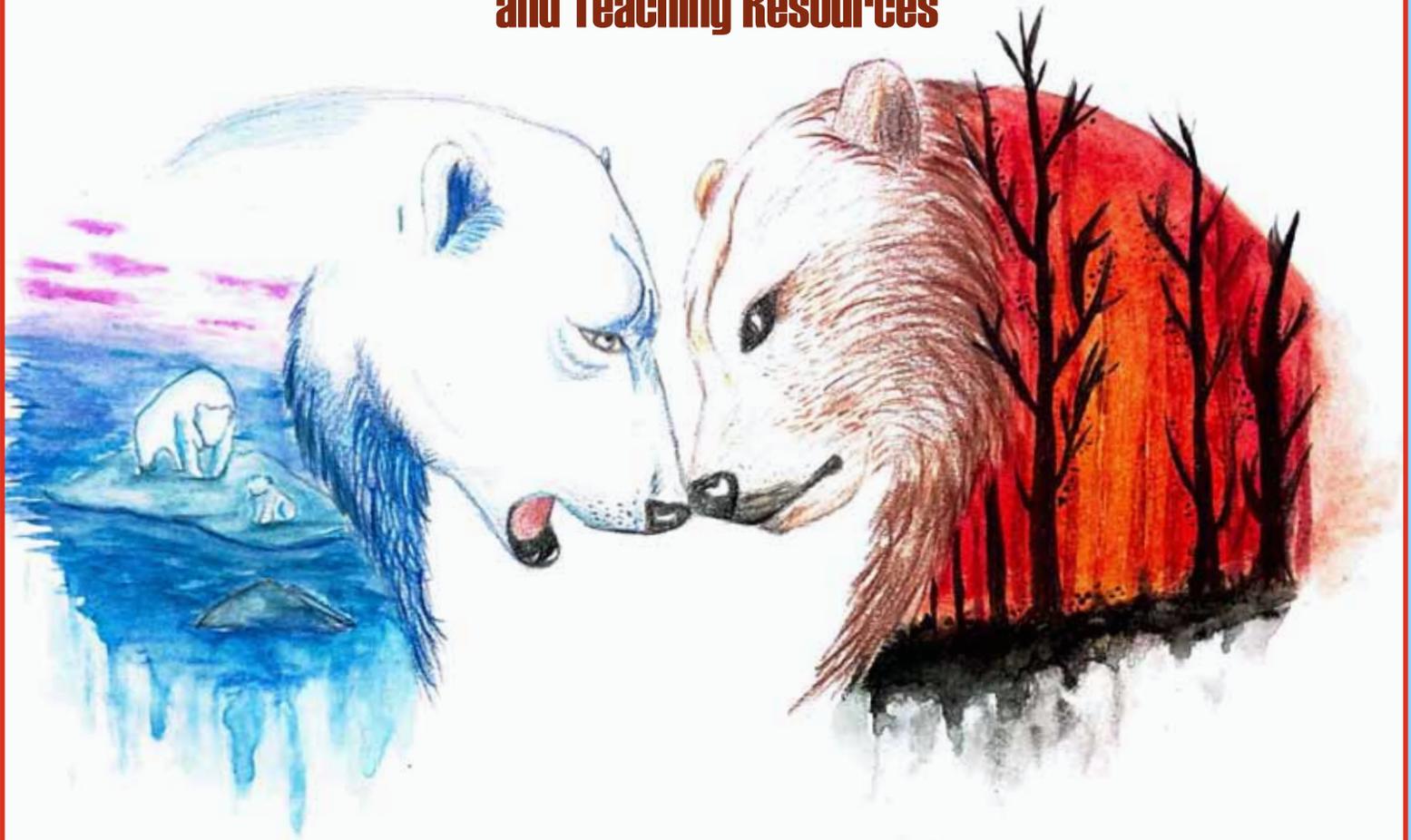


# Skipping Stones

Vol. 31, no. 3  
July - Sept. 2019

*A Multicultural Literary Magazine*

## Reviews of the 2018 Multicultural and Nature Books and Teaching Resources



The soft powdered snow,  
The beautiful trees and plants,  
Where did they all go?

*Art & haiku by Nazin Taraghi, grade 7, California.*

2019 Asian Celebration Haiku Contest  
Multicultural and Nature Awareness Books  
Celebrating America: The Nation of Immigrants

# The 2019 Skipping Stones Honor Awards



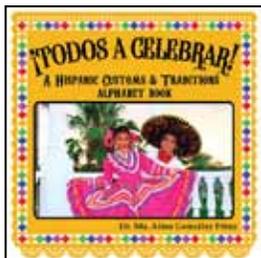
This year we recommend 27 outstanding books and three teaching resources as the winners of our **27th Annual Skipping Stones Awards**. These books promote an understanding of cultures, cultivate cooperation and/or encourage a deeper awareness of nature, ecology, and diversity. They foster respect for multiple viewpoints and closer relationships within human societies. The honored titles offer many ways to explore and understand families, cultures, places, societies and their histories for readers of all ages—from the very young readers to high school seniors and adults.

## Multicultural & International Books

**¡Todos a celebrar!** *A Hispanic Customs and Traditions Alphabet Book*, by Dr. Ma. Alma González Pérez. Bilingual. *Del Alma Publications*. Ages 5-9.

North America is now a home to tens of millions of Mexicans as well as other Hispanics—from Central and South America as well as places like Cuba and Puerto Rico. Naturally, Hispanic customs and traditions have transcended the borders—people carry their culture and traditions with them.

This bilingual alphabet book introduces non-Hispanic children to the Hispanic culture and the Spanish language. But more importantly, it is a great resource for Hispanic children growing up in the United States and Canada, for it instills an awareness of, and pride in their own cultural values and history. Each culture is important and should not be forgotten. It is the intricate mosaic of the many cultures that makes our society resilient and interesting.



The photos of children that illustrate each page are very vibrant and colorful. Authors creatively offer diverse Mexican cultural items (as well as a few other nationalities) for just about every letter of the alphabet.

Great for ages 5 to 9, and for beginning Spanish learners.

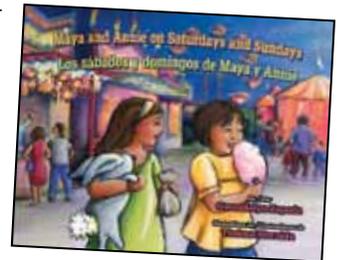
—Arun N. Toké and Esther Celis, editors.

**Maya and Annie on Saturdays and Sundays/ Los sábados y domingos de Maya y Annie** by/por Gwendolyn Zepeda, illustr. Thelma Muraida. Bilingual. *Piñata Books*. Ages 5-9.

Do you have a friend who has a different cultural background or a national origin? It is definitely a learn-

ing experience. This picture book introduces readers to a cross-cultural friendship. Maya and Annie play together on most Saturdays and Sundays. Both Maya and Annie love their weekends. They don't see each other on school days because they both go to different schools. When they do see each other on the weekends, they may play in Annie's backyard or play with Maya's two little dogs, or they may go to the amusement park with Maya's mom or to the beach with Annie's dad.

Maya enjoys the different Vietnamese foods that Annie's dad cooks—typical Asian dishes like noodles, rice, fish and dumplings. And Annie likes eating things that Maya's mom makes. Maya is Hispanic, and naturally, the meals at her home are typical Latin American fare—tacos, tamales, arroz y frijoles.



One Sunday night, the two parents invite their extended families—grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins—to a big dinner and announce that they will be getting married! At the wedding the girls realize they will now become sisters, and they'll be able to live together and see each other everyday of the week.

This English and Spanish bilingual book with lively illustrations explores both childhood friendships and multicultural values. Readers learn about traditions and celebrations—from *posada* to Lunar New Year—from two distinct cultures. Highly recommended!

—Arun N. Toké, editor.

**Grandma Lale's Magical Adobe Oven/El horno mágico de Abuelita Lale** by Nasario García, illustr. Dolores Aragón. *Rio Grande*. Bilingual. Ages 5-9.



For a learner of either English or Spanish, a delightful story with each page having an English and Spanish version is a real treat. Read in your first language, then move on to the other and you already know the meaning of new words without having to look them up. And the informal phrases make perfect sense on the first pass. Bilingual books are a fun and a fine way to learn.

Junie Lopez moves with his parents from a small rural community near Chaco Canyon to live with grandparents in a tiny house in the city. He starts fourth grade in Mrs. Padilla's class in a Hispanic area of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Before Christmas, when Junie is assigned to write a story, his mom suggests a holiday topic.

Junie recalls all the delicious traditional Christmas treats, warm from the old oven that his grandfather built in the yard. In the old village, lots of homes once had such hand-built ovens. The fragrant wood burned in them gave savory flavors to all food baked inside. He knew Grandma Lale had mastered building a hot fire in the oven, cleaning it out, then baking in the heat held in the adobe bricks.

Next day, in class, the students had to tell what they wanted to write about. When Junie suggested his grandmother's oven, the class bully made fun of him. But Junie knew he had an interesting story. He easily talked Grandma Lale into coming to class to answer the questions he expected would come up after his talk.

On speech day, the bully was soon fascinated with the whole idea of building your own oven out of sun-dried mud bricks that you make, right in the yard. And everyone's mouth watered as Junie described the tasty treats and tempting sweets his grandmother made from traditional recipes.

When Junie's talk is over, Lale steps forward, charming the teacher and whole class. She happily answers questions, and the colorful illustrations show just what she and Junie talked about. The reader learns a great deal, and some will be inspired to try building their own *horno*, since the book presents all the direc-

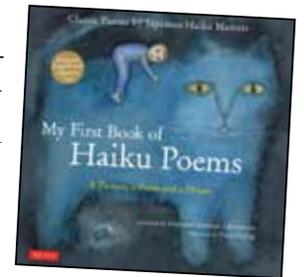
tions for construction and use in simple language. Then, time to look up the recipes for old, memorable foods that have often been forgotten in our city rush to be modern. It made me want to try doing it all.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.

**My First Book of Haiku Poems: A Picture, a Poem, and a Dream**, trans. Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, illustr. Tracy Gallup. Bilingual haiku. *Tuttle*. Ages 5-9.

Painter Tracy Gallup loves haiku. As she read Japanese haiku, she noticed a resonance between certain haiku and particular paintings she had done. She showed her neighbor, translator Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, these juxtapositions. Thus, this unique, multicultural book was born.

Ramirez-Christensen translated twenty haiku written by Japanese masters, paired with twenty of Gallup's paintings. Each haiku is written first in English, then in kanji, and finally transliterated in Japanese. A paragraph under each haiku includes comments and/or questions designed to stimulate thinking and imagination.

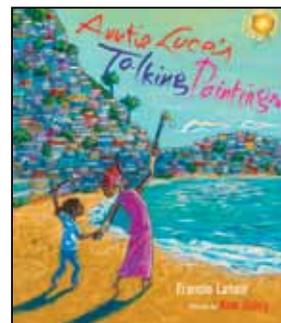


This stunningly beautiful book will be useful in Japanese immersion schools. It will be an asset to any school library. Teachers at every level will find it useful during a study of Japan. It can also be used to motivate student writing. Parents sharing this book with their children will find it a wonderful springboard for discussion and artistic stimulation.

Personally, I very much enjoyed reading and rereading this book. I recommend it highly.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller and grandmother.

**Auntie Luce's Talking Paintings** by Francie Latour, illustr. Ken Daley. *Groundwood*. Picture book. Ages 4-8.

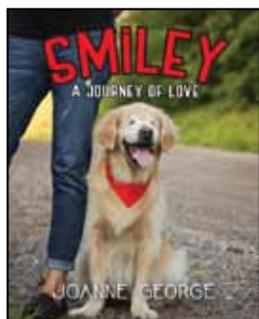


Through her paintings, Auntie Luce is able to open her young niece's understanding and appreciation for the country her daughter moved away from. Everyone can see that Auntie Luce loves her homeland, Haiti. The beauti-

ful, bright colors on every single page, express love, excitement, and joy. From the colorful houses crowding the hillside to the deep blues of the ocean, to the hundreds of people going about their daily tasks, you are convinced, Haiti is a wonderful country to live in. History is mentioned and the present poverty is hinted at, if one does careful reading. Author's note and a small glossary located at the end of the book are very important to digest, if you desire a better understanding of Haiti's history. This is truly an "everybody's" book that all ages will appreciate.

—Paulette Ansari, *African American storyteller and educator.*

**Smiley:** *A Journey of Love*, by Joanne George. Picture book. *Fitzhenry & Whiteside*. Ages 6-10.



Many colorful photos illustrate this large format true story of Smiley, a Golden Retriever, born in a "Puppy Mill." He came into the world without eyes and with dwarfism that gave him short legs and other body problems. Joanne and her father rescued Smiley along with other neglected and abused dogs. They

got them healthy and found good homes for each dog. However, nobody took in Smiley because he had so many needs. So Joanne, a vet tech and dog trainer, had no other choice but to adopt Smiley herself.

From the very beginning, as she cared for him, she learned about the importance of patience, trust and love. A vet offered to work on his eyes and after that he was much happier. Joanne realized he probably had eye pain before the operation. Following sounds, Smiley now can chase a ball and fetch. He uses sound, like bats use their echo-location, to find his way and to know what is near him. He goes for walks on a leash, confident and calm, with Joanne's other two dogs. Joanne trains other dogs, using hand signals. For a moment she sometimes forgets Smiley can't see hand signals, because he can do so much.

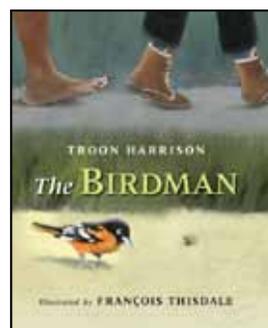
After four years of being with Smiley, Joanne married and then had a child. When she brought home her son, baby Shepherd, she discovered Smiley just knew how to be good with the little one. Later, on a

walk they met an elderly woman who felt very happy knowing Smiley. Smiley had the gentle loving personality that would let him be a perfect therapy dog, to bring happiness to people in distress, sad or alone. Soon, Joanne signed him up to be trained as a therapy dog. There are more than 3000 therapy dogs now working in Canada, where they live.

In the book, we learn what therapy dogs do, the different ways they are trained for special work, how they reduce stress and awaken feelings of affection. Smiley has done more than just visit people who need his love; he has a TV and social media career as well. He is a famous dog who has inspired millions of people! Kids will be amazed and delighted by Smiley. His life is a real inspiration for us all.

—Barbara Shaw, *grandmother, blogger, and educator.*

**The Birdman** by Troon Harrison, illustr. François Thisdale. Picture book. *Red Deer Press*. Ages 5-9.



This is a beautifully illustrated biography of Dr. Alexander Milton Ross. Alexander was born December 13, 1832, in a little farm house in Upper Canada. His mother loved the spring and knew the names of all the plants and animals in the area. She taught all of this to Alexander. The two of

them loved nothing better than wandering through the woods all afternoon. During the long winter months Alexander would read about all of the living things he had encountered and so much more.

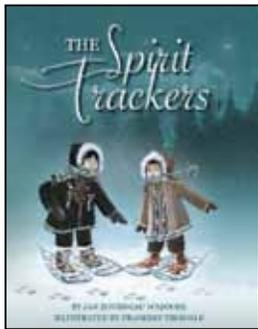
One day Alexander's father brought home a group of barefoot and exhausted people. His mother brought them food on her best china. They were escaped slaves bound for Toronto where they hoped to find work. As they rested and ate they talked about how they were treated and how they escaped to Canada. One man slipped off his shirt and let Alexander touch the scars, from whippings on his back. A woman had a scar on her cheek where a fresh burn lay. Her master had burned his own initials there with a hot iron.

Alexander never forgot what he had seen that day. He left home at the age of 17. He went to New York

where he worked in a newspaper office during the day and studied medicine in the evenings. While there he joined an abolitionists group. He learned all about the Underground Railroad and he read “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” The reading of this novel started a fire in him that would never be put out. He risked his life over and over again traveling through the deep south talking to slaves and helping them escape. During the Civil War Alexander worked as a spy for President Lincoln. He published several books, including, *The Birds of Canada*, *Butterflies and Moths*, *Flora of Canada*, and *Forest Trees*, to name a few. He completed his studies in medicine earning his M.D. in 1855. But he didn’t become a practicing physician until 1875. There is an interesting timeline in the rear of the book stating his many honors and accomplishments. He did keep his promise to his mother and left the world a little better than he found it.

—Paulette Ansari, grandmother, African American storyteller.

**The Spirit Trackers** by Jan Bourdeau Waboose, illustr. François Thisdale. Picture book. *Fifth House*. Ages 6-9.



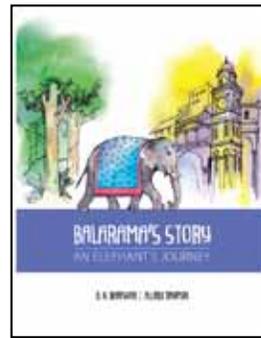
First Nation Anishinaabe author Jan Bourdeau Waboose from Ontario, Canada captivantly shares her culture in this story of two cousins from the Moose Clan who want to be trackers like their uncle. They beg their uncle to tell them the story of the Windigo again, but afterwards cannot sleep. The noise that wakes them in the

night when they finally do sleep and the tracks under their window in the morning persuade them to do what good trackers do. The author skillfully captures the boys’ feelings of fear and determination as they set off to follow the tracks.

This wonderful read-aloud book authentically incorporates cultural information, and leaves the reader wanting more Windigo stories.

—Yvonne Young, grandmother, retired teacher and storyteller.

**Balarama’s Story: An Elephant’s Journey**, by D. K. Bhaskar and Alladi Jayasri, illustr. Yathi Siddakatte. Peppertree Press. Ages 7-12.



**Balarama’s Story** is an intricately woven mosaic of the life of Indian elephants in their natural habitat in the Nagarahole forest along the Kabini River in the Western Ghats of Karnataka state in Southern India and their importance in the traditional South Indian Hindu culture.

I grew up in Central India, and I remember vividly, how as a child I looked forward to the weekend morning stroll of a decorated elephant through the city streets with his mahout riding atop, accepting monetary or fruit gifts from the city dwellers and offering them amusement and blessings in return.

The wild elephants and tigers coexist with many other animals in the Nagarahole National Park and Tiger Reserve. However, if the elephants wander off to the edge of the park, they might be trapped by people and transported to another world—the human civilization—where elephants are often used in cultural and religious ceremonies. For thousands of years elephants have held a reverential place in Hindu mythology. For example, Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed god and the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, is considered the obstacle-remover, and Airavata, the mythological white elephant with five trunks and ten tusks, is the mount of Lord Indra, the king of gods.

For the last 500 plus years, the annual Dasara festival of Mysore (Karnataka) culminates with a grand procession in which the lead elephant, decorated ornately and mounted with an Ambari—a 1500-pound solid gold *howdah*—carries a statue of the Hindu goddess Chamundeshwari. Naturally, the elephant chosen for this task is strong and large, and is trained vigorously.

The **Balarama’s Story** is told in the voice of an elephant named Balarama who was caught and trained as the lead-elephant for this famous procession. As we read, we get a glimpse of the life of Indian elephants in the wild as well as how it changes dramatically when they are caught, and then trained by a skilled *mahout* for this task. The authors, obviously elephant-lovers, give us several hints to help us realize that even after years of living away from their native habitat, these elephants

may still be dreaming of returning to their life in the forest.

The book's end pages give information about the Mysore Dasara festival with actual photos of the decorated elephants. And the book contains a glossary of the many Indian words used in the story. An educational and entertaining read, especially for kids who are naturally elephant-lovers!

—Arun N. Toké, editor.

**Iqbal and His Ingenious Idea:** *How a Science Project Helps One Family and the Planet*, by Elizabeth Suneby, illustr. Rebecca Green. *Kids Can Press*. Age 8-12.

Iqbal is a young schoolboy living in Bangladesh. It is the monsoon season, which means that there are heavy rains everyday. Instead of cooking outdoors like they do in the dry season, Iqbal's mother must cook over an open flame inside the house in the rainy season. Collecting the wood is dangerous and time consuming, and the smoke from burning it is harming the entire family and the environment. They cannot afford to purchase a propane stove, which would allow her to cook inside without all of the smoke. When Iqbal learns of the science fair at his school, and the cash prize that comes with winning, he sets his mind to helping his family. After several days of thinking, he decides to build a solar oven out of an old umbrella and some foil. His clever idea helps his family and the planet.

**Iqbal and His Ingenious Idea** is a delightful book about creative problem-solving and sustainability. Not only does his invention free up valuable time for the women during the summer, when they would otherwise be collecting wood, it also allows the family to purchase a propane stove for the monsoon season. By salvaging discarded materials like broken umbrellas, and harnessing the renewable power of the sun, Iqbal is able to build a safe and sustainable means of cooking for the family. The book, while written with Iqbal as the main character, uses his female family members to illustrate the importance of topics like female empowerment and safety.

*Reviewed by Josh McCoy, Oregon.*

**They Call Me Güero:** *A Border Kid's Poems*, by David Bowles. *Cinco Puntos Press*. Ages 9 and up.

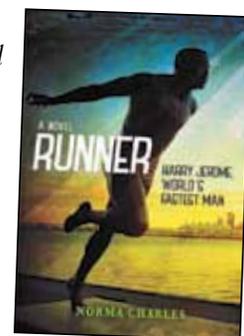
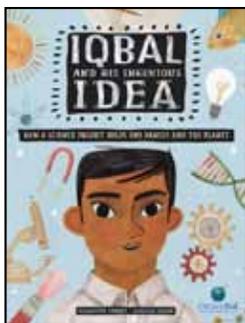
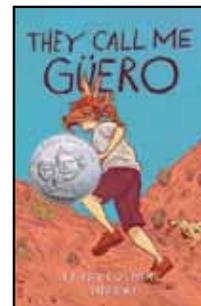
A young man with red hair (Güero), inherited from an Irish ancestor, has lived a short time with his Mexican clan near the border of Texas and Mexico. Fitting in is not easy when you look different from all the other kids in the neighborhood and at school. Güero loves to read and, as he makes friends and learns more about the local culture, he begins to write simple verse-stories about his experiences. As he grows, so does his writing. He explores feelings, relationships, family, tradition, fun and games, and all the happy joyful times shared with the extended family and neighbors.

This collection of easy poems become more like short chapters that create a unified tale as a whole. Reading them is a fun way learn about the border culture of south Texas, a blend of old and new, tradition and discovery, with all its richness and disappointments for a boy finding his way. He starts as a stranger, makes real friends to share adventures with, and soon knows he belongs.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.

**Runner:** *Harry Jerome, World's Fastest Man*, a novel by Norma Charles. *Red Deer Press*. Ages 11-15.

This is a short biography (148 pages) of a kid who overcame tremendous hardships to become the fastest man on earth. Harry was born and raised in Canada. He was the oldest of four and had to be the man of the house because his father was away for weeks at a time working as a porter. The family didn't have much money and lived in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Harry was only nine when the entire neighborhood was flooded after a heavy rain storm. Harry got his pregnant mother and two sisters out in time. When the family returned the following week they found all of their possessions covered in mud & filth. Father found them a three bedroom house in Vancouver but when they began unpacking they



were told, “It was a Whites Only neighborhood!” so they went to a smaller house in North Vancouver. The three Jerome children did not feel welcomed in the elementary school in North Vancouver either.

Harry loved baseball and was a good player. Soon the kids forgot about what color he was; everyone wanted Harry on their team. Harry worked a paper route which earned him 50 cents a day. He got a penny for each paper he delivered. Harry didn’t own a bike like all the other paper carriers but he could run like the wind. Each day his goal was to deliver all fifty papers in less than an hour and each day he would try and beat his own record. One night Harry woke to the smell of smoke. The kitchen was on fire. Harry got everyone out of the house but by the time the fire truck arrived there was nothing left to save. Father came home a few days later and found them another house.

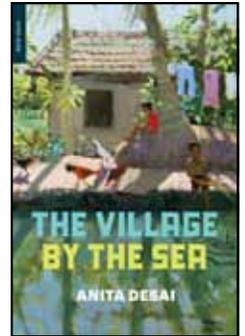
Harry’s life was certainly full. He went from baseball, to soccer, to paper route, always being the man-of-the house while father was away. Harry was used to being the only person of color in class. But when the high school coach talked him into joining the track team, new emotions surfaced. Track was different; everyone was looking at him. Harry got so caught up in what people might be thinking about him that he couldn’t focus. He did not run well the first few track meets. He went to the Olympic Games in Rome but during his last big race he pulled a leg muscle. Despite his injury the University of Oregon accepted him on an athletic scholarship. Some people thought he would never run again. On May 20, 1961, at a track meet in Corvallis, Oregon, he ran the 100-yards in an amazing 9.3 seconds—equal to the world record set by Mel Patton in 1948. He was the first man to hold two world records at the same time, the 100-yard and the 100-meter sprints.

—Paulette Ansari, grandmother, African American storyteller.

**The Village By The Sea**, a novel by Anita Desai. *New York Review Books*. Ages 9–14.

Although this story was originally published in 1982, it contains classic themes and topics that are just as fresh and relevant today. The plot centers around two siblings, Lila and Hari, from a rural, seaside village

in India. They have a mother who is chronically ill, a father who is alcoholic and unemployed, and two younger siblings who require care and supervision. Although they are just young adolescents, they wrestle with serious concerns about how to survive and keep their family from starving. A cast of characters from their village, including their beloved family dog, add color and drama to the story, especially as they depict ongoing tensions between the poor and the wealthy.



Another subplot is the ongoing encroachment of developers who wish to build new factories near them, threatening the peaceful atmosphere and pristine environment of their home. The children witness wealthy businessmen coming from Bombay (now, Mumbai) to scope out the land and plan their projects, and they fear losing the natural beauty which defines their way of life. Anxiety and uncertainty propel them to assume greater responsibility for their family’s well-being.

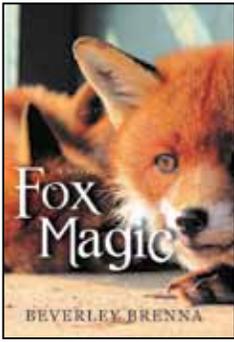
Eventually, Hari decides he must leave their quiet village to find work in Bombay, so that he can support their family. Lila remains at home to care for their younger siblings and their mother. During these long months of separation, they are unable to communicate with each other, and although they have always been able to rely on each other for support, now they must navigate their respective challenges independently. Each of them makes new discoveries about their own strengths and capabilities, and their new friendships offer them a sense of hope that they previously lacked.

Woven into the story are countless descriptions of Indian culture and landscape that transport the reader to a very different world. Desai’s writing was especially delightful to me, as the daughter of an Indian immigrant. The language is beautiful and yet also accessible to students in grades 3 and up, and the courage shown by the major characters is sure to inspire young readers.

—Sarah Mendonca, Ph.D., educator, musician and mom

**Fox Magic**, a novel by Beverley Brenna. *Red Deer Press*. Ages 11–15.

Set in a small town in Canada, with a large indigenous population from several First Nations, this is a



story about a seventh grader named Chance. Her two best friends took their lives in a pact that Chance had originally agreed to be part of. She backed out at the last minute. The three of them had been rebuilding an old car together, bonding nicely. A few weeks after the suicides, Chance is in despair, and falling into a dark place, unable to deal with the Bad Thing, unable to think, unable to eat.

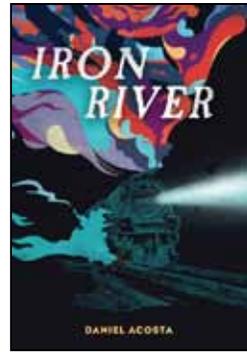
Everyone at school seems to blame her. She gets mean and angry notes saying she should have gone along with it, that she's bad, a dyke, ugly, worthless. She saves the notes, believing them. Parents and teachers seem unable to reach her. Her mother and father have separated but Dad takes time off work to do activities with her, and simply to talk, hoping to get her out of her stuck place. All Chance really wants is to hide out in her room and sleep to forget.

Then, she starts glimpsing a red fox, first out of the corner of her eye along roads, then more clearly on the periphery of her world. Eventually, in a very vivid dream, she meets the fox, who introduces herself as Janet Johnson and speaks words of wisdom. The magical realism is a perfect device for allowing a troubled girl to find an unlikely mentor who can gently pull her into a new way of seeing herself, her community, her family and what actually happened.

The fox leads her away from her father while they are cross-country skiing one afternoon, and takes Chance to the forested site where the Bad Thing happened. Now she has to face the truth. It's very painful. And it's healing too. Things turn around quickly after she confronts all her fears.

In the afterword, we learn that youth suicide has shocked and saddened small towns in Canada. The author did a lot of research into some of the causes and how teachers can foster positive self-esteem in students with in-depth classroom discussions, like in the book. Using a Robert Frost poem, the teacher and class talk about how we build walls between us, and what we can do to change that, to see each other as part of our world, everyone unique and valuable.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.



**Iron River**, a novel by Daniel Acosta. *Cinco Puntos Press*. Ages 12-17.

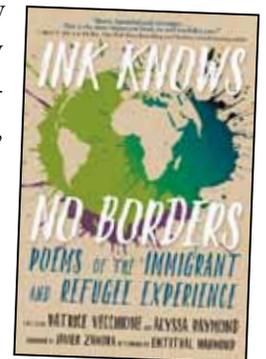
Manuel Maldonado Jr., a twelve-year-old, worries about dying young. He is part of a struggling Mexican American family living in San Gabriel, California, ten miles east of Los Angeles. His home is close to the train tracks, and that's where Manuel and his friends often play. They know it is a dangerous place to play; their parents have forbidden it. But the kids have nothing more interesting to do especially during the long, hot summer months. In poor neighborhoods like Manuel's there are gangs, drug runners, crooked cops, crime and death. Manuel and his friends have formed their own closed-knit circle, but they haven't been caught breaking any laws yet. One day they are in the backyard throwing oranges and lemons at the hobos riding on top of the boxcars as the train moved slowly down the track. When they go to pick up the mashed fruit they discover a dead hobo near the tracks. The boys are convinced that one of them might have killed the man.

This is a powerful coming-of-age story. The author has done an excellent job of telling it skillfully.

—Paulette Ansari, grandmother, African American storyteller.

**Ink Knows No Borders:** *Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience*, edited by Patrice Vecchione and Alyssa Raymond. *Seven Stories Press*. Ages 12 and up.

The stories of immigrants and refugees are filled with challenges that many Americans would find nearly impossible to imagine. The experience of entering a foreign land, forging a new identity, often being treated as unwelcome and unwanted, not to mention the grief of having left behind home and family, and the uncertainty inherent in starting over—all of these form the basis for *Ink Knows No Borders*, a collection of poems written by those who understand what it means to be an immigrant.



Although one might expect these poems to be filled with sadness and despair (and some of them are), there is also a theme of hope and resilience that unites the 64 poems in this volume. Each one tells a different story, and yet, together they remind readers of our shared humanity. Although the poems were initially published between 1984 and 2018, their themes are timeless: the ties that bind families together, and the pain of separation; the elusive, variable sense of belonging; the inevitable introduction to racism and discrimination.

I was impressed by the variety in the poets' countries of origin: the poems represent many places including Nigeria, the Philippines, South Korea, Pakistan, Guyana, Mexico, Syria, Sudan, Guam, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Vietnam, and more. And even though the poems all illustrate what people have in common, they also call attention to the dramatic differences in lifestyle, values, and customs that become so evident for immigrants and refugees.

Interestingly, one of the editors notes that his inspiration for this collection emerged after the 9/11 attacks, when he noticed the mistreatment of immigrants in America. He felt that poetry was a necessary and important response to that racism and injustice. Even though that was almost 18 years ago, circumstances in many ways seem worse now rather than better, especially with the ongoing separation of children from their parents at our southern border. Despite the serious subject matter, the editors deliberately selected poems with younger readers in mind: it is suitable for those who are 12 years of age or older.

—Sarah Mendonca McCoy, PhD, educator, musician & mom.

**Hurricane Season**, a novel by Nicole Melleby. *Algonquin Young Readers*. Ages 9–12.

Finola, nick-named Fig, is a sixth grade student who cares for her dad very much, and her dad loves her equally. The two of them live in a beachside town in New Jersey; her mother left them when Fig was just a new-born baby.

Fig's father has bipolar disorder. He was once a renowned piano player. But now he hardly composes or plays music. Fig wants to understand her father's mind, so she takes an art class to learn about Van Gogh,

his art, and to experience life the way an artist does, especially one who had some serious mental disorders.

One day Fig's dad shows up at school, confused and looking for her. The teacher calls social services out of her concern for Fig's well-being. As the walls start to crumble around her, Fig feels only she alone can rescue her father and protect her family. But with the help of their kind new neighbor, Mark, her friends like Danny (who has a crush on her) and Hannah (who works at the library, and Fig dreams of her as her girl friend), Molly (classmate), and Miss Williams (her art teacher), Fig begins to understand she isn't as alone as she once thought.

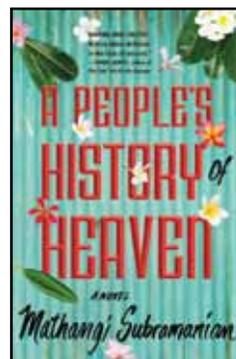
Like any good story, the book has a great ending with Fig's father composing and performing a piano piece called "Finola" at a large theater.

**Hurricane Season** brings unpredictable good and bad days for the main characters in the story, a story of friendships and sharing our truth as we see it, about taking risks and learning from life. It is also a story about love, caring for friends and family, and about the healing it can bring us. Perhaps, it will also extend your definition of what constitutes a family.

—Arun N. Toké, editor.

**A People's History of Heaven**, a novel by Mathangi Subramanian. *Algonquin Books*. Ages 15 and up.

This novel tells the story of five girls growing up in a slum in Bangalore, India. The slum is named Swargahalli and it is marked by a sign, although the sign was split by a bulldozer during one of the past attempts to raze the community and now only reads "Swarga." This means "heaven" in Sanskrit and serves as the new name for the slum, as well as forming the basis for the title of the book. But Heaven is under threat: once again the city has sent bulldozers to raze the slum to make room for more development.



A slum named Heaven may be a little sad and a little pitiful. But at the same time, it is an apt name for the place that these five girls feel most at home. At the heart of the book is this choice between despair or joy in the face of trying circumstances. By the end of the novel, the five protagonists show us that the slum named Heaven does indeed deserve its name.

Deepa is blind, Banu likes building things, Padma is studious, Rukshana is Muslim and queer and Joy is transgender and Christian. Their stories are as diverse as their personalities, and we learn about each of them in bits and pieces, as the narration of the novel jumps around through different moments in time. The novel traces different relationships, the girls' relationships with the older women who raise them, with their peers, with each other. There are common threads, like Janaki Ma'am, the generous headmistress at the school who wishes the best for her young female students; and the bulldozers, which threaten to destroy the slum and cause the residents of Heaven rally in protest.

At times the nonlinear structure of the book seems jarring, as the reader lurches between unrelated scenes with little or no transitions other than a page break. But perhaps this structure is fitting. In various ways, Deepa, Banu, Padma, Rukshana and Joy have all had their lives broken—just like the sign that marks the slum they call home. Yet being broken does not mean being destroyed; something new must emerge. So, too, the readers follow the hardships these girls experienced, in pieces. Bit by bit, their secret sufferings and betrayals are revealed—like Padma's trips to the post office and what she learns from reading the returned letters, or what happens to Joy when they ride together on the train “playing Metro.” The readers watch as something new and something strong grows from these fragments.

Above all, this novel seeks to tell the untold stories—from women, from young people, from poor people. The high-profile aspects of Bangalore, like the city's tech parks, hardly get mentioned. And the men in book, when they are mentioned, go unnamed and are usually up to no good.

As the global economy continues to divide people into winners and losers, and as income inequality rises, the stories of Deepa, Banu, Padma, Rukshana and Joy

remind us what is most important of all—a group of friends and a place to call home.

—Daemion Lee, educator and associate editor.

**We Kiss Them With Rain**, a novel by Futhi Ntshingila. *Catalyst Press*. Ages 15 and up.



As a parent, I understand all too well the instinct to shield our children from the most horrific of human experiences. It is natural for us to want to protect their innocence as long as possible—to delay their exposure to concepts like death, abuse, and war. But the truth is that too many children around the world live with this kind of suffering and trauma on a daily basis, on a scale far worse than I can probably imagine.

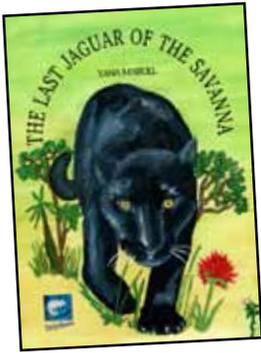
From that perspective, it seems reasonable to introduce adolescents in privileged countries to the heartbreaking circumstances that their counterparts face, particularly in the form of fiction that allows them a glimpse of people and places that are far beyond their life experience. When an author can use a light-hearted tone and humor to diffuse subject matter that is grave and intense, that helps to make it more suitable for younger readers.

**We Kiss Them with Rain** addresses topics such as the AIDS epidemic, sexual abuse, death of a parent, racism, poverty, abortion, and self-mutilation. But the story weaves joy and sorrow together seamlessly, illustrating the strength, courage, and perseverance of the characters to learn how to move on despite their suffering. While the main character and those surrounding her grapple with grave illness, death, abandonment, and injustice, there are also remarkable instances of love, loyalty, reconciliation, and resilience.

My 13-year-old daughter read this book and found it deeply moving. It opened her eyes to situations and challenges that she could not have imagined, and afterward, she felt convinced that more people should read books exactly like this one. Author Futhi Ntshingila reminds us of our common humanity, and that as long as there is human suffering in the world, our work is not yet done.

## Nature and Ecology Books

—Sarah Mendonca McCoy, PhD, educator, musician & mom



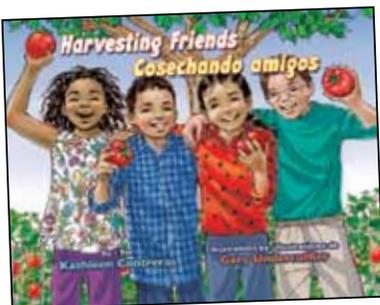
**The Last Jaguar of the Savanna**, by Yana Marull. Terra Books. Picture Book. Also available in Portuguese, Spanish, and German. Ages 5-10.

Did you ever wish that a wild creature will open their heart and tell you what is happening in their neck of the woods? What we—the human beings—are doing to their habitats all over the world? The story is presented from the point of view of a black jaguar, a rare panther native to the Cerrado of central Brazil. In **The Last Jaguar of the Savanna**, we come close to understanding the perspectives and experiences of a native wild animal that roams the tropical region.

The author was a journalist in South America who reported on the environment for some 20 years. She shares what she has learned about the flora and fauna of the Brazilian savanna during her stay there. She bases the story on a real-life jaguar who was tracked by researchers by placing a GPS collar on him. Cerrado is the second largest ecosystem in South America, after the Amazon rainforest, and about half of it has been already cleared by human beings for farming, cattle ranching, roads, and other purposes. No wonder, animals like jaguars are endangered. This one single jaguar was documented to have a territory of 1200 Sq. Km.

The simple illustrations are child-friendly, colorful, and lively. The illustrations, story, and the author's end notes about the jaguars and their habitat help transport the readers to the savanna, and become more aware of the need to protect and preserve these powerful panthers.

—Arun N. Toké, editor



**Harvesting Friends / Cosechando amigos** by Kathleen Contreras, illustr. Gary Undercuffler. Piñata Books. Ages 5-8.

This story teaches us so much. We learn about

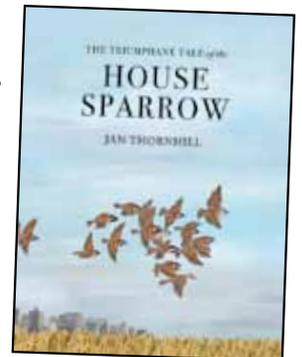
Lupe, a young girl and her family, how they plant a garden. We learn about principles: honesty and hard work among others. We learn about how to make friends and build community. We learn how to develop a vegetable garden. And if that wasn't enough, we learn how to make fresh salsa from scratch, and there are other recipes too.

The story is told in English and Spanish. The two languages side by side makes it very easy for those wanting to improve either language. The illustrations are realistic, colorful and engaging. Every page shows a full display of the scene described in the text. The font is simple and easy to read. A smaller illustration separates the Spanish/English texts. Easy to read and delightful.

—Esther Celis, our board member and Spanish editor.

**The Triumphant Tale of the House Sparrow**, by Jan Thornhill. Picture book. Groundwood. Age 7-10.

With beautiful illustrations, this large format book brings delight to the long, well-told tale of one type of bird that has lived close to humans for ten thousand years. Fun to read to younger kids, the story is probably best for children seven and older.



House sparrows have learned to survive about anywhere we live. They followed us as we learned to grow grain, and as our cities filled with horses and feed for them. They moved from the Middle East into India, Europe and North Africa, or hitchhiked on ships to Australia and the Americas.

Wherever they settled, house sparrows raised lots of babies, and soon ate so much grain that people saw them as pests. In early Egypt, their name was the same as the word evil. In the 20th century in China, Mao declared war on them, even declaring a special day for everyone to kill as many as possible. The next year, insect pests ruined crops and many people starved for several years after that. What a hard lesson about the good that the little birds do, eating bugs!

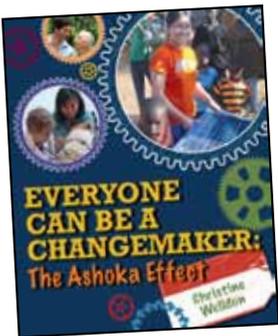
Today, house sparrows can eat about any food we

discard, nest about anywhere and live in huge cities as well as natural places. And yet their population is going down. Our cities no longer need horses and horse feed. Our farms are so full of machines and poisons that the feisty, chirping birds struggle to find good food. And our homes and buildings lack places they can build nests. Will they continue to be our admired friends and annoying foes or will they, like so many species, fade away? Maybe we need to find out just *why* they are struggling now. It could be an important message for us about problems that could harm people.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.

**Everyone Can Be A Changemaker:** *The Ashoka Effect*, by Christine Welldon. *Fitzhenry & Whiteside*.

Ages 8-13.



Author Christine Welldon defines “changemakers” as “social entrepreneurs who have found their way around problems and roadblocks in their quest for positive change.” In this detailed guide, she describes the amazing work of changemakers in a variety of fields. The common thread

between these changemakers is an organization called Ashoka. This network brings encouragement, advice, and assistance to innovative social entrepreneurs. The positive change that springs forth from this network is described as “The Ashoka Effect.”

The name Ashoka originates from the story of Emperor Ashoka the Great, a ruler in 269 BC. This cruel king waged many wars. After winning the bloody Kalinga War in Eastern India, he walked through the battlefield with countless dead and dying people. He grew to resent himself for his cruel actions. This experience caused him to become a peace-loving ruler and a Buddhist, spreading message of peace and love.

Today Ashoka is a helping agency, a worldwide network of mentors and fundraisers who help changemakers make positive impact on the world. Changemakers include people such as Tomas Lang, who created the Reusable Events Materials Library as a way to help change the way schools deal with waste, and Eden Full, who designed a rotating solar panel to bring alterna-

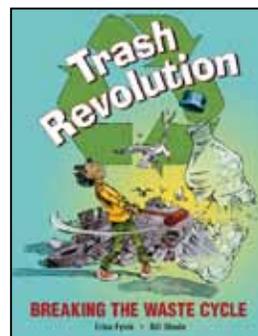
tive energy and clean water to people on the other side of world, and Steven Leafloor, who used hip hop and dancing to develop a toolkit for supporting at-risk Inuit teenagers.

Other Ashoka-supported projects include endeavors such as Claudia Li’s shark conservation efforts, Taylor Gunn’s good citizenship and voting awareness project, Manon Barbeau’s filmmaking about the suffering of street kids, homeless people, and other marginalized groups, Jean-Francois Archambault’s action to bring unused restaurant food to the homeless, and Daphne Nederhorst’s support of farming education for children in Uganda.

Welldon shares the basic strategy recommended for changemakers. She urges youth to find their passions, start small (one step at a time), look at the big picture, and be listeners and observers who can be aware of community needs and potential solutions. She provides a list of simple suggestions on how youth can improve the world. This book provides inspirational descriptions of changemakers in a variety of domains and locations. It shows youth what can be accomplished when a network of dedicated innovators collaborate. This message of hope is delivered in a practical and uplifting way. This is an essential guide for all youths who desire to become the world’s next changemakers.

—Saffron Hunter, volunteer, Oregon.

**Trash Revolution:** *Breaking the Waste Cycle*, by Erica Fyvie, illustr. Bill Slavin. *Kids Can Press*. Ages 8-12.



This is an amusingly-illustrated, large format why-to and how-to book for people of any age, with a focus on a young audience. It helps us get our minds around the stinky problem of human trash. It’s horrifying how much of all sorts of waste—food, plastic, paper, clothing, metal, electronics, building materials and more—we toss without a thought. It’s as if we assumed it simply vanished by some sort of magic, the way natural waste can in natural ecosystems.

How did we end up with mountains of garbage? A

look at the carbon, water and “food print” of a school lunch starts the journey to understanding how we each add our bit of yuck to the giant heap. But the news is not all bad. We learn how uneaten food and animal manure can make great organic fertilizer. Even the dirtiest water can be cleaned and reused, even for drinking. And with further reading, we gain lots of useful ideas for changing the ending of an ugly, stinky story. The upside in a book about nasty stuff is all the valuable information about what we, as individuals, can do to make a difference.

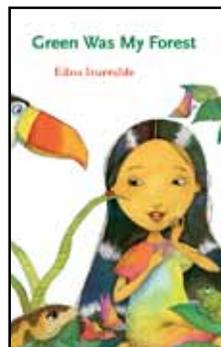
“The T-shirt adventure” lets us in on the whole cycle of “fast fashion,” most of which rots for years in landfills at the end of its life. Instead of using oil to make synthetic fabrics, now we can make fiber for cloth out of recycled plastic bottles. Paper has a similar story. We still cut down close to 300,000 trees daily, not to mention whole ecosystems around them, to make paper we use but once. We can each do our bit to reduce this waste by carefully recycling paper after it’s used. And industry is learning how to make all sorts of surprising things from used paper—like bike helmets and fluffy insulation to keep buildings cozy or cool.

Plastic is a tough problem. First, it’s made from petroleum, which involves a very dirty process itself. Much of the discarded plastic ends up in huge trash gyres circling our oceans, gradually getting inside sea animals and making them sick. Electronics are a challenge to recycle because they are made of so many small parts and contain dangerous toxics that harm people who try to recycle them. But worldwide, the market for refurbished computers and phones is huge, allowing poor people everywhere to own high tech tools at low cost.

Metals are a bit easier to recycle, and recycling of metals reduces the dirty process of mining for the ore, and the energy to melt and refine raw ore. Recycling aluminum is a great saver, cutting by 95% the energy required to make new aluminum from bauxite ore. By simply tossing a beverage can in the right waste container, anyone can take steps to help.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.

**Green Was My Forest** by Edna Iturralde, trans. Jessica Powell. *Mandel Vilar*. Ages 8 and up.



A collection of thirteen stories, by one of Latin America’s beloved writers for young people, the book mixes reality with fantasy and myth. The tale of a measles vaccination team in the remote village is right out of modern times, as is that of a skeptical outsider with a bad injury being healed by the herbs of the village shaman. Other chapters are made of the childhood memories of kids who grow up in a wild, warm place filled with fabulous plants and animals, and the freedom these tribal children enjoy, to explore their home territory and to know it and its rich resources very well indeed.

Even though each tribe of Eastern Ecuador has its own language, customs, and myths, by following the kids, the reader learns about their world. The tribes only seem similar to us at first, because all of them are so very different from the world most readers live in. Some parts of their lives in a simpler tribal world are difficult, and other aspects are delightful.

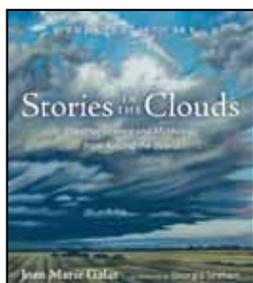
My favorite tale is *Jaguars Go To Heaven*. A boy of the Siona tribe, called Yaiyeopian, is guarding the cornfield, some distance from home, when he finds an ailing Jaguar. Hoping to build trust, he runs back to the village, brings soft food and offers it to the jaguar. Then he sees its yellow drool and a swollen paw and knows the big cat was bitten by a poisonous snake. The boy runs home again, borrows a grinding stone, picks the special leaves he knows will help, and makes a mash mixed with water. The cat is so weak it allows him to push leaf mush into its mouth and hold it shut until it swallows.

Then, taking out his knife, the boy makes a small cut in the swollen paw and sucks out the poison, spits it, rinses his mouth and spits again.

Stroking the cat, the boy is surprised when he hears himself making Jaguar sounds, as if talking to the unhappy animal. They spend the afternoon together, then Yaiyeopian hides the cat in a cave so it is safe. For some weeks, he cares for the cat, “talking” in growls to the animal as it slowly recovers, then one day it is gone. Though he is sad, the boy knows jaguars go to heaven and their spirits stay on earth to be with others

of their kind.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.

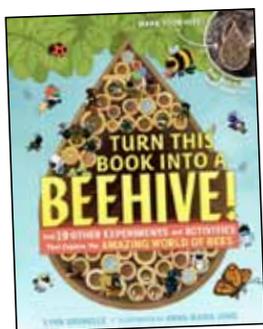


**Stories in the Clouds:** *Weather Science and Mythology from Around the World*, by Joan Marie Galat, illustr. Georgia Graham. *Whitecap Books*. Ages 8–12.

This engaging book for children is a composite of science and stories. Factual sections about weather, including climate, sun, wind, clouds, thunder and lightning, seasons, frost, and fog are interspersed with related tales that early humans once used to help them understand weather in its many manifestations.

These scientific sections list facts about each topic with bullet points and colorful illustrations. This format produces a style that is both pleasing and informative. Teachers will find *Stories in the Clouds* a useful resource for a study of weather. Students will enjoy both the scientific explanations of various aspects of weather and the fascinating stories from seven different cultures from several continents.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller and grandmother.



**Turn This Book into a Beehive!** *And 19 Other Experiments and Activities that Explore the Amazing World of Bees*, by Lynn Brunelle, illustr. Anna-Maria Jung. *Workman Publishing*. Ages 8–12.

Asking questions is awesome, but it can be overwhelming. Especially when you're exploring the amazing world of bees. A lot of information is available and it can be hard to understand when you have so many questions demanding answers. Questions like: "How many different kinds of bees there are?" The answer: "25,000 different species of bees on earth."

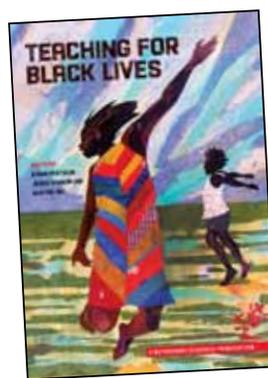
People around the world are asking these same questions. Do not despair! This book is here to help. Not only can you turn it into a home for mason bees when you are done reading, you can also learn a lot about bees in this fun, easy to read book. It clears away

any misconceptions you may have about bees, leaving you educated and ready to help. The quick and fun activities provided in the book are a good place to start.

All of the information and activities in this book are easy to comprehend for all readers. Hopefully, you have been inspired to read this book and learn more about this vital insect. Grab friends and family to complete these engaging activities and help save the bees. You can even use the pages from the second half of the book to make a beehive for mason bees!

—Serenity Levin, high school student intern, Oregon

## Teaching Resources



**Teaching for Black Lives**, ed. Dyan Watson, Jesse Hagopian, Wayne Au. *Rethinking Schools*. All grades.

Beginning with the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, the Black Lives Matters movement has often captured headlines with activism and protests in cities and in streets across the

U.S. *Teaching for Black Lives*, a collection of essays for educators, seeks to be a catalyst for change in another location: the nation's classrooms.

As the editors lay out in the introduction, many textbooks in use around the country fail to adequately address slavery and race in the U.S. They cite a 2015 incident, that garnered national media attention, when a Black student in Texas happened to find a passage in his textbook that referred to slaves brought to the U.S. as "workers." Specifically, the passage stated that the slave trade brought "millions of workers from Africa to the southern United States to work on agricultural plantations"—seeming to suggest that these Africans were similar to migrant workers, rather than people who had been bought, sold, and survived extreme forms of violence. The CEO of the textbook publisher called it an "editorial error," in response to the media reports, but the editors of *Teaching for Black Lives* suggest this so-called error is evidence of something deeper: that many Americans don't know how to talk about

slavery and don't know how to talk about race and our textbooks reflect that. Teaching for Black Lives offers a starting place for change.

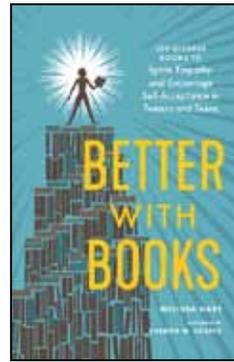
The first section of the book is "Making Black Lives Matter in Our Schools." This section includes the most directly political writing, including essays about activism, how to fight white supremacy in schools, how to teach about Trayvon Martin. The next section "Enslavement, Civil Rights, and Black Liberation," takes a historical look at racism and the Black experience in the U.S., including educators writing about how they teach topics ranging from Tuskegee Syphilis study to Henrietta Lacks to the Reconstruction. One author writes about his and his students' efforts to identify which Presidents owned slaves, something not mentioned in their textbook.

The next two sections focus more on current issues: "Gentrification, Displacement, and Anti-Blackness," followed by "Discipline, the Schools-to-Prison Pipelines, and Mass Incarceration." The essays in these sections range widely, from exploring the question of what people mean when they say "urban," to an interview with author Michelle Alexander about mass incarceration, to a student's perspective in "Haniyah's Story," an essay written by a 17-year-old from California. The book concludes with a section that takes a more personal look at Blackness, through a literary lens: "Teaching Blackness, Loving Blackness, and Exploring Identify." It includes thoughts on teaching poetry, teaching the novel "The Color Purple," an essay about Islamophobia, and how to talk to 6-year-olds about race, while the leading essay in the section is a reprint of a 1963 essay by James Baldwin. These writings are the most deeply emotional, as authors reflect on both the challenges and the beauty of the Black experience.

Many of the pieces here follow a similar format: an experienced educator reflects on a specific lesson or topic they have used to connect with students. It is an effective approach, as these essays are informative without being dry, and all give an answer to the biggest question: what might it look like to actually teach this in the classroom? Overall, Teaching for Black Lives is an excellent resource for middle school and high school educators in social studies or language arts, and an important contribution to the ongoing fight for

Black lives in America.

—Daemion Lee, associate editor and educator.



**Better With Books: 500 Diverse Books to Ignite Empathy and Encourage Self-Acceptance in Tweens and Teens**, by Melissa Hart. Sasquatch Books. Grades 4–12.

**Better With Books** lists 500 books designed to help tweens and teens. But this book is more than a list of good novels. Each book reviewed is a potential life-saver with the ability to teach empathy, compassion, build a sense of security and self-worth.

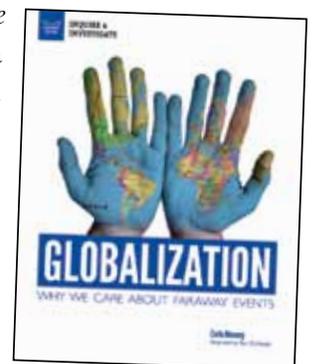
The book is divided into eleven chapters featuring eleven different themes like adoption, body image, disabilities, and race and religion—topics of interest to tweens and teens. As the editor points out, sometimes young people struggle to talk about these difficult issues with their parents; books can offer a safe place for teens to explore and to understand on their own terms.

Each chapter has an in-depth introduction which gives insights to what issues the stories address. Under each book listing is a snapshot of what the book is about. Stories for 9 to 12 year-olds are listed first, separated from the 13 and up stories. This book saves parents a good deal of precious time in finding the right book for their tween/teen to read, or the right book to read with them.

—Paulette Ansari, educator and grandmother.

**Globalization: Why We Care about Faraway Events** by Carla Mooney, illustr. Sam Carbaugh. Nomad Press. For middle grades.

Globalization is a word that changes everything for curious young minds. The book **Globalization: Why We Care about Faraway Events** breaks down the complicated meaning of this word. Simple comics and one-liners explain the way technology drives this phenomenon and how this all affects global economies, society, and



governments.

This book is perfect for a classroom or an individual student. It provides both realistic and cartoon examples of complex issues like trade and the economy. Relatable characters struggle with classroom problems like whether to trade Asian pears for African cookies, and how the world places monetary value on these items for trading purposes.

Does this sound complicated? It should because it is. If you want to know more, join our characters as they learn about globalization right at home.

Reading this book at home or in your classroom is perfect! You will have so many examples of items from across the globe. Maybe, you will realize that globalization is something you already know about. Whether you learned in a classroom, a grocery store, or on social media. Discover the world changing phenomenon of Globalization within the pages of **Globalization: Why We Care about Faraway Events**.

—Serenity Levin, student intern, Oregon.