside” with his “extended family of artists, performers, and beautiful souls.” The book’s inviting prose is accompanied by a treasure trove of full-color photographs from various sources of jugglers, swordsmen, duchesses, and other rennies that adorn nearly every page. A charming concluding chapter on festival ephemera gives readers a visual menagerie of Renaissance fair art, posters, newspaper clippings, tickets, brochures, and T-shirts. While some readers may object to Olson’s occasionally corny writing style (which is effectively evocative of the movement’s festive mise en scène), this is a delightful and visually impressive book.

An engaging insider’s look at the history and value of Renaissance festivals.

THE LUCKY HERMIT CRAB AND HER SWIRLY NEW SHELL

Petrie, Janice S.C.
Seatales Publishing Company (32 pp.)
978-1-73305-172-9

A hermit crab struggles to part with a “perfect” shell—even when it no longer fits—in this science-focused rhyming picture book from author/illustrator Petrie. An unnamed crab has trouble finding a new shell after outgrowing her old one. One day, during a storm, a seemingly ideal home appears: a swirly, white moon snail shell, complete with stylish decorations, including barnacles and anemones that will protect the crab from predators. The rhyming text relates her joy: “The shell was as perfect as perfect could be. / How lucky to find such a shell in the sea!” But despite its perfection, it can’t grow with her. Before long, the beautiful carapace is just slowing her down—until one day, an octopus scares her out of it and into a new one. Petrie’s full-color cartoon illustrations mix realistic detail with friendly facial expressions; the octopus hiding on almost every page makes for an excellent seek-and-find. The main text reads smoothly throughout, but the thought-bubble commentary from fish witnessing the crab’s difficulties is the story’s highlight. They offer fast facts about hermit crabs while amusingly reacting to the protagonist’s adventures. The ample ocean-creature terminology (exoskeleton, anemones) will challenge newly independent readers, and the interesting topic will provide encouragement.

A sea story with a solid message, fanciful rhymes, and engaging characters.
Rueckert writes of feeling a conflict between her church's characterization of marriage and motherhood as a woman's highest calling and her own desire to teach, write, and see the world. Compounding her anxiety were the example of her parents' divorce and a giddy college romance that ended, leaving her devastated. Then she met Austin, a member of her faith who was supportive of her career aspirations; she married him in 2014, when she was 25, and the two embarked on a monthlong tour through South America, Asia, and Europe. The trip threw them into trying circumstances as they weathered squalid hostels, border-crossing snafus, money issues, and even an attack by a pack of wild dogs in Peru. Their accommodations to each other were also difficult, as Rueckert's cautious, fretful temperament chafed against Austin's adventurous, impulsive personality. Along the way, the author surveyed the marital wisdom of everybody from the Karen people of Thailand to her Hindu acquaintances in Bangalore. The journey culminated in a grueling 500-mile pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela that also featured warm camaraderie with other pilgrims. Intertwined with these narratives are the author's recollections of her family—including her fraught relationship with her mother—and the courtship culture of her church. Over the course of the book, Rueckert's reminiscences present readers with an evocative travelogue and a remarkably sensitive and insightful portrait of the difficulties of modern marriage and the compromises that one makes to feel both autonomy and connection. Her scenes of marital discord, in particular, crackle with barely restrained emotion: “We ate in perfect silence. I stared at the table….’You don't inspire me anymore,’ I said, the words reverberating like a bomb. I waited a heartbeat, maybe two. ‘I'm not happy.’” It’s a sometimes-harsh, unsparring account of a rocky beginning, but Rueckert's grappling with uncertainty yields courage and a luminous sense of hope.

An engaging exploration of a hard but ultimately exhilarating trek toward love and commitment.

MULTIVERSE
Rothman, M.A.
Self (364 pp.)
Sept. 1, 2022
979-8-84845-326-3
979-8-84792-162-6 paper

In Rothman's SF novel, a physicist experiences fragments of possible futures resulting from his particle experiments.

Princeton University physicist Michael Salomon suffers occasional visions of a life in which his wife, Maria, has left him and/or their baby daughter is dead. Salomon doesn't immediately connect these incidents with his physics research involving theoretical faster-than-light particles called tachyons. After a breakthrough in tachyon detection and interaction, Salomon's lab suddenly falls under tight government oversight. People close to Michael die or disappear, and ominous FBI agents descend. It transpires that the tachyon tests are leading to time travel—the consequences of which could mutate the United States into an Orwellian police state where even potential crimes are punished. Alicia Yoder, a graduate student whose studies also factor into the time-meddling, finds that her future self is sending data streams back in time to help defuse the dystopia. Her scenes of marital discord, in particular, crackle with barely restrained emotion: “We ate in perfect silence. I stared at the table…” "You don't inspire me anymore," I said, the words reverberating like a bomb. I waited a heartbeat, maybe two. “I'm not happy.” It’s a sometimes-harsh, unsparring account of a rocky beginning, but Rueckert’s grappling with uncertainty yields courage and a luminous sense of hope.

An engaging exploration of a hard but ultimately exhilarating trek toward love and commitment.

HARVARD'S QUIXOTIC PURSUIT OF A NEW SCIENCE
The Rise and Fall of the Department of Social Relations
Schmidt, Patrick L.
Rowman & Littlefield (264 pp.)
$110.00 | $40.00 paper | $40.00 e-book
June 21, 2022
978-1-5381-6829-5 paper
978-1-5381-6828-8

A history of an influential, now-defunct Harvard University department.

Harvard's Department of Social Relations was home to some of the 20th century's most important (and controversial) social scientists, including sociologist David Riesman and psychologist Timothy Leary, and left behind a mixed record during its existence between 1946 and 1972. Its graduates, such as anthropologist Clifford Geertz, revolutionized social science,
while its faculty engaged in some of the most ethically problematic research experiments of the 1950s and 60s. The formation of the department marked a turning point in the history of American universities, as Harvard, then a bastion of stodgy traditionalism, became the nation’s first university to embrace a truly interdisciplinary department—one that integrated diverse fields, from sociology and anthropology to clinical and social psychology. As such, this book is just as much an intellectual history of mid-20th-century social scientists as it is an institutional history of a relic of Harvard’s past. Although the department struggled with “the realities of an academic world stubbornly structured around traditional disciplines,” the actions of its more radical faculty often attracted unwanted publicity and scandal. For example, Leary and Richard Alpert (later known as Ram Dass) gave student test subjects psychedelic drugs in their infamous “Good Friday Experiment.” Psychologist Henry Murray’s research on extreme stress subjected Harvard students to horrifying verbal abuse; the traumatized undergraduate victims included Ted Kaczynski, who would later target research universities as the Unabomber. Originally written as an undergraduate honors thesis during author Schmidt’s Harvard studies more than four decades ago, the book is largely based on firsthand interviews of the department’s faculty. Updated to include more contemporary scholarship, and with a firm command over the diverse interdisciplinary literature that emerged from the department, this is an extremely well-researched book with more than 70 pages of endnotes and bibliographic references. It gives readers an engaging glimpse into transformations within post–World War II higher education.

An absorbing account of the rise and fall of a notoriously provocative academic division.

HOW TO BE AKWARD

**Essays**

Turner, Amanda

Fever Streak Press (251 pp.)

$16.95 paper  |  $9.95 e-book

Sept. 12, 2022

978-0-9986541-3-3

In this collection of essays, a humorist reflects on the awkward incidents and characteristics that have shaped her life. “In my mind,” Turner writes in the opening of this volume, “I’m a goddamn cheetah. Sleek, stealthy, lithe, with a teaspoon of danger.” But upon reflection, the author acknowledges that “my body leaks and creaks and sweats” and that she has the “ability to land in cringeworthy situations and/or directly cause them.” In this compilation of 26 essays, the endlessly hilarious Turner walks readers through the awkwardness that is her life, from an overactive salivary gland and gastrointestinal issues to her fangirl fixation on fellow essayist David Sedaris, who “is unaware of our bond.” Featuring an abundance of self-deprecating anecdotes from the author’s personal life, this work becomes an homage to the awkward readers who wear taped-up glasses, spend too much time in public bathrooms, and are “bling-free in a sparkly world.” Constantly relatable, the essays include the perils of husband-and-wife DIY projects gone wrong and couches that swallow TV remotes and socks into their cavernous abysses. An entire chapter provides a “Field Guide” on “How To Be Chubby” that concludes with sage advice. Previous works by the author, published under the name AK Turner, include the popular Vagabonding With Kids travel series and an unfiltered confessional about the trials of motherhood, *This Little Piggy Went to the Liquor Store* (2012). This volume is a worthy addition to Turner’s impressive, award-winning repertory. The author’s fearless honesty in grappling with her own personal quirks and bodily irregularities will surely resonate with a wide range of readers beyond a target demographic of middle-aged mothers, as nearly every essay possesses at least one laugh-out-loud moment (often delivered in the sidesplitting footnotes). Fans of Turner may be disappointed that a handful of the essays appeared in previous publications, and some readers may object to the volume’s scatological humor and predilection for four-letter words. But for those with a fair share of awkward idiosyncrasies, this collection is a delightful read that celebrates people’s eccentricities.

An incisive and entertaining celebration of awkwardness.
“An expansive space opera with a vibrant crew and action-packed plot.”

HARBINGER OF PARADOX
West, Bayard
Self (288 pp.)
978-8-84760-409-3

West’s sequel to Harbinger of Treason (2014) melds intergalactic politics with space-time travel and a dash of romance.

Picking up at the steep cliffhanger where the first book left off, Ensign Cassandra “Cassie” Hague is barely alive, tied up beneath an octocopter on a remote military base on Consoritia, an Earth and Mars colony in the throes of a war against the government of the Consortian Republic, which is fighting for its independence. However, a barely breathing and beaten-down Cassie soon finds herself among the members of a Consortian military crew made up of the gruff yet verbose Lt. Neals and his men. As Cassie recovers her memories of what led her to land her ship in the middle of the Consortian capital city and how she ended up a prisoner of war, she recalls a common enemy that brings together Earth and Consortian forces, leading Cassie to team up with less-than-desirable partners in her mission. The Harbinger crew from the previous book assembles for this diplomatic mission across space, time, and black holes to negotiate a peace with a culture that’s not that interested in armistice. Confronting with the paradoxical implications of black hole travel, monstrous alien creatures with a plethora of ways to kill humans, and a near-impossible mission, Cassie and her crew press onward in a foreign environment with threats from all sides. Over the course of this novel, readers may find themselves overwhelmed by the sheer number of new characters that West introduces, as he relies heavily on the groundwork laid in the first series installment for existing characters and allows only a meager amount of time and page space for new ones to be fleshed out. Instead, the author’s focus is decidedly on crafting a fast-paced, gripping plot—a mission which he carries out successfully, even if it is to the detriment of character development. Fans of hard SF will find this work to be carefully crafted and deliberately executed even if some of its elements feel overly familiar at times.

An expansive space opera with a vibrant crew and action-packed plot.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT
West, David
Self (255 pp.)
$3.37 e-book | Nov. 8, 2022

Twenty-something twins travel to Frankfurt, where unexpected adventure and turmoil await them.

The fourth installment of West’s Sir Anthony Standen Adventures opens in the summer of 1612. The family vineyard near Rome is producing well, and Sir Anthony decides to purchase the adjacent vineyard. Now they must expand their market for an anticipated increased yield. Maria suggests that she and her brother Antonio bring samples of their wine to the Frankfurt Trade Fair, where they hope to attract a large wine merchant. Little do the siblings suspect that they will find themselves in the middle of a murder mystery and political upheaval that will put their lives in danger. They enter Frankfurt, and as they gaze around at the vibrant, bustling main market square, Antonio notices that a handsome young man is admiring Maria. Enter Manuel Nuñez, a doctor with a complicated past who adds a new layer of interest to the novel. When Maria and Antonio visit the home of pawnbrokers Edith and Daniel Bamberger and later find the elderly Jewish couple’s murdered bodies, they vow to ferret out the killers, winding up embroiled in the “Fettmilch uprising,” a historically documented savage siege against Frankfurt’s small Jewish community. Here West reaches the heart of this episode—the story of the political unrest among the town merchants and the vicious antisemitism that is roiling Frankfurt. The early part of this installment, which for the first time uses the second generation of Standens exclusively as lead protagonists, progresses slowly, focusing on the budding romance between Maria and Manuel rather than on adventure. But with the discovery of the Bamberger murders, the narrative accelerates and moves into the realms of meticulous investigation, espionage, and high action that are the hallmarks of the Standen Adventures. West, as always, sprinkles informative historical tidbits within the story and seamlessly integrates early-17th-century conventions, styles, and such miraculous innovations as Manuel’s gadget the Janssen scope, a prototype microscope.

Tender love and chilling mob violence alternate in this engaging, disturbing period drama.