

Contemporary Canadian Picture Books

Critical New Literacies

THE PRAXIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
AND LEARNING (PELT)

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Contemporary Canadian Picture Books

*A Critical Review for Educators, Librarians, Families,
Researchers & Writers*

By

Beverley Brenna, Richard Dionne and Theresa Tavares



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Richard Dionne

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Theresa Tavares

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Introduction

Some of us love picture books because they mark important times in our lives:

- early childhood, when others shared favourite stories with us;
- revelations of saying *I can read*, whether that involved “reading” the pictures, memorised text or actual decoding; and
- insights from particular books that changed us in some way – Virginia Woolf calls these “moments of being” and James Joyce calls them “epiphanies.”

Fast forward and these books are the first ones we will read to our own children, and later, if we are lucky, to eager grandchildren. Indeed, picture books bring us full circle. We promote them in libraries, we share them in classrooms, and we sing their praises for older as well as younger readers.

Canada has a wealth of world class picture books waiting to be read. From a feast for the senses in Julie Flett’s *Wild Berries...* to the repetitive refrain of Joanne Oppenheim’s *Have You Seen Birds?* (illustrated by Barbara Reid)... to romping child-friendly texts by Robert Munsch... to the lyrical, narrative celebration of the natural world in Susan Vande Griek’s *Loon* (illustrated by Karen Reczuch)... to the strong underpinnings of rhyme and rhythm exemplified in the work of Dennis Lee, whose *Alligator Pie* (and other works) resounds with language play... and to mature themes about equity and independence in Nan Gregory’s *How Smudge Came* (illustrated by Ron Lightburn), Canadian picture books have for generations made us laugh and cry, learn new things, and imagine *what if...*

But do we really know what a picture book is? What do we really know about Canadian picture books?

And what can a group of newer titles, published between 2017–2019, tell us about common patterns and themes in picture book publishing?

1 Contents of This Book

In this volume we share many of the best, new Canadian picture books on the market as well as spotlight a dozen contemporary authors and illustrators. We also celebrate a list of our favourite timeless national classics. Our focus throughout is on writers and artists living in Canada who publish in English with Canadian publishing houses, and while we undoubtedly have missed

exceptional work published elsewhere and in ways other than through traditional publishers, our work is based on a research study that used this particular lens to focus on brand new books.

Our audience includes preservice and in-service teachers, teacher-educators, and librarians, but we encourage anyone who champions children's literature to enjoy this resource! We hope that families find titles here to fuel shared reading experiences, and we anticipate that researchers will draw many of our suggested titles into school-based studies. We want readers to be aware of what a rich and diverse body of content we have in Canada; we want to see these books in classrooms, libraries, and homes; we want Canadian titles on recommended reading lists; and, above all, we want these books in the hands of young people.

Our readers will find titles organised through particular themes that connect well to Canadian school curricula. Families will find fuel for conversations and inspiration for artistic play. Children will “meet” 12 authors and illustrators, relatively new to the field of picture books, whom we introduce in Chapter 13 and whose responses to our interview questions provide fascinating insights into picture book creation. Chapter 13 also connects nicely to classroom studies of authors and illustrators related to English Language Arts outcomes, supporting teachers in unit development. Writers and artists can find support in this volume as well – the best advice we have for those who wish to create picture books is to read widely, explore contemporary offerings, and develop stories that mean the most to them.

We have grouped many of our new titles – books with copyright dates between 2017 and 2019 – in thematic chapters to help readers navigate the range of content. While some books could logically fit under more than one theme, we have limited inclusion to single chapters, trusting our readers to make further connections among titles. Chapters 2 to 10 present excellent books in the following categories: identity themes; places near and far; traditional tales – including creation stories, trickster stories, and other narratives with folktale roots; titles where English is accompanied by at least one other language; predictable books, with child-friendly repetitions that encourage children to chime in; books about nature and our living Earth; stories that honour newcomer experiences; picture books that follow older characters – intriguingly interesting to both children and adult readers; and interesting facts and famous people presented in the picture book form. At the end of each summary, we have included suggested audience ages and used a + sign to indicate particular books that might appeal to wider age ranges.

Chapter 11 draws attention to teachable moments at home and at school, putting the following on centre stage in combination with some of the best, newest titles: shared reading with very young children; reader response activities

to deepen comprehension; and critical literacy. Chapter 12 celebrates the best of the past, featuring many of our old favourites as Canadian “classics” not to be forgotten, as well as newer titles that we predict will stand the test of time.

With bibliographies of children’s literature at the end of each chapter, highlighting titles created by Indigenous authors or illustrators, and a comprehensive index, this volume will help readers find specific titles and information, and support researchers who wish to locate and study particular kinds of picture books and/or Canadians who publish for young people.

An Epilogue at the end of the book offers our final say on this topic (for now): roads left untaken, literature from other countries we recognise as impactful to the creative process here in Canada, and an apology to anyone whose work deserves to be in this compendium but is not. There were just too many titles to include in this one guide. And that’s a good thing for the status of Canadian picture books for children!

So... flip for key facts, or read cover to cover – this book is now at your service!

2 What Is a Picture Book?

We describe picture books here as titles of various shapes and sizes, combining words and illustrations, traditionally produced for younger children. And we agree with children’s literature scholar Perry Nodelman: picture books are unlike any other form of verbal or visual art.

In Kathy Stinson’s helpful book *Writing Picture Books: What Works and What Doesn’t*, she indicates that a standard length is 32 pages, including the title page and copyright page. Image quality has become just as important as words when assessing children’s literature, and a range of media can be seen in Canadian books to include and even combine approaches such as digital art, acrylics, charcoal, oil paints, pencil, photography, and watercolour. The visual component of a picture book is vital to its success and impact.

While early picture books had limited illustrations that reflected particular aspects of the written story, contemporary picture books champion both the images and the words in carrying and extending the storyline. Pictures and words join to form a unique whole. In the history of Canadian publishing, Canadian houses could not initially afford to print their books in full colour. William Toyé’s books with Oxford University Press, in the 1960s and 70s, with Elizabeth Mrazik Cleaver as artist, were pioneers of full-colour illustration in the Canadian picture book form. Yet, even today, many picture books do not include information about the media illustrators have used, and further talking about illustrations is an area where we encourage growth!

A completed picture book is the result of many hands at work: authors and illustrators, for sure, but also designers, editors, publishers, and multiple avenues of promotion and review.

Most picture books have the following elements: the book jacket, or cover; the spine, on which the title and author(s)/illustrator(s) are displayed; sometimes endpapers, and these may offer a visual introduction to the book's contents; the title page; the copyright page, which is normally at the beginning of the book but sometimes at the end; often a dedication page; and then the story or informational text, not paginated unless there is a table of contents. Aligned in some way with the story is the interior art – either representing or extending the words, or as the full story in wordless picture books. Illustrations that accompany the text provide a rich level of narration – telling the story visually. For many children, picture books are their first introduction to evocative visual art, which covers the full range from literal images to quite abstract illustration.

Information about authors and illustrators is increasingly being included in additional back matter, as well as additional content pieces. Non-fiction titles, for example, often include glossaries and indexes as well as links to related websites and organisations. Most of the time, bilingual stories also have glossaries to aid the reader in navigating the languages. In addition, some titles have invitations encouraging activities that further extend the impact of the book outside the reading experience.

Picture books now appear in a wide variety of genres including, but not limited to: realistic fiction; fantasy; historical fiction; and non-fiction. Sub-categories of non-fiction include biographies, autobiographies, and narrative non-fiction – where the information unfolds in a story-like manner. A variety of choices related to poetry and prose are also apparent in writing style, and these sometimes involve rhymed or unrhymed verse, with various attention to meter. It's important to note that unless a picture book is for very young children, where rhymed text can support chiming in, rhymed work for children is very much out of date.

There are plenty of variations on the picture book form, as well. For the youngest audiences, popular choices are board books, with heavy cardboard or plastic pages that stand the rigours of time and hands-on use; look/say toddler books, providing a context for the recognition and naming of common items; and counting and alphabet books with repeated characters and/or settings and an overarching theme. Hybrids combining elements of both the picture book and the graphic novel forms are also increasingly common – for example, Kelly Collier's *A Horse Named Steve* and its sequel, *Team Steve*. Blended genres are also steadily more apparent – seen in creative non-fiction, for example, as well as the continuum of historical fiction that offers varying degrees of truth telling. Paul Yee's *Ghost Train*, illustrated by Harvey Chan, is

an example of historical fiction/fantasy where fact is combined with fiction to create a moving fantasy about the Chinese workers who died building North American railroads.

As well as identifying what picture books are, it's important to recognise what picture books are not. They're not simply "easy stories for little people," and they're not a label for books written with a controlled "levelled" vocabulary such as educational titles created for the beginning reader. If you see a "storyline" such as "The fat cat sat with a hat on a mat..." reject it. This is not a picture book. Picture books are written for the readers' interest and appreciation, not to a narrow reading level or for the sole purpose of decoding individual words.

In this guide, we have omitted collections of poetry unless they featured a single storyline or fit well under non-fiction headings (even though poetry anthologies such as Shannon Bramer's *Climbing Shadows*, illustrated by Cindy Derby, are spectacular). We have also omitted board books and many of the counting and alphabet books available as new titles although a handful of counting/alphabet books with highly original elements and/or exceptional illustrations have been included. Most of our chapters dwell on books originally published in English in the target years 2017–2019, and this has meant we are not focusing on Canadian titles earlier published in French.

Some picture books, such as *That Squeak* by Carolyn Beck and illustrated by François Thisdale – a story about the death of a friend, for ages 8 to 11 – carry complex characters and information intended for older, mature readers. A number of titles speaking to older age groups carry more text – verging on the 2000 word mark – than the typical picture books of a few hundred words designed for younger audiences.

Contemporary picture books are also not merely words with corresponding pictures, as they may have been in years past. Many new picture books have illustrations that take readers far beyond what is presented in the text – and some "wordless" picture books don't use text at all in favour of stand-alone visual information, requiring a different kind of attention on the part of readers. *Sidewalk Flowers*, winner of the 2015 Governor General's Award in the category for children's illustrated books, illustrated by Sydney Smith, was authored by JonArno Lawson although no written words at all appear on any of its pages.

3 Finding Great Picture Books

Noting authors and illustrators with multiple titles can offer a foundation for locating great books. Ruth Ohi, for example, has authored and illustrated over 20 books, and illustrated many others. Perusing award lists, and short-lists, is another good way to locate terrific titles. While the Amelia Frances

Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award was discontinued in 2015, the booklist is still a good one and there are a number of artists who have won it multiple times: <https://bookcentre.ca/awards/amelia-frances-howard-gibbon-illustrators-award>.

Here are a few current awards to note, and a few recent winners.

Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award

This \$1000 award was established in 1985 through an endowment by one of Canada's pre-eminent illustrators and administered through the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Canada. Recent winners include Rachel Wada who illustrated *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden* (written by Heather Smith), Julie Morstad for *Bloom: A Story of Fashion Designer Elsa Schiaparelli* (written by Kyo Maclear), and Julie Kraulis for *A Pattern for Pepper*.

Governor General's Literary Awards for Young People's Literature – Illustrated Books (English)

The Canada Council for the Arts is responsible for administering and promoting the Governor General's Literary Awards, which recognise Canada's best English and French books, in a variety of categories, with prizes of \$25 000 plus funding to publishers for promotion costs. Recent picture book winners include: *Small in the City* by Sydney Smith; *They Say Blue* by Jillian Tamaki; and *When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson, illustrated by Julie Flett.

Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award

Charles Baillie established this \$20 000 prize, administered by the Canadian Children's Book Centre, in the name of his wife, Marilyn Baillie, an award-winning children's book author and an early learning specialist. Recent recipients have included Shauntay Grant (author) and Eva Campbell (illustrator) for *Africville*; Paul Harbridge (author) and Matt James (illustrator) for *When the Moon Comes*; and Jennifer McGrath (author) and Josée Bisaillon (illustrator) for *The Snow Knows*.

TD Canadian Children's Literature Award

This prize of \$50 000 for the "most distinguished book of the year," administered through the Canadian Children's Book Centre in partnership with the TD Bank Group, has recently acknowledged the work of Joanne Schwartz (author) and Sydney Smith (illustrator) for the winning title *Town Is by the Sea*. Recent "honour books" have included *Mustafa* by Marie-Louise Gay as well as Barbara Reid's *Picture the Sky*.

Other Noteworthy Awards

Across the country, various provinces and territories offer annual literary prizes that are voted on by children. Information for Ontario, for example, is available

at the Forest of Reading site: <https://forestofreadingfestival.ca/>. Information on Saskatchewan readers' choice awards appears here: <https://willowawards.ca/>. A complete index of various other Canadian children's literature awards is here: <https://bookcentre.ca/resources/canadian-childrens-award-index>.

Other Noteworthy Books

To find additional excellent titles beyond awards' records, we also recommend seasonal lists of best books or titles sorted by topic. *Best Books for Kids and Teens*, published by the Canadian Children's Book Centre (CCBC) (<https://www.bookcentre.ca>), has a section specifically for picture books. The International Board on Books for Young People via IBBY Canada (<https://www.ibby.org/>) lists books by topic, including a digital catalogue of picture books by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit authors and illustrators. The CCBC has regional libraries that are situated in various institutions, including universities, as well as a quarterly magazine: the *Canadian Children's Book News*.

Locate even more titles through online reviews. CM Magazine (<https://www.cmreviews.ca>) is an electronic reviewing journal that comes out every Friday from September to June, supported by Dr. Dave Jenkinson, CM Editor and Professor Emeritus, University of Manitoba.

Other popular and well-sourced websites that post reviews online include:

- 49th Shelf (49thshelf.com); and
- Quill & Quire (quillandquire.com);
- or search regionally, such as through Atlantic Books Today (atlanticbookstoday.ca), Prairie Books Now (prairiebooksnow.ca), or BC Bookworld's Book-Look (bcbooklook.com).

In addition, Canlit for Little Canadians (canlitforlittlecanadians.blogspot.com) is a blog we recommend. It's run by Helen Kubiw, a reputable source with a respected website.

And of course, bookstores across the country, and online, support children's literature. While numbers of independent children's bookstores have diminished over the past twenty years, it's still worth locating the few nearest you that still exist. Another great source for book suggestions is through your local library – public librarians are always willing to help.

4 A Brief History of Children's Literature

Before the 19th century only a few books in English were written for children, so young people read books intended for adults, understanding whatever they could. This has certainly changed, and the professional publication

of Canadian picture books has risen to approximately 200 new titles every year. Now, some of the Canadian picture books intended for children are even claimed by adult readers – Robert Munsch's *Love You Forever*, for example, illustrated by Sheila McGraw, was created over two decades ago and has sold more than 30 million copies – many of them for adults. Another Munsch title, *The Paper Bag Princess*, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, has just celebrated its 40th anniversary, and it dislodges gender stereotypes, asserting a feminist message for all ages.

Up until the 18th century, a variety of books in languages other than English reached multiple audiences, including children, such as:

- *Panchatantra* (800 BCE), an ancient collection of animal fables in prose and poetry, authored by Indian scholar Vishnu Sharma;
- Aesop's Fables (600 BCE), moralistic animal tales invented by Aesop (Ἀἴσωπος – Aisōpos), a slave and storyteller in Ancient Greece;
- *Arabian Nights* (folktales created prior to the 9th century), by authors of Middle Eastern or Indian descent;
- *Kathasaritsagara* (11th century), a collection of Indian legends, fairy tales and folk tales as retold by court poet and Sanscrit writer Somadeva; and
- *Orbis Pictus* (1658), authored by John Amos Comenius and published first in Latin and German – the earliest known picture book specifically for children.

A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, intended for the Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly with Two Letters from Jack the Giant Killer is the title of what is considered to be the very first fiction children's book in English. It was released in 1744 by British publisher John Newbery, for whom the American Newbery Award in Children's Literature is named. Thomas Boreman's ten-volume series, the "Gigantick Histories," was issued between 1740 and 1744 and designed to instruct, although many of the included facts were deemed incorrect by readers.

Prior to the 20th century, most of the published books for children in Canada came from elsewhere. Local authors and illustrators produced materials for magazines as well as unpublished manuscripts for family and friends. One of the best known originally unpublished early Canadian manuscripts for children is Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon's *An Illustrated Comic Alphabet*, dated 1859, and given as a Christmas gift. Oxford University Press published the book in 1966.

In the late 19th century, improvements to paper production, along with other inventions, supported English book publishing on a wider scale, and

made books for a variety of audiences available cheaply. At this time, writing for children was shaped specifically to teach moral and didactic lessons, particularly through religious tracts. This old-fashioned approach to children's literature has gone out of style in terms of contemporary Canadian picture book publishing, although there are still many authors – primarily unsuccessful ones – who attempt to direct heavy handed moral or otherwise didactic lessons through their work.

It wasn't until the late 19th and early 20th centuries that the children's library movement across North America advocated for quality publications for children, as agents of social influence. Professional recognition of children's librarians as specialists also occurred at this time. As demand increased for quality children's materials, production increased for North American children's books, firstly in the United States. With a few exceptions (including Lucy Maud Montgomery's "Anne" books), there wasn't a thriving book industry in Canada until the late 1970s. The surge here followed by some years the rise of Canadian adult literature – children's books came second. Our beginnings were small and shaky, combatting the prevailing notion that, as Canadians, we didn't have real stories to tell. Once the industry for Canadian children's literature took hold, it faced steep competition from imported materials as well as from the rising educational publishing market.

In the 1960s, advocacy for children's literature heightened. Sheila Egoff, a children's librarian and the first tenured faculty member to teach children's literature at the Canadian university level, inspired William Toye and Elizabeth Cleaver to collaborate on the first real picture books published in Canada. These included the Indigenous creation stories *How Summer Came to Canada* (1969) and *The Loon's Necklace* (1977), supported by the National Archives of Canada and published by Oxford University Press. A thorough history of Canadian picture books was published in 2010 by Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman, and is definitely worth reading for a thorough discussion of the evolution of picture book publishing in this country.

As we ask about the importance of picture books today, many responses come to mind. All said, the best picture books serve a number of purposes, the most important of which is to tell riveting stories in a tightly composed form that impels readers to turn the page, anticipating what happens next. In addition, they:

- seek to inform and/or entertain, increasing knowledge and building a foundation for lifelong reading;
- support vocabulary development;
- expand children's grammar and options for sentence structure;

- offer a rich context for adult-child talk, further developing language;
- demonstrate patterns for writing;
- introduce young people to fine art, which they can closely examine and which will set a foundation for personal enrichment and lifelong appreciation; and
- provide mirrors and windows on our lives and the lives of others – deepening ideas about personal identity and encouraging empathy.

In Canada, modern picture books have commonly told stories and presented information for ages 4 to 8, although suggested age groups for picture books vary around the world. Audience-age appears to be changing in Canada where picture books for older readers or all ages are given special attention on library shelves outside the children's department. Increasingly, some picture books present mature themes and diverse characters, appealing to older audiences including those who are learning English.

A few remarkable titles, such as Melanie Florence's *Missing Nimâmâ*, illustrated by François Thisdale and published by Clockwise Press in 2017, engage intergenerational reading: *Missing Nimâmâ* is the story of a missing Indigenous woman, and her daughter, offering insight to the realities of a national tragedy; Matt James' *The Funeral*, published in 2018 by Groundwood Books, provides perspective on specific rituals seen through the eyes of a young child; Jennifer Lanthier's *The Stamp Collector*, with illustrations by François Thisdale, presents a mature story about freedom of expression; and Danielle Daniel's *Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox*, published in 2015 by Groundwood Books, offers insight into the traditions of the Anishinaabe culture.

As previously mentioned, sometimes picture book stories unfold through the illustrations alone and these are labelled *wordless picture books*. Dave Whamond's *Rosie's Glasses*, exploring our attitudes about how we see the world, is a spectacular example of how a story can unfold through pictures. Many titles with or without words include characteristics of digital reading – such as informational or narrative sidebars, with cues embedded in font and colour. This is where the role of the designer, alongside author and illustrator, becomes especially vital in a collective goal of making meaning, with the book's editor charged in assessing the product in its entirety.

Canada's picture book industry shows the impact of our digital world, with an ongoing evolution in terms of new forms and formats, perspectives, and boundaries, demonstrating what American academic Dr. Eliza Dresang calls *Radical Change*. Keeping up with modern times, picture books must be clever, authentic, dynamic and engaging in order to survive the competition of other forms of reading, both handheld and online.

5 Picture Book Research

This book was produced with acknowledgements to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, in conjunction with a SSHRC Insight Grant associated with Dr. Beverley Brenna's work at the University of Saskatchewan. Bev's research team explored patterns and themes in picture books published in Canada by professional publishing houses during the copyright years 2017, 2018, and 2019. Either the author or the illustrator (or both) were living in Canada at the time of publication. Some of the books discovered as part of this study appear in chapters of this guide as particularly important titles to note. We apologise in advance for any exceptional titles we may have missed in our process.

As our study progressed into the spring of 2020 with restrictions on social activity due to COVID-19, Bev was able to bring all 500 picture books within the three-year-copyright period into her front porch, where they could be explored and re-explored at her leisure, although not all were available to the other authors of this text. For this reason, any errors in detail or interpretation found in this volume are likely Bev's.



These books are formidable in their entirety, a solid reminder of the important work Canadians are doing in picture book publication. Realistic fiction and fantasy genres appear to be the most common, but non-fiction is also a popular genre, comprising just under a third of the picture books published in 2017, for example. Common themes in the three-year set of books presented

in this guide involve identity, and depictions of the natural world. We cheered at the diverse characterisations in these books, and saw representations of many human realities. While a few titles included secondary characters with physical exceptionalities, however, characterisations including disability were almost entirely absent – definitely an element to watch in future years.

Topics such as friendship, commonly found in picture books of the past, were not as common in this set, although some stellar new titles such as Isabelle Arsenault's *Albert's Quiet Quest*, where the storyline unfolds through speech bubbles, and *The Magic Boat* by Kit Pearson and Katherine Farris, illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard, impressed us with their original perspectives on being a friend and needing a friend. Possibly since Canada already has many children's books about friendship, publishers are now seeking titles that represent different themes.

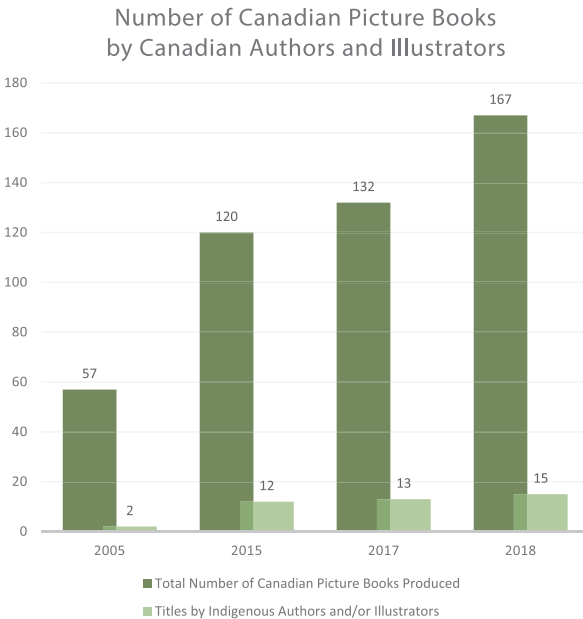
And now, a few points about cost. Printing a picture book, in full colour, is perhaps one of the most expensive printing processes there is. Consequently, publishers have to consider whether proposed picture book projects can earn back the money that goes into the production. Frequently, the printing process does not take place in Canada, but off-shore – i.e. usually in Asia where the costs are significantly lower. This is technical stuff, but it does come into the whole story of picture books and the fact that they are still being produced, despite the competition from more digital-based projects that, at times, seem to threaten the continuing production of printed books.

We are delighted that handheld picture book production is currently alive and well in Canada! The numbers of English titles released each year by professional publishing houses is one trend to note in the graphic that follows, updated from recent data (Brenna, Khan, & Morstad, 2020), and includes comparative information related to Indigenous authors and illustrators that also demonstrates an increase over time in Indigenous perspectives. Even with increases seen here in Indigenous content, there is still room for growth in comparison to total numbers of books produced each year. In addition, while some of the many Indigenous populations of Canada are represented in this literature, others are not yet present.

As part of each chapter's bibliography we have used an asterisk * to highlight books with Indigenous authors/illustrators, anticipating that readers will be especially excited to locate this content in the spirit of indigenising collections of resources for young people. Not only does this signage recognise Indigenous authors and illustrators, but it is intended to encourage and honour these Indigenous titles in circulation.

We have also included information about Indigenous author and illustrator backgrounds in our summaries of books. At times, regional spellings of

cultural significance may be different from summary to summary as we have replicated exactly the information from each specific text and language background. The decision made to inform audiences about the Indigenous cultures of authors/illustrators included in this volume is an effort to extend awareness of books that carry Indigenous voices and narratives, and it comes here as part of our response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.



6 A Message from the Authors

We hope that for anyone new to Canadian picture books, you will find material here to start a productive foray into these compelling resources. And if you are already experienced in this field, we similarly hope that you will find enough new information to keep on reading.

Canadian history to this point in time in the creation and production of authentic, literary local content has not been an easy one, and we most of all hope that our work might in some way encourage the continued development of excellent picture book materials for use in Canada and beyond.

Every book is shaped by the many who support its creation, and ours is no exception. We thank a number of people and organisations for their diligent contributions here, including our wonderful peer reviewers and editors, and

we've included some information about our own backgrounds so that readers will recognise what we bring to this volume as well as what we may have omitted.

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Identity Themes

Canada is a big country with a diverse population, and sometimes it's difficult for children to find their place in the world. School curricula address this in many ways, from Health programs that look at the importance of developing a positive personal identity, to Social Studies goals that examine community and the value of diversity, and English Language Arts materials that foreground thinking about the identity of self and others. Seeing ourselves in what we read is of immense importance, as are messages about diversity that challenge hegemonic ideas. Books dealing with identity themes build confidence in readers to be who we are, and help us imagine a world that's both authentic to reality and rich with new possibilities for the future.

Luckily for us, Canadian picture book authors and illustrators are increasingly tackling the subject of identity in ways that are meaningful and accessible to young folks. Many new titles include explorations of self-image with an emphasis on strategies to develop positive feelings about individual differences such as gender, race, ability, etc. Some of these books push directly against stereotypes, while others promote questions about social justice and deeper understandings of ourselves and other people.

In this chapter we introduce you to some of the best and most representative picture books with 2017–2019 copyright dates. It's longer than most of the other chapters because there were so many amazing titles to choose from that fit this theme! However, while we see various aspects of human experience presented, we also note that the variety of human abilities is a characteristic not fully recognised in terms of diversity in these books; we therefore encourage and look forward to the continued production of new, authentic writing that shows the whole range of humanity, with various abilities and exceptionalities included.

As with all of our thematic chapters, we have listed the books in our summary sections alphabetically, by author. Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

When I Found Grandma

*Saumiya Balasubramaniam
and Qin Leng*

Maya longs to see her grandmother but when she arrives from far away, Grandma's not what her granddaughter expected. She wears a crimson sari and hands out treats that Maya hasn't tasted before. This compelling story about navigating cross-cultural contexts will support discussions on cultural identity. Saumiya Balasubramaniam's evocative first-person text is extended by Qin Leng's compelling illustrations in ink and watercolour. For ages 5–9.

A Horse Named Steve

Kelly Collier

Steve is a horse who tries so hard to be special that at first he misses how unique he really is. With the fast pace, comic timing, and eye-catching ink and watercolour graphics shared by its sequel *Team Steve*, this book shows how important it is for young people to understand that no matter who they are, they have a unique identity all their own. For ages 3–8+.

Our Big Little Place

*James A. Conan
and Nicolle LaLonde*

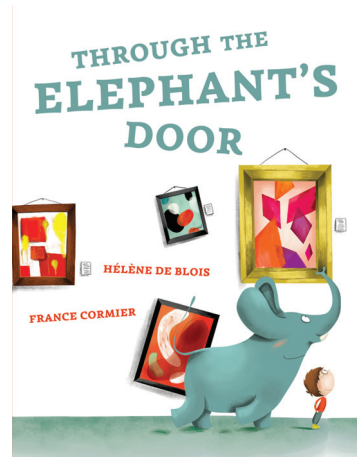
This title is about the life of a little boy who lives in a family apartment. His identity emerges as he plays with others and his imagination opens the door to a bigger world. This book is an exploration of home and community, delivered through James A. Conan's skillful storytelling and Nicolle LaLonde's eye-catching digital illustrations. For ages 4–8.



Through the Elephant's Door

*Hélène de Blois
and France Cormier*

Two friends go to the museum on a rainy day. Because of his size, Émile the elephant can't go through the same door as everyone else – instead, he must go through the delivery door. During their time in the gallery, Émile receives continued scrutiny from one of the guards, offering a strong perspective on how terrible it feels to be negatively singled out. This is a book about equity and prejudice. For ages 5–12+.



Becoming Métis

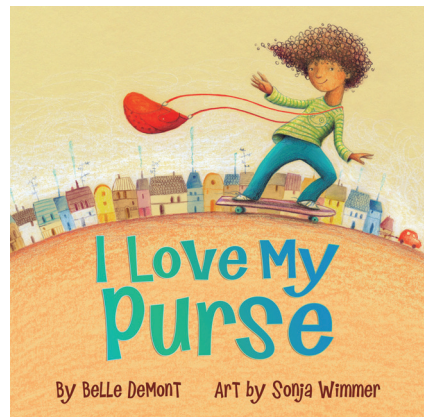
*Deborah L. Delaronde-Falk
and Sheldon Dawson*

At Métis Culture Days, Tiah experiences bannock making, snowshoe racing, moose calling, leg wrestling, samples pemmican, and learns about a number of other traditions including the reasons why Métis and Voyageurs would wear the culturally significant Sash. A clear message in this book involves the importance of exploring and learning about your culture. For ages 4–8.

I Love My Purse

*Belle DeMont
and Sonja Wimmer*

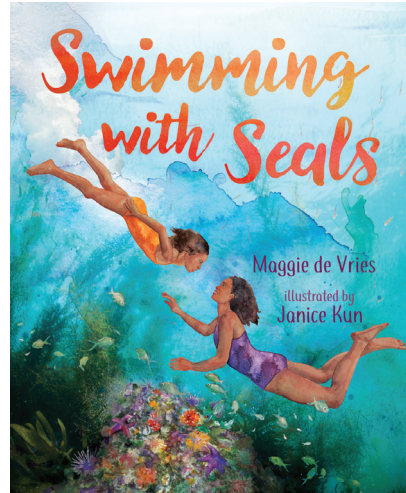
Charlie, a young Black child, inherits a beautiful red purse from his grandmother and decides to wear it to school. Other people comment on his unusual choice, but over time his matter-of-fact responses are convincing, and the critics simply go about their daily business. Other characters see Charlie making choices for himself, and follow his lead. For ages 4–8.



Swimming with Seals

*Maggie de Vries
and Janice Kun*

This book is based on a true story about a child who lives with her grandmother and a great-aunt. When Ally flies to visit Aunt Kate at the seaside, she also connects with her birth mother, offering a chance for Ally to discover that she and her mom both love to swim. This book presents a good example of different kinds of families through Maggie de Vries' heartfelt narrative and Janice Kun's mixed-media illustrations that include collage, watercolour, drawing, and photography enhanced with Adobe Photoshop. For ages 5–9.



Ben and the Scaredy-Dog

*Sarah Ellis
and Kim LaFave*

Ben is afraid of dogs. An encounter with a nervous dog offers Ben a new perspective – that dogs can be frightened, too. This is a sensitive story about facing your fears and overcoming anxiety, enhanced by Kim LaFave's evocative use of paint, pencil and digital media. For ages 3–7.

Ben and the Scaredy-Dog



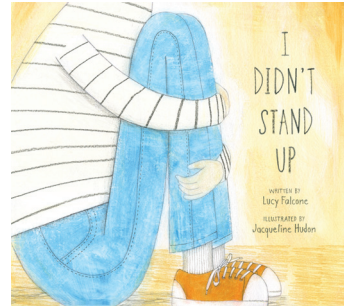
Written by Sarah Ellis Illustrated by Kim LaFave

I Didn't Stand Up

Lucy Falcone

and *Jacqueline Hudon*

This story narrates the experiences of a bystander who does not speak up against various bullying situations until the bullies attack closer to home. In response, everyone who has been bullied previously stands together in solid support. This book encourages taking action against injustice, and is based on an anti-Nazi protest poem written by Martin Niemöller. For ages 7–12+.



The Reptile Club

Maureen Fergus

and *Elna Ellis*

Rory is a boy who can't find a school club to match his interests and so he starts his own. While other children aren't initially interested, three talking reptiles volunteer, and eventually Rory's classmates come around. Adding to the theme of respecting various interests regardless of gender, there are depictions of dads making cookies, and boys knitting and joining ballet, all presented through lively, colourful illustrations. For ages 6–9.

Trampoline Boy

Nan Forler

and *Marion Arbona*

Identified by its publisher as a book about someone on the autism spectrum, this story follows a boy who likes to bounce on his trampoline all day, the youngsters who taunt him, and a girl who becomes his friend. With its lyrical, evocative text, enhanced by intriguing gouache and pencil illustrations, it could be a springboard for mature discussions about abilities. For ages 6–11.

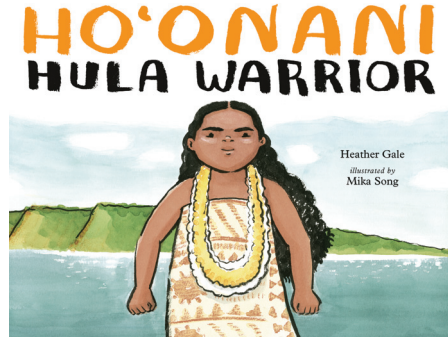


Ho'onani: Hula Warrior

*Heather Gale
and Mika Song*

Based on a true story, Ho'onani doesn't see herself as wahine (girl) or kane (boy) and she's happy to be in the middle. When she takes part in a school performance of a traditional kane hula chant, her sister is embarrassed until she sees

Ho'onani's talent and stands up for her. This story unpacks issues about gender normativity and is based on the documentary *A Place in the Middle*. Watercolour and ink illustrations vividly render ideas about diversity and acceptance. For ages 5–12+.

**Fern and Horn**

Marie-Louise Gay

Fern and Horn are twins who look alike but have very different ways of seeing the world and being in the world. This book offers a lively text and colourful mixed-media illustrations to explore imagination and creativity as well as the fun that comes with originality. For ages 4–8.

The Walking Bathroom

*Shauntay Grant
and Erin Bennett Banks*

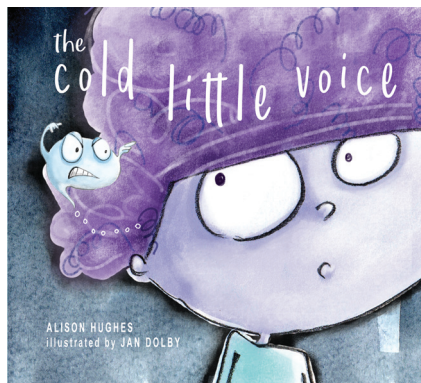
Amayah wants to wear a truly original Halloween costume and relies on her imagination to help her break the norm – including a shower curtain cape and rolls of toilet paper worn like bracelets. Although her classmates are confused by her choices, she goes on to win the school contest. This is a book about unleashing your creativity and being proud of your uniqueness. For ages 4–8.



The Cold Little Voice

*Alison Hughes
and Jan Dolby*

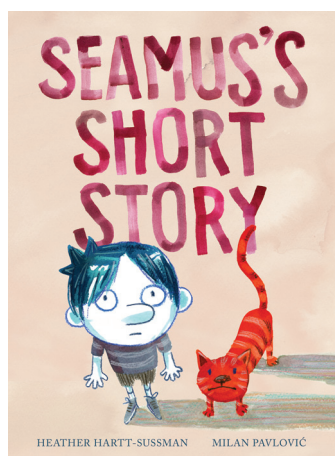
This picture book follows a cold little voice as it speaks negative thoughts to a young narrator. A solution appears when the narrator starts hanging out with positive and accepting people. This is a story about being kind to ourselves. For ages 5–12+.



Seamus's Short Story

*Heather Hartt-Sussman
and Milan Pavlović*

Seamus longs to be taller. When he discovers his mother's high-heeled shoes, he can suddenly reach everything! Or can he? Clothes here become a simple means-to-an-end, and Seamus decides that there are definitely times to be tall and times to be short. A gently nuanced story about innovation, self-acceptance, and love, extended by Milan Pavlović's colourful paintings of Seamus's world. For ages 4–8.



Ira Crumb Feels the Feelings

*Naseem Hrab
and Josh Holinaty*

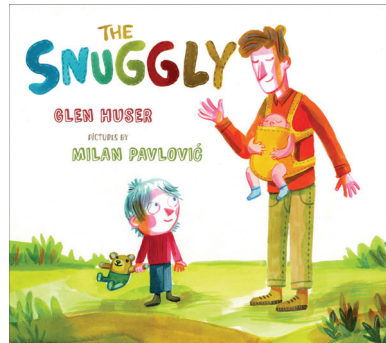
Ira and Malcolm always play together but today they can't settle on an activity they both like. Ira is overcome with sadness when his friend goes off to play tag with the other children. Later, Ira shares his feelings and their friendship resumes. This is a book about how being friends doesn't mean you have to do everything together. For ages 4–7.

The Snuggly

Glen Huser

and *Milan Pavlović*

Todd uses his baby sister's snuggly to carry his beloved teddy bear, and then discovers it's a great place to store all sorts of things – until his collection bursts out all over the place during Show and Tell. This story offers a way to talk about changing roles within families when new siblings arrive, enhanced by Milan Pavlović's vibrant illustrations. For ages 2–7.



What's My Superpower?

Aviaq Johnston

and *Tim Mack*

As Nalvana goes around town discovering the superpowers of other people, she learns about her own strengths in making others feel good about themselves. An Inuktitut glossary defines four words that are seamlessly integrated. This is a story about human differences and how communities rely on diversity. For ages 4–8.

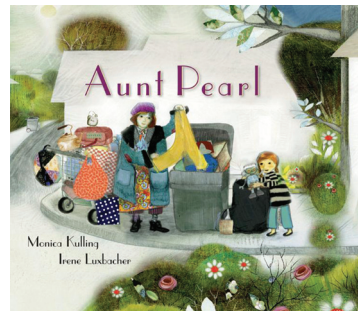


Aunt Pearl

Monica Kulling

and *Irene Luxbacher*

Aunt Pearl has been living homeless and comes to stay with Dan and Marta's family. She gathers things from trash bins and turns some of it into art. As fall approaches, Aunt Pearl becomes quieter and quieter, and eventually heads back out on her own. A story told without judgement or didacticism, this title offers the chance to think about mental health. Irene Luxbacher's elaborate collage illustrations are rich with visual clues. For ages 6–9+.



A Pattern for Pepper

Julie Kraulis

A young girl searches for the perfect dress as a special occasion draws near. With the help of a tailor, she learns about the cultural origins of various patterns – depicted in unique illustrations using oils and graphite on board. This book presents clothes as a way to show one’s personality. For ages 4–8.



Wallpaper

Thao Lam

This is a wordless story, in Thao Lam’s signature paper collage style, about a young girl too shy to play with others. After picking at the peeling wallpaper in her new room, she enters a fantastic imaginary world. When she returns to real life, she has developed new courage. This tale explores shyness and feelings of anxiety. For ages 5–8.

Goodnight, Hockey Fans

*Andrew Larsen
and Jacqui Lee*

A young boy can’t sleep because he longs to watch the hockey game; hearing the play-by-play on his radio allows him to relax and dream about a glorious game in which he himself scores the winning goal. Readers can be encouraged to think about the author’s choice in simply calling the protagonist of this story “the boy” rather than giving him a name. Jacqui Lee’s gouache illustrations, digitally edited, are visually interesting and generous with detail. For ages 3–8.

I Am Small

Qin Leng

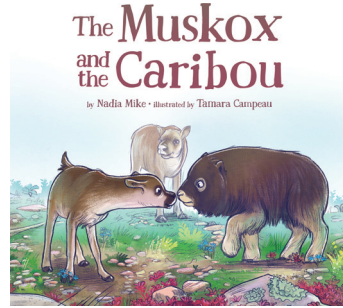
Mimi is unhappy about her size and lists the various inconveniences about being small before thinking about the possible advantages. When a baby sibling arrives, she relishes the chance to be a big sister. This is a book about coming to terms with one’s own characteristics but also being open to new perspectives. Qin Leng’s pen, ink and watercolour illustrations are simple yet poignant. For ages 4–7.

The MuskoX and the Caribou

Nadia Mike

and *Tamara Campeau*

Baby MuskoX grows up with a different group, the Caribous. He feels like an outsider until he finds a herd that looks just like he does. As he joins them, he misses his Caribou mother, but looks forward to seeing where he belongs with the new group. This story reinforces the importance of cultural connections and self-acceptance. For ages 5–9.

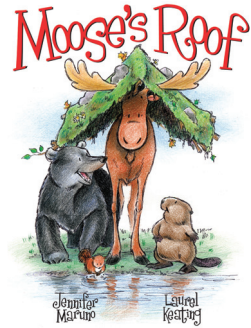


Moose's Roof

Jennifer Maruno

and *Laurel Keating*

Moose decides that living under a roof would be a good idea. With the help of friends, he creates a shelter carried on his antlers. Eventually he realises what works for others might not work for everyone, and celebrates being himself. For ages 5–8.



Boonoonoonous Hair!

Olive Senior

and *Laura James*

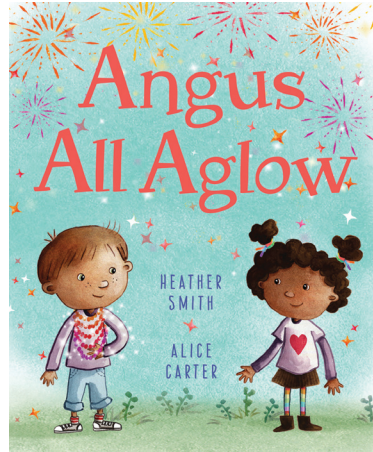
In this story, Jamilla learns to love her “fantabulous, splendiferous, boonoonoonous” hair. This is a book about self-acceptance and self-love. Laura James’ boldly coloured pencil and paint illustrations truly enhance Olive Senior’s empowering text. For ages 4–9.



Angus All Aglow

Heather Smith
and Alice Carter

Angus loves sparkly things until his classmates laugh when he wears a glass bead necklace to school. One classmate who shares his interests supports him and Angus continues to fuel his inner sparkle. This is a story about individuality and the importance of acceptance. Alice Carter's water-colour, gouache, and pencil illustrations are sensitive and compelling. For ages 5–8.



The Dog Who Wanted to Fly

Kathy Stinson
and Brandon James Scott

Zora the dog wants to fly but after many failed attempts, she decides to give up. A friend in danger inspires her to even greater heights and... Zora soars to the rescue! This is a story about setting goals, naysayers, and never giving up. For ages 4–9.



From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea

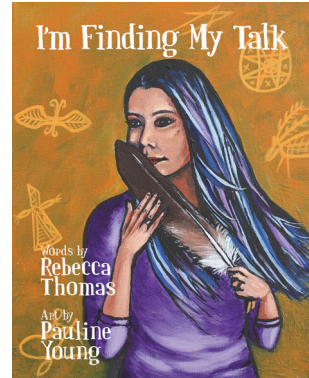
Kai Cheng Thom,
Wai-Yant Li and Kai Yun Ching

Miu Lan is not just any child, but one who can change into any shape they can imagine. The only problem – according to the people they meet – is that they can't decide what to be: boy or girl; bird or fish; tree or star. But they find comfort in the arms of their mother, who sings of everlasting love and a steadfast belief that Miu Lan's courageous dreams about just *being* will come true. The message here is about learning to value uniqueness. For ages 3–7.

I'm Finding My Talk

*Rebecca Thomas
and Pauline Young*

Told in rhyming verse, this is a story about reuniting with culture taken away by the residential school system. The words and images identify activities like sewing regalia, dancing at powwow, and smudging as very helpful in the narrator's quest. It is a companion picture book to Rita Joe's *I Lost My Talk*. For ages 4–adult.



The Sinking of Captain Otter

*Troy Wilson
and Maira Chiodi*

Two kindred spirits – an otter and a butterfly – follow their dreams through an ocean voyage in spite of others' mockery about their differences. This book has important messages about acceptance and belonging. For ages 4–8.

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Places Near and Far

Adventure is everywhere! Exploring Canada and other countries can be fun and educational, and books can take us on spectacular trips inward and outward. Through well-researched and authentic picture books, children can learn about different cultures as well as their own, with *place* appearing as a mirror with two sides – reflecting both ourselves and other people.

In this chapter we present some Canadian picture books published between 2017 and 2019 that take readers on amazing trips in all directions. Authors and illustrators can be commended for sharing their own lived perspectives as well as doing the research necessary to get these stories right! While many places are named specifically, others are unnamed, allowing readers to infer and imagine, comparing and contrasting various locations with their own lived habitat.

While the text in these picture books illuminates many aspects of *here* and *there*, employing a range of fiction and non-fiction genres, illustrations in this set of books also go into overdrive, presenting places and spaces in luminous detail with photographs, drawings, and gallery-quality paintings. Fasten your seatbelts for the journey ahead because these books really travel!

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

Nuptse & Lhotse in the Land of the Midnight Sun

Jocey Asnong

This title is part of a series on two globetrotting cats. In this volume, they travel the Chilkoot Trail to the North Pole, encountering all four seasons, and entertaining themselves by panning for gold, riding a caribou across the tundra from boreal forest to Artic Ocean, and, with the help of an Inuit hunter, sailing among ice floes in the Northwest Passage. This book celebrates the uniqueness of Canada and the Arctic. For ages 5–10+.

Sharing Our Truths/Tapwe

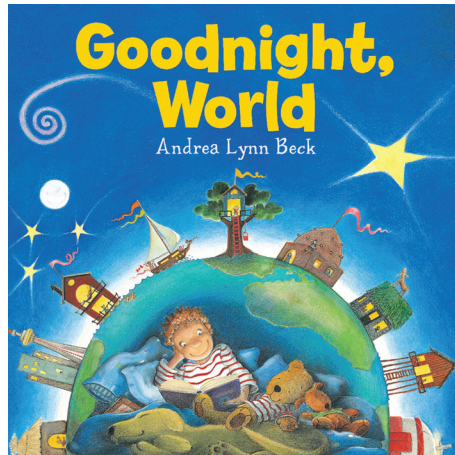
*Henry Beaver, Mindy Willett with Eileen Beaver
and Tessa Macintosh*

This detailed personal narrative about a family living in Fort Smith, North West Territories, celebrates the land and its people. With many photographs that depict Indigenous cultural practices and connections, the setting here is rich with teaching possibilities. For ages 4–adult.

Goodnight, World

Andrea Lynn Beck

A boy settles into his bed on a sailboat and wonders where other children sleep. Two pages at the end of the book provide facts about various types of homes around the globe including: domed houses in Syria; brick houses; houses with grass roofs; yurts made of wood and felt; houseboat homes; tree houses; apartments; mud homes; a house on stilts; and wooden houses. The



illustrations throughout, with pencil crayon and paint on watercolour paper, are full of rich and colourful details that will engage young readers and offer further information. For ages 2–7.

Summer North Coming

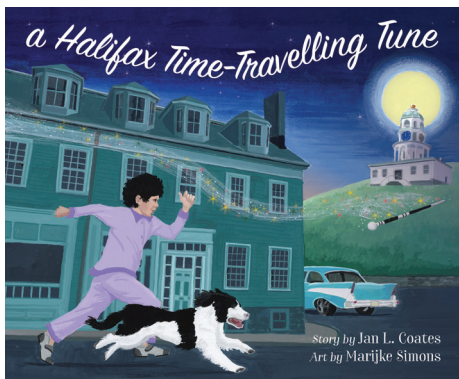
*Dorothy Bentley
and Jessica Bartram*

This book celebrates summer and winter in the north. Its poetry is beautifully rhythmical with stunning vocabulary usage. Readers will make personal connections and learn new facts about Canadian settings and activities. Jessica Bartram's rich watercolour and gouache illustrations are an homage to the picturesque Canadian north. For ages 5–9+.

A Halifax Time-Travelling Tune

Jan L. Coates
and Marijke Simons

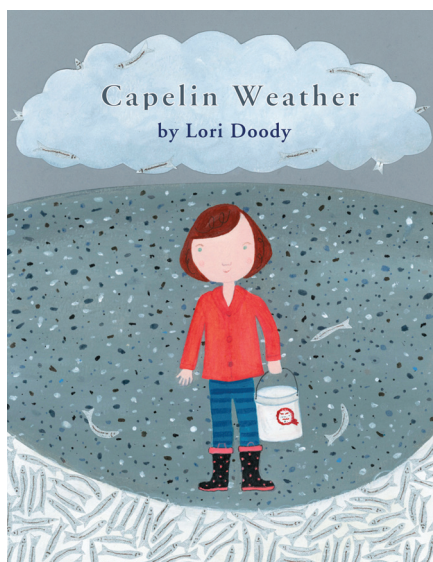
This lyrical story and its accompanying dreamy illustrations follow a young child back into 1950s Halifax, Nova Scotia, along with a magic song entity named “Tune.” They dance through Point Pleasant Park, the Public Gardens, Citadel Hill, and other historic Halifax landmarks. Accompanied by two additional pages of vintage photos and related descriptions, this book is a celebration of Halifax’s history. For ages 4–8.



Capelin Weather

Lori Doody

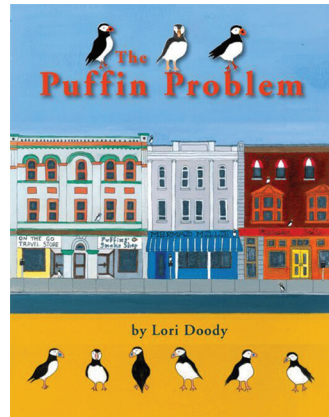
Kate experiences the gray, cold time at the beginning of summer on Newfoundland’s shores. Her grandmother promises that the weather will be nicer after the capelin roll in. Kate watches for the little fish and sees all sorts of other things including icebergs, whales and kittiwakes... until the day when the capelin really do arrive. Lori Doody’s folk art illustrations are playful and bright, offering a portrait of Newfoundland’s natural beauty. For ages 4–8.



The Puffin Problem

Lori Doody

This story follows an imaginary influx of puffins into downtown St. John's, Newfoundland. The folk art images depict local businesses, and endnotes provide context for the story, explaining how puffins really do nest in St. John's each summer and often end up stranded on land, disoriented by artificial lights. Lori Doody's comical, spare, pencil and watercolour illustrations offer young viewers ample opportunities to locate distinctive puffins everywhere! For ages 3–8.



Milo and Georgie

Bree Galbraith

and *Josée Bisailon*

Milo and Georgie move with their mom to a new city, and Milo doesn't like it. To help his sister, he sends her out exploring on the end of a red string, so that when he tugs, she'll return. But one day he has to go and find her, and the trail leads readers through a detailed exploration of this city setting. Readers may be inspired to map out their own neighbourhoods in response to this look at one supportive community. Josée Bisailon's watercolour, collage and digital illustrations are a visual feast. For ages 4–8.

My Winter City

James Gladstone

and *Gary Clement*

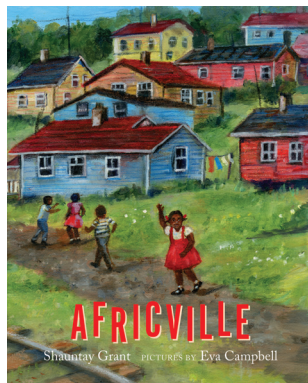
An elegant, lyrical first-person text follows the experiences of a boy, his dad and their dog exploring winter in the city. Rich vocabulary and highly detailed watercolour illustrations fill the extra-large pages of this celebration of urban living. For ages 4–8.



Africville

*Shauntay Grant
and Eva Campbell*

A young girl visits the former site of Africville, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, imagining what the community was like. Many details appear in textured illustrations created with oil and pastel on canvas. The author's note provides even more information about the vibrant Black community that thrived in the face of oppression for over 150 years. Africville was demolished by city officials in the 1960s; in 2010, the City of Halifax delivered an official apology. This book offers the opportunity for discussions about injustice and racial discrimination. For ages 4–8+.



When the Moon Comes

*Paul Harbridge
and Matt James*

This title nostalgically explores winter in a small community, culminating in an informal nighttime hockey game on a frozen beaver flood. Community traditions such as building a fire and clearing the ice are included in vivid, active paintings, rendered in acrylic paint and India ink, on oversize pages. For ages 4–8+.



Up! How Families Around the World Carry Their Little Ones

*Susan Hughes
and Ashley Barron*

From West Africa to Peru, from Egypt to Canada's Far North, from Korea to India, from Poland to China and Afghanistan, and other places called home, families carry their babies in many different ways. With simple words and cut-paper collage illustrations, readers are taken through a number of traditional customs. This is an original take on cultures around the world. For ages 2–7.

Here to There and Me to You

Cheryl Keely

and *Celia Krampien*

This book spotlights well-known bridges around the world, identifying their different structures through simple text and drawings as well as more informative sidebars. These include: Canada's Hartland Bridge; California's Golden Gate; the London Bridge; Peru's Puente de Piedra; wildlife crossings in Banff National Park; the Whirlpool Rapids Bridge at Niagara Falls; the Three Countries Bridge at the borders of France, Germany and Switzerland; the Brooklyn Bridge; and, bridges closer to home: rope bridges, backbends, rainbows and hand-holding. For ages 5–9+.

Sun Dog

Deborah Kerbel

and *Suzanne Del Rizzo*

A puppy explores her Arctic home under the midnight sun before anyone else is awake. Suzanne Del Rizzo's striking illustrations in textured polymer clay and acrylic wash add important details to Juno's coming-of-age story. For ages 2–8.

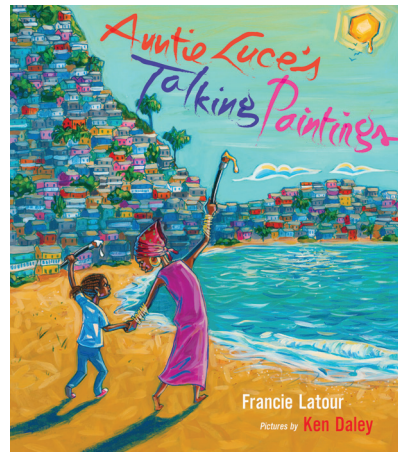


Auntie Luce's Talking Paintings

Francie Latour

and *Ken Daley*

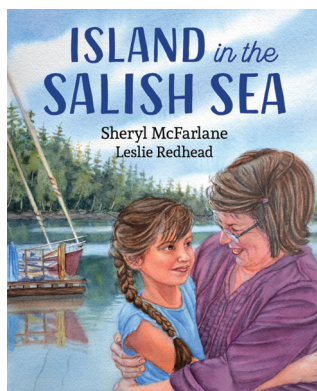
Every year a young girl visits her aunt, a painter in Haiti, and this vividly illustrated story brims with the foods, sounds, and language that offer the protagonist a deeper understanding of Haitian history and culture including Black heroes important to the country. Luce Turnier, one of Haiti's celebrated artists, was the inspiration for this book, and Ken Daley's vibrantly painted landscapes, using acrylic on illustration board, evoke the tropical setting. While this title is about Haiti, it is also about identity and the ways we can learn to see ourselves. For ages 4–8.



Island in the Salish Sea

*Sheryl McFarlane
and Leslie Redhead*

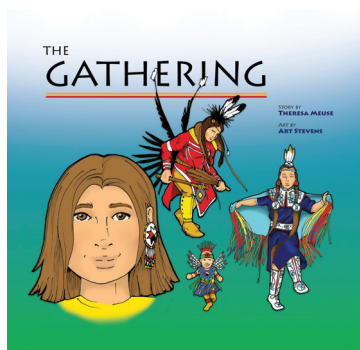
Every day is a beach day and every day is different for the young narrator as she relates her adventures on Gran's island. Redhead's vivid watercolour paintings bring the plants and animals to life and offer panoramic seaside views. For ages 4–8.



The Gathering

*Theresa Meuse
and Art Stevens*

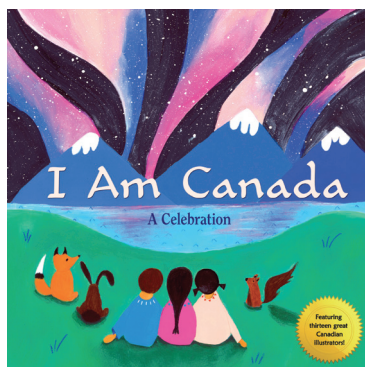
Alex is attending her first Mi'kmaw spiritual gathering. Assisted by her older cousin, she meets Elders and learns about the Sacred Fire, drumming, tanning and moccasin decorating, weaving baskets, and canoe-making, followed by a feast. Most importantly, Alex finds her voice in the talking circle. This is an inclusive story that celebrates Mi'kmaw culture and kinship. For ages 5–8.



I Am Canada

*Heather Patterson
and 13 Canadian illustrators*

With a simple text that identifies activities and landscapes common to living in Canada, this title has multiple illustrators who also include statements about what Canada means to them. Artists include: Cale Atkinson, Eva Campbell, Geneviève Côté, Danielle Daniel, Marie-Louise Gay, Doretta Groenendyk, Jon Klassen, Qin Leng, Irene Luxbacher, Ruth Ohi, Barbara Reid, Ashley Spires, and Jeremy Tankard. This book will inspire great conversations among children and adults about being Canadian. For ages 3–7.



Birthdays Around the World

Margriet Ruurs

and *Ashley Barron*

The information in this book, in text and paper collage illustrations, is based on how real people from 14 countries around the world celebrate their birthdays. The countries included are: Australia, Belgium, Cambodia, Canada, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Japan, Latvia, Lesotho, Peru, Russia, the United States, and Vietnam. For ages 4–8.

She Dreams of Sable Island: A Paper Doll Book

Briana Corr Scott

Scott is a celebrated artist whose paintings and poems are inspired by the natural world. Here she renders the story of a little girl who goes to Sable Island, Nova Scotia, in her sleep. After the main text unfolds in gentle rhyme, there is an informational section on the national park, followed by an illustrated double-page spread that describes local flora and fauna including a spotlight on the famous wild horses. Paper doll cut-outs are included to engage young readers in retelling the story. This book is an evocative blend of fact and narrative non-fiction along with a hint of fiction, all set on Sable Island. For ages 3–9.



Ten Cents a Pound

Nhung N. Tran-Davies

and *Josée Bisaillon*

A young girl is torn by her desire to stay home in her isolated village and her dream to go to school on the other side of the mountains. Her mother is determined that her child will have a life beyond the coffee fields. Bisaillon's mixed-media art work revels in earth tones, accented by the striking red coffee beans that sell for *ten cents a pound*. Tran-Davies' lyrical prose will catalyse discussions about poverty and education. For ages 5–8.

A West Coast Summer

*Caroline Woodward
and Carol Evans*

This book brings together a collection of fine art images from watercolourist Carol Evans with rhyming text by author Caroline Woodward, who writes and works as a lighthouse keeper on Lennard Island, British Columbia. A title that definitely evokes the seaside, readers will happily explore the gorgeous images for details in the absence of a traditional storyline. For ages 3–8.

The Promise

*Prina Bat Zvi, Margie Wolfe
and Isabelle Cardinal*

Auschwitz concentration camp is the historical setting for the saga of two sisters who eventually survived to tell this story to their daughters – the authors of this book. This title renders the inhumanity of war through its poignant story and haunting illustrations, but also the possibility of hope for humanity even in the darkest times. Isabelle Cardinal's haunting mixed-media illustrations use digital collage to combine photographs and sketches. For ages 7–12+.

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Traditional Tales and Modernised Folk Literature

Every culture has traditional tales, and this is our homage to them. Stories from oral traditions appear in many forms but there are interesting similarities in some stories to those found across different cultures. Originally, traditional tales were not solely intended for children; they were created for the education and entertainment of young and old. Yet, children now enjoy these tales because they are great stories, usually short, with fast-moving plots that spark the imagination. Many are humorous, informative, and end *happily ever after*.

Traditional literature is a window into the culture that created it, allowing its audiences to explore particular values and beliefs from that society as well as references to language and setting. We note that many of the Canadian picture books published since 2017 focus on content developed by Indigenous authors and illustrators. Sharing these tales with children is an important part of ensuring the health and longevity of local cultures. The production of traditional literature from immigrant cultures is, however, lagging, and we encourage publishers to also embrace these perspectives as we seek commonalities to embrace in stories around the world.

Many of the books in this collection present creation stories or trickster stories. Creation stories explain something from the natural world; trickster stories present heroes – often personified animals – that cunningly employ their wits to get their way or complete a task. We present the picture books in this chapter in two sections: traditional tales, and modern tales based on traditional patterns. The modern stories call to mind particular roots in folktales, fairy tales, legends, or myths.

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

1 Traditional Tales

**Minegoo Mniku: the Mi'kmaq
Creation Story of Prince Edward
Island = *Epekewitkewey A'tukwaqn***
*Sandra L. Dodge, translated by
Georgina Francis*



In both the Mi'kmaq language and English, Dodge shares how the Great Spirit creates Kluskap, the Mi'kmaq people, and Minegoo itself. Her watercolour illustrations are both dreamy and bold, and borders on each page are based on Mi'kmaq quill patterns. A key purpose of this book is to help keep the Mi'kmaq culture and language alive. For ages 5–9+.

The Fox Wife
*Beatrice Deer
and D.J. Herron*

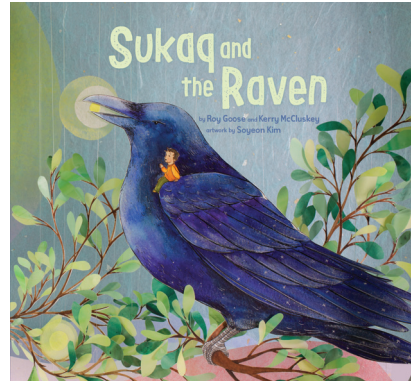


This story is an adaptation of a traditional Inuit tale about Irniq and his wife – a shapeshifting fox. Instead of being content with what he has, Irniq is curious and his repeated questions end up driving his fox wife away. Based on musician Beatrice Deer's song "Fox," the book borrows the use of graphic novel cues, including speech bubbles and a narrator's box, along with narration more typical of picture books. For ages 5–9+.

Sukaq and the Raven

*Roy Goose, Kerry McCluskey
and Soyeon Kim*

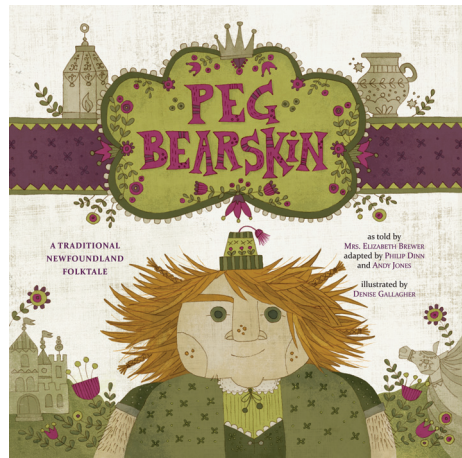
Sukaq often drifts off to sleep listening to his mother tell him stories. But this time, he is suddenly whisked off by an enormous raven to observe how the entire world is formed. The creation story from Inuit storyteller Roy Goose is brought to print through co-author Kerry McCluskey's retelling and Soyeon Kim's three-dimensional dioramas of combined sketches and painting. For ages 5–8.



Peg Bearskin: A Traditional Newfoundland Tale

*Philip Dinn, Andy Jones
and Denise Gallagher
adapted from a tale told by
Mrs. Elizabeth Brewster*

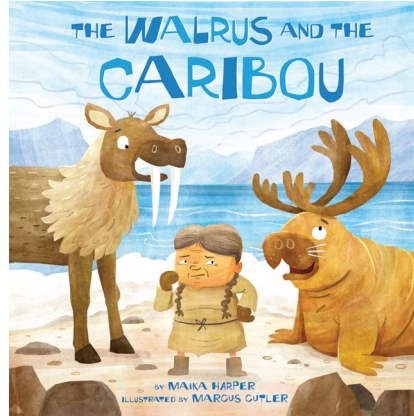
Peg is a feisty, hairy protagonist who tricks a witch to find a husband for herself and her two comely sisters. This story originated from a specific part of Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, and it shares similarities with Grimm's fairy tale, *The Frog Prince* as well as William Steig's picture book, *Shrek!* For ages 5–9+.



The Walrus and the Caribou

*Maika Harper
and Marcus Cutler*

This picture book is based on a traditional Inuit story passed forward orally in Arctic communities about the origin of the caribou and the walrus. An Inuit woman with the power to create life uses her garments to create these two animals. At first the animals look very different than they do in present day. Maika Harper's introduction emphasises that versions of this story can be found across the Arctic, and a glossary at the back contains information about pronunciation of Inuktitut sounds. For ages 5–9+.



Gifts from Raven

*Kung Jaadee
and Jessika von Innerebner*

Kung Jaadee is a traditional Haida storyteller, writer, Haida language teacher, singer, and drummer from Haida Gwaii, in northern British Columbia. In this book she uses rhyming couplets to share how Raven has given each of us a unique talent or passion to share with the world. For ages 4–6.

The Circle of Caring and Sharing

*Theresa “Corky” Larsen-Jonasson
and Jessika von Innerebner*

This picture book uses rhyming couplets to identify how a sharing circle can help unite a community of animals. Author Theresa “Corky” Larsen-Jonasson is a respected elder, as identified by her community, with roots in Red Deer, Didsbury, and Maskwacis First Nations in Alberta. The last page of the book presents six Plains Cree Animals and their phonetic pronunciations. For ages 4–6.

Red Sky at Night

Elly MacKay

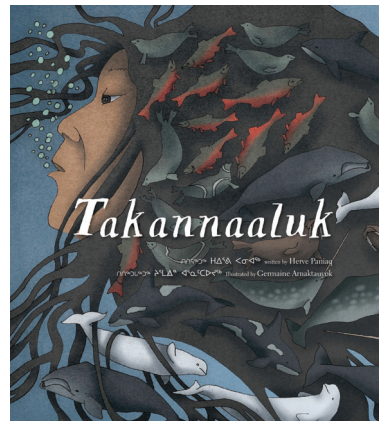
MacKay's distinctive paper and ink illustrations, set into three dimensions and photographed, carry the storyline as Grandpa takes his grandchildren on a fishing trip. The text itself is composed of sayings about the weather. The introduction tells readers that long ago, people looked for clues in nature to predict the weather, and the very first saying cited is the classic, "Red skies at night, sailor's delight." For ages 3–8.



Takannaaluk

*Herve Paniaq
and Germaine Arnaktauyok*

As a young girl, Takannaaluk is tricked into marrying a sea bird posing as a man, and she comes to be both feared and respected as the mother of the sea mammals. Her story is brought to life here in both Inuktitut and English by elder Herve Paniaq and Inuit artist Germaine Arnaktauyok. For ages 7–9+.



The Origin of Day and Night

*Paula Ikuutaq Rumbolt
and Lenny Lishchenko*

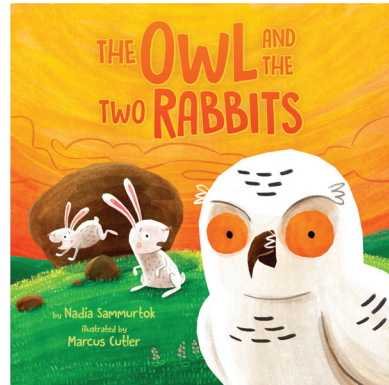
Tiri, an Artic fox, and Ukaliq, an Arctic hare, separately control the setting and rising of the sun. But... one wants darkness to prevail while the other wants daylight. This story has been communicated orally for hundreds of years in the tradition of Inuit mythology. Paula Ikuutaq Rumbolt, an elementary school Inuktitut teacher, offers a cadenced retelling here that is illuminated by Lenny Lishchenko's deliberate palette of mostly black and white. For ages 4–9+.



The Owl and the Two Rabbits

*Nadia Sammurток
and Marcus Cutler*

In this cautionary tale, a hungry owl hunts two rabbits instead of one, with greed leading to his downfall. This book is a creative retelling of an Inuit traditional story. The author was inspired by a version of this story from the Kivalliq region of Nunavut where she grew up. Bright pastel illustrations uplift the more serious story content. For ages 4–8.



Siuluk: The Last Tuniq

*Nadia Sammurток
and Rob Nix*

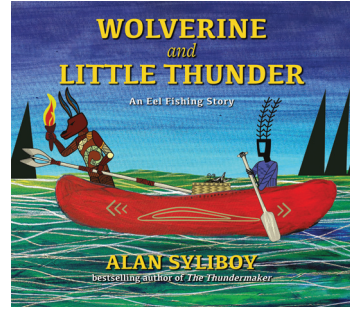
This is an inter-generational story that Inuit writer and educator Nadia Sammurток heard from her father, who heard it from his father. It tells of a man who is said to have been one of the last of the Tuniiit to have lived, giants who inhabited the North. A key theme here is accepting others and their individual characteristics, compatible with the titles in Chapter 2 of this guide. Rob Nix's illustrations depict an engaging comic-book type superhero. A separate, fully Inuktitut version of the story is also available. For ages 4–8+.



**Wolverine and Little Thunder:
An Eel Fishing Story**

Alan Syliboy

Little Thunder and Wolverine, a trickster, are eel fishing. One night they encounter the giant river eel, and Wolverine triumphs in order to feed their community for the winter. Alan Syliboy is a Mi'kmaq artist who looks to the Indigenous Mi'kmaq petroglyph tradition for inspiration. Here, his mixed-media illustrations incorporate paint on canvas as well as digital elements. For ages 5–8.

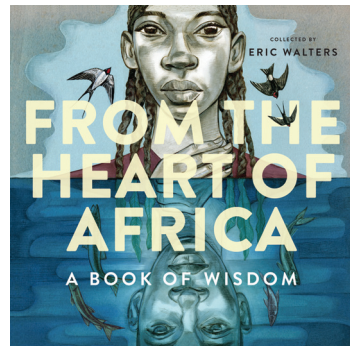


From the Heart of Africa:

A Book of Wisdom

collected by Eric Walters

This is a book of 15 aphorisms, or proverbs, with African origins. Each saying is connected to its place of origin as well as defined in child-friendly language. Illustrations, created by artists from countries all over the world, accompany each saying. Author Eric Walters runs Creation of Hope, an organisation that provides care for orphans in Kenya. For ages 6–adult.



The Wild Beast

Eric Walters

and Sue Todd

This is a creative retelling of an African story about the wildebeest. In different parts of Eastern and Central Africa, there are many versions of this creation story. In this version, the Creator built this unique animal from particular parts common to other animals. Artist Sue Todd has used lino cut prints with digital colour to create vivid illustrations. For ages 5–8.



2 Modern Tales Based on Traditional Patterns

Cinderella and the Furry Slippers

*Davide Cali
and Raphaëlle Barbanègre*

This twist on the Cinderella story sees our heroine unhappy with her fairy godmother's magic. When she wins the dance-off, she discovers that she also dislikes the prince. On her way home, she sees a girls-only career fair and decides to head that way. Raphaëlle Barbanègre's digital illustrations are comedic and bright. For ages 5–8+.



Dancing with Daisy

*Jan L. Coates
and Josée Bisaillon*

In this fun-filled, modern *pourquoi* story, Grampy uses the structure of a tall tale to relate his 1962 experience with Hurricane Daisy. He personifies the storm as a forceful woman trying to get him to be her dance partner until, finally, Nana fends her off. The story is presented to his grandson alongside vibrant multimedia illustrations that give a rationale for why Grampy has wrinkles and false teeth. For ages 6–8.



Song on the Wind

*Caroline Everson
and Anne Marie Bourgeois*

This gentle rhyming poem about the journey of a lullaby is beautifully illustrated by Anne Marie Bourgeois whose work is inspired by her Indigenous ancestry. For ages 5–8.

Arthur Garber the Harbor Barber

Joe Frank

This humorous rhyming book presents a series of stories told by a small-town barber about his clients. Some may be real, while others are very likely maritime tall tales. The bold watercolour illustrations are witty and engaging. For ages 5–7.

When Molly Drew Dogs

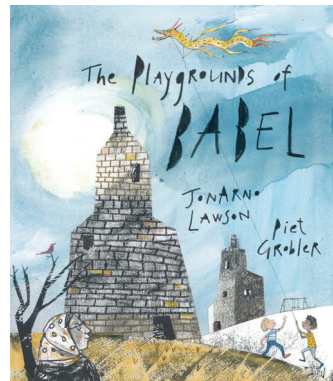
*Deborah Kerbel
and Lis Xu*

One night, Molly's chalk drawings come to life and rescue her in the most unexpected way. This engaging book was inspired by the Japanese folktale "The Boy Who Drew Cats." Lis Xu's childlike, coloured-pencil illustrations are dreamy and imaginative. For ages 5–8.

The Playgrounds of Babel

*JonArno Lawson
and Piet Grobler*

The biblical story of the Tower of Babel is adapted here and told through dialogue as one child creatively translates an old woman's messages. This is a book about language and communication. Grobler's mixed-media illustrations use fresh watercolour and coloured pencil for the Babel tale while contrasting the story on the playground by using darker tones. For ages 5–9+.



The Christmas Wind

*Stephanie Simpson McLellan
and Brooke Kerrigan*

One stormy night before Christmas, Jo, her mother, and the newborn baby have to leave their home. They take shelter in a barn but the farmer carries them to refuge inside his house. This poignant picture book echoes the Christian nativity story. Brooke Kerrigan's muted coloured-pencil images and watercolour washes extend the complexity of this story about vulnerability and compassion. For ages 5–8+.

The Girl and the Wolf

*Katherena Vermette
and Julie Flett*

This is an original twist on a classic wolf tale. A little girl is gathering berries with her mother when she becomes lost in the woods. When she encounters a wolf, he coaches her to use her wits and eventually she finds her family again. That night she leaves tobacco in a red cloth for the wolf as a gift of thanks. Katherena Vermette is a Métis author from Treaty One territory in Winnipeg and her author's note describes the process she used in retelling a European fairy story "inspired by traditional stories, yes, but in no way taken from one." Julie Flett is a Cree-Métis award-winning artist whose distinctive style is on fine display here. For ages 4–9+.

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Dual Language Books

Picture books are a great way to introduce new languages to children whose first language is English, or to introduce English to children who speak other languages at home. Books that present different languages alongside English also show respect for various cultural groups living in Canada and provide insight into groups separate from one's own.

Many young children aren't aware how language works – that different people can use different words to represent the world and their experiences in it. Michif, for example, emerged at the time of the fur trade and descends from the Métis people of Canada; it includes Cree verbs and French nouns. Julie Flett's *Owls See Clearly at Night: A Michif Alphabet*, connects Michif and English words with images from Métis culture, and we discuss this book in Chapter 11 along with other Canadian classics.

In this chapter we present some of our favourite dual language Canadian picture books published between 2017 and 2019, while other dual language books appear elsewhere in this guide. We maintained this group of books in order to assist readers who are specifically seeking material that demonstrates languages other than English. Many titles in this section focus on Indigenous languages while others explore languages with origins in different countries. Some of the books are fully translated, while others include single non-English words in a larger English story context. Of the thirteen books listed, nine have Indigenous languages included, and four involve languages from various other cultures – an interesting picture of the newer books available in this thematic category. Enjoy the linguistic diversity in these titles; they will undoubtedly provide children with new tools to understand the world!

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

Una Huna?: What is This?

*Susan Aglukark,
Amanda Sandland
and Danny Christopher*

A little girl from an isolated northern camp learns to use knives, forks, and spoons obtained during trading but soon wonders if they are a harbinger of change. Many Inuktitut words appear within the English text as well as in a glossary. Susan Aglukark is Canada's first Inuk artist to have won a Juno Award and is also an officer of the Order of Canada. For ages 5–8.



Me, Me, Me

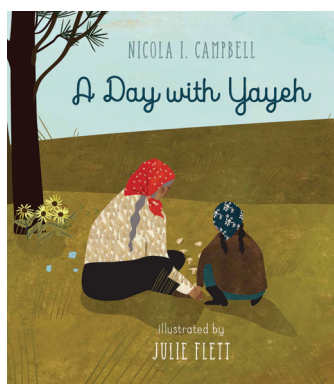
*Annika Dunklee
and Lori Joy Smith*

Three best friends decide to form an all-girl singing group for the talent show, and conflict emerges. In addition to English, the book includes some conversations in Swedish and French, with English translations, in addition to Annie's made-up words. Children and families can be encouraged to create their own multi-language stories in response. Lori Joy Smith's whimsical, bright digital illustrations are further enhanced by speech-bubble dialogue. For ages 5–8.

A Day with Yayah

*Nicola I. Campbell
and Julie Flett*

Here a First Nations family gathers edible plants and mushrooms as Yayah, the grandmother, passes down her knowledge of the natural world. Language from the Nle?kepmx Nation (the Thompson River Salish people) is embedded in the text, and a glossary of Nle?kepmxcín words is available at the end of the book. Nicola I. Campbell is Interior Salish and Métis and sets this book in her own territory, the Nicola Valley. Julie Flett is a Cree-Métis artist whose distinctive illustrations shine here. For ages 5–10+.



Jujijk: Mi'kmaw Insects

Gerald Gloade

This illustrated guide to bugs and insects in Atlantic Canada showcases the verb-based Mi'kmaw language with English definitions and a pronunciation guide. Gerald Gloade is an artist from Millbrook First Nation. *Jujijk* is a joint project of the Tripartite Forum Culture & Heritage and Education working committees. The vibrant mixed-media illustrations combine hand-drawn elements and photographs. For ages 4–9+.

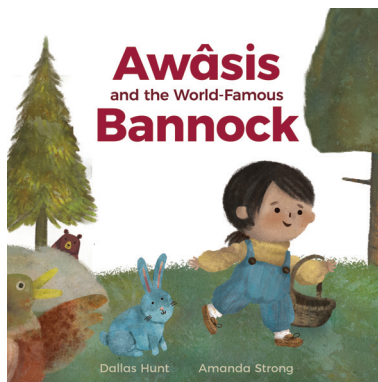


Awâsis and the World-Famous Bannock

Dallas Hunt

and *Amanda Strong*

A little girl loses her Kôhkum's bannock but she gets new ingredients from forest animals. Cree words are used in the context of the story and a list, with translations, appears at the back of the book along with the bannock recipe. Dallas Hunt is a member of Wapisewsiipi (Swan River First Nation) and Amanda Strong is a Michif filmmaker whose work here includes textures similar to cut-paper collage. This book connects especially well to various response activities, including oral retelling and dramatisation. For ages 4–8.



Meennunyakaa: Blueberry Patch

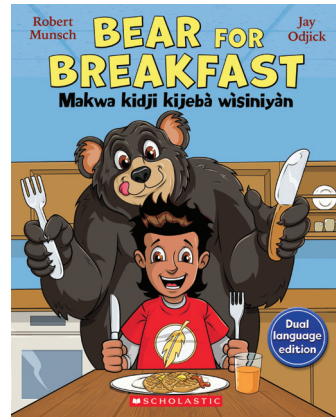
Jennifer Leason (co-author and illustrator)

and *Norman Chartrand (co-author and translator)*

Norman Chartrand, an elder from Manitoba, shares childhood memories of blueberry picking. Both Chartrand and Jennifer Leason are Salteaux-Métis-Anishinaabek people and the text appears in English and Anishinaabemowin. A recipe for bannock and suggested activities for readers are included at the end of the book. For ages 4–8.

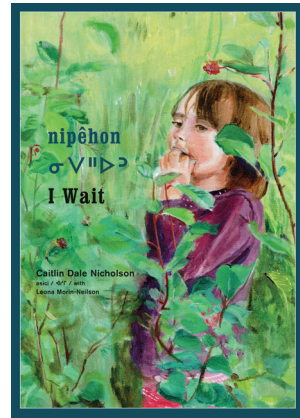
**Bear for Breakfast/Makwa
kidji kijebà wisiniyàn**
*Robert Munsch
and Jay Odjick*

Donovan wants to catch a bear for breakfast just like his grandfather used to eat, but the bear has other plans in mind. The engaging comic-like digital illustrations are provided by the respected artist Jay Odjick, a member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Algonquin community. This book is available in a dual language edition translated into Ojibwa by Joan Commanda Tenasco. For ages 3–7.



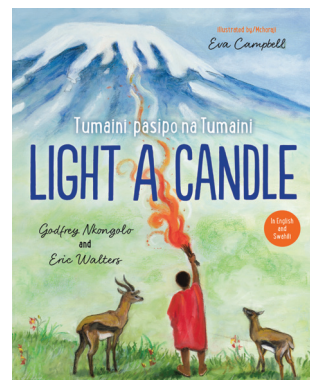
Nipêhon/I Wait
*Caitlin D. Nicholson
with Leona Morin-Nielson*

This is a very easy-to-read story about a little girl, her mom, and her grandmother going on an outing to pick wild yarrow. A recipe for yarrow tea is included. The English text is translated into Cree by Leona Morin-Nielson (in both the standard Roman orthography and in syllabics), and Caitlin D. Nicholson's stunning acrylic paintings fill the book's oversize pages. For ages 2–7.



Light a Candle/Tumaini pasipo na Tumaini
*Godfrey Nkongolo,
Eric Walters
and Eva Campbell*

Written in both English and Swahili, this title follows a young boy as he climbs Mount Kilimanjaro against his father's wishes. Once there, he fulfills a political leader's request to light a candle and unify two territories. Ngama's fictional narrative is based on a true story. Eva Campbell's expansive oil paint and pastel illustrations reflect emotional depths. For ages 5–9.



Lucky Me

Lora Rozler
and Jan Dolby

A little girl bursting with thankfulness for the many good things in her life shows readers how to say thank you in a variety of different languages besides English: Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Cantonese, Cree, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Urdu. Jan Dolby's luminous, heartwarming illustrations are created with acrylic paint, watercolour, graphite and marker mixed with Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator techniques. For ages 3–8.

Ojiiichan's Gift

Chieri Uegaki
and Genevieve Simms

Ojiiichan's Gift is about a little girl who helps her grandfather tend to his garden each time she visits Japan. When Ojiiichan grows old and must move away, Mayumi creates a tiny stone garden in a bento box for him to keep. The story was inspired in part by Chieri Uegaki's late father, a traditional Japanese landscaper and gardener. The six Japanese words included in the story are defined on the copyright page, and offer a simple pattern for children to embed various languages in their own writing. Genevieve Simms' luminous watercolours create a moving representation of the bond between grandfather and granddaughter. For ages 4–8.

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*In the spirit of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an asterisk appears beside works created by Indigenous writers or artists.

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- *Munsch, Robert (illustrated by Jay Odjick) (2019). *Bear for Breakfast = Makwa kidji kijebà wisiniyàn*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Canada.
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Predictable Books

Books that contain repeated language or story patterns, or the use of familiar sequences, we call *predictable books* because they engage audiences, particularly very young children, in chiming in or telling what might happen next. Simple rhyming books also fit this category, and adults reading these aloud can stop and let youngsters fill in the rhymes at the end of each line. The best work here demonstrates authentic rhyme and meter without didactic elements or the inclusion of archaic vocabulary or syntax in order to satisfy the pattern.

Predictable books help preschool children learn vocabulary, including words for colours or numbers, and engage them in language play through their involvement in telling and retelling storylines. People don't use day-to-day speaking grammar the way syntax unfolds in books, and many of these books also inspire listeners to chant the repeated phrases, an activity that magically embeds new grammatical structures to help in later reading and writing experiences. Playing with rhyming words provides strong support for reading and writing because children who know a rhyming word can work out the new word.

In this chapter we summarise the best predictable picture books from our set of Canadian titles published since 2017. Many of the refrains from these texts are so catchy that we had them stuck in our heads long after we finished reading. We imagine how eagerly young audiences will listen to each of these books and then ask you to “READ IT AGAIN!”

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A Little House in a Big Place

Alison Acheson

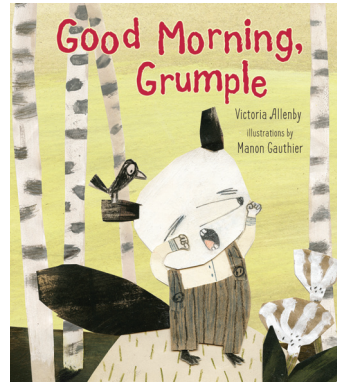
and Valériane Leblond

A little girl waits at her window every morning and waves at the engineer of the passing train. Eventually she grows up and rides the train east, where we see her playing guitar and singing for a crowd. Illustrated by Valériane Leblond in gouache, oil pastels, and coloured pencils, Alison Acheson's lyrical, repetitive text will interest older readers in this evocative story about growing up. For ages 4–adult.

Good Morning, Grumble

Victoria Allenby
and Manon Gauthier

This gently rhyming story, with a soft padded cover, tells how to wake up a grumpy youngster. The advice includes a song, a kiss, a hug and a dance, with text sizes that increase as the book goes along to reflect the experience of waking up. Manon Gauthier's mixed-media and paper collage illustrations convey engaging emotional depths. For birth–age 4.



Mine. Yours.

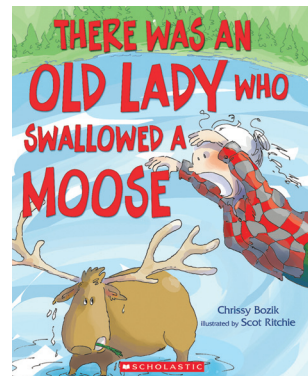
Marsha Diane Arnold
and Qin Leng

Most of the storyline of this picture book about Little Panda and Big Panda is told through Qin Leng's whimsical ink and watercolour illustrations while only three words appear – *yours*, *mine*, and *ours* – used repeatedly throughout. Other animals make cameo appearances in this story, and all are native to Asia. For ages 2–5.

There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Moose

Chrissy Bozik
and Scot Ritchie

This Canadian variation of the popular song about “the little old lady who swallowed a fly” is complete fun. With some encouragement, children will actively holler out the rhymes. Scot Ritchie's pencil, ink, and computer-coloured drawings are comical and vivacious with a palette that abounds in reds, blues, and greens. For ages 3–7.



In the Sky at Nighttime

Laura Deal

and *Tamara Campeau*

With the repeated use of the phrase “In the sky at nighttime...” this lyrical prose poem depicts dancing northern lights, a mother’s song on the breeze, and a roosting raven. For ages 2–5.



Sprout, Seed, Sprout!

Annika Dunklee

and *Carey Sookocheff*

Repeating multiple words, including counting from one to three, this is the story of a child planting an avocado seed. It evocatively heralds seed magic and patience. For ages 2–7.

First Times

Charles Ghigna

and *Lori Joy Smith*

This simple rhyming book brightly celebrates the fun of childhood as well as the joy of learning to accomplish new things. Lori Joy Smith’s watercolour, pencil, and gouache illustrations demonstrate both simplicity and expressiveness. For ages 3–8.



Sharon, Lois & Bram’s Skinnamarink

Sharon Hampson,

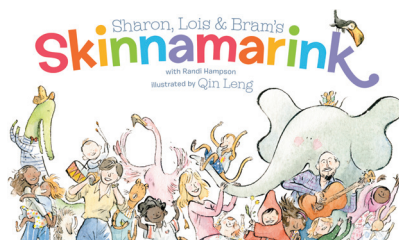
Lois Lilienstein,

Bram Morrison,

Randi Hampson

and *Qin Leng*

This is an illustrated version of the popular children’s song by musicians Sharon, Lois & Bram. Its repeated chorus and colour-coded attention to the refrain “I love you!” will encourage chiming in. For ages 3–7.



My Puppy Patch

Theo Heras
and Alice Carter

My Puppy Patch presents a little girl training her puppy. Patch's name, and the name of another dog, are included throughout in colourful bold letters. A soft padded cover makes this story even more appealing for the younger set. Alice Carter's use of watercolour, coloured pencil, and digital media has resulted in a delightfully expressive landscape for an energetic story about the importance of patience, perseverance, and love. For ages 4–8.



Where's Bunny?

Theo Heras
and Renné Benoit

This simple picture book, with a padded cover and extra-heavy paper, takes us through Baby's bedtime routine with Big Sister. The repetitive question "Where's Bunny?" is answered in the illustrations. A checklist is included that might help other families follow a similar routine. Renné Benoit's watercolour and digital illustrations resonate with warm, pastel colours. For birth–age 3.



Leap!

JonArno Lawson
and Josée Bisailon

This story about a chain of leaping animals combines rich vocabulary with predictable rhymes as well as the repeated word "LEAP!" as each animal, in turn, jumps into its own adventure page. Josée Bisailon's striking mixed-media illustrations are full of movement. For ages 4–8.

The Eagle Feather

Kevin Locke

and *Jessika von Innerebner*

In gentle rhyming text, Kevin Locke, a traditional storyteller who is Lakota and Anishinabe, shares that each feather on the eagle's wing represents a virtue to learn. This is an adaptation of Locke's *Dawn Flight: A Lakota Story*. For ages 4–6.

It's Time for Bed

Ceporah Mearns,

Jeremy Debicki

and *Tim Mack*

This repetitive story is told through Siasi's perspective as she offers various excuses to ignore bedtime routines. Her arguments include wild creatures from northern Canada, like polar bears, caribou, geese, wolves, rabbits and fish. Co-authors Mearns and Debicki live in Iqaluit, Nunavut, where their real daughter, Siasi, inspired this story. For ages 3–6.



My Mommy, My Mama, My Brother, and Me

Natalie Meisner

and *Mathilde Cinq-Mars*

Gentle rhyme and a repeated refrain encourage audience participation in this fun beach adventure experienced by a pair of brothers and their two moms. Magical watercolour illustrations by Mathilde Cinq-Mars heighten this warm, family story. For ages 3–8.

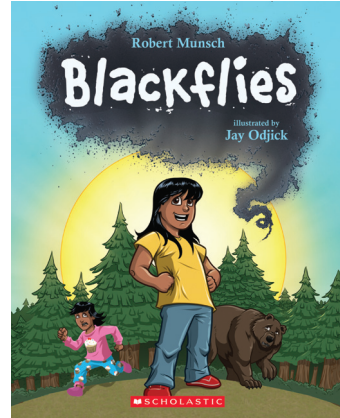


Blackflies

*Robert Munsch
and Jay Odjick*

Helen battles sixteen gazillion blackflies and mosquitoes in order to enjoy the spring, a storyline inspired by the author's experiences meeting a girl named Helen and her family in Fort McMurray, Alberta. Illustrator Jay Odjick is from the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Algonquin community and in this book he employs digital cartoon-styled illustrations to depict a First Nations father and his two children.

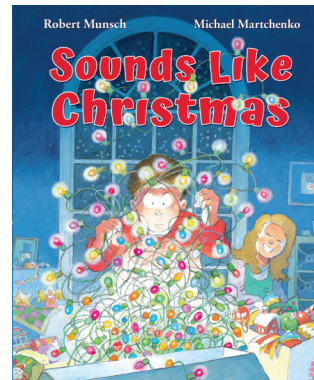
There are a number of repeated lines and sound effects that young children will enjoy chanting along with the reader. For ages 4–8.



Sounds Like Christmas

*Robert Munsch
and Michael Martchenko*

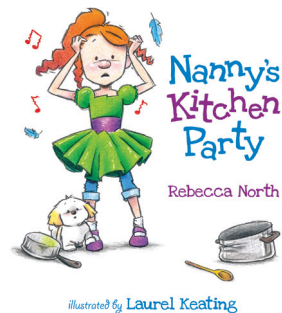
Georgia and Lincoln get competitive as they decorate their Christmas tree with noisemakers. The repetitive sounds as well as the cumulative storyline will engage and entertain. Michael Martchenko has captivated audiences for decades and this title demonstrates his zany signature style. For ages 3–8.



Nanny's Kitchen Party

*Rebecca North
and Laurel Keating*

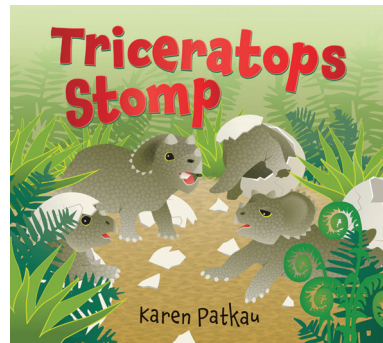
When you get invited to a Newfoundland kitchen party at your grandmother's house, you don't expect to see moose, foxes and bears. This cumulative, creative counting book will have young children chanting along. For ages 3–7.



Triceratops Stomp

Karen Patkau

This simple, onomatopoeic story follows the hatching and frolicking of baby dinosaurs until a T-Rex comes and Mother Triceratops scares it away. Many repeated words will encourage young children to chime in. The computer-generated illustrations are full of movement and verdant landscapes as well as different types of dinosaurs. For ages 3–5.



When You're Scared

Andrée Poulin

and *Véronique Joffre*

A boy and his mother go camping on a beautiful day. When they meet a bear cub and his mama, all four are afraid, but the cub needs help and the humans find a solution. This story is told through collage images as well as variations and repetitions of a single sentence. For ages 4–7.

Birds from Head to Tail

Stacey Roderick

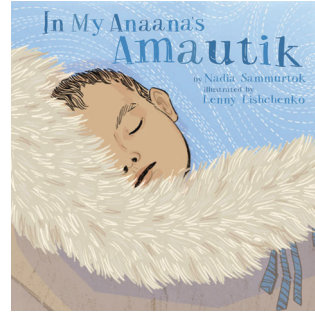
and *Kwanchai Moriya*

This non-fiction book in the “Head to Tail” series has a Q&A format which encourages children to use the clues to guess which bird is featured in a series of colourful close-ups. The questions are repetitive, with only small differences in wording from page to page, offering a supportive scaffold for reading. Kwanchai Moriya’s mixed-media, digital illustrations in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator combine original photographs and textures in a collage-like style. For ages 3–7.

In My Anaana's Amautik

*Nadia Sammurtok
and Lenny Lishchenko*

The narrator of this story, a toddler, offers the perspective of being inside the special carrier in the back of a parka. In Inuktitut, this pouch is called an amautik. Each page begins with “In my anaana’s amautik...” For ages 2–5.



I Love You Like...

Lori Joy Smith

This repetitive story has whimsical, cartoonish illustrations that represent the four seasons, providing similes for how a garden sprite loves a smaller garden gnome. For ages 2–6.

Splish, Splash, Foxes Dash!

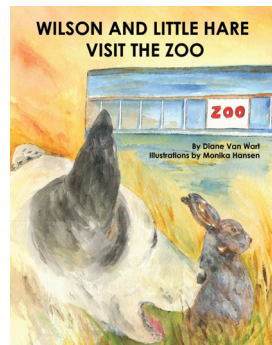
Geraldo Valério

This concept book teaches 11 colours while presenting facts about Canadian wildlife. Alliteration on each page supports the predictability of the words, and bright collage illustrations complement the topic. For ages 2–6.

Wilson and Little Hare Visit the Zoo

*Diane Van Wart
and Monika Hansen*

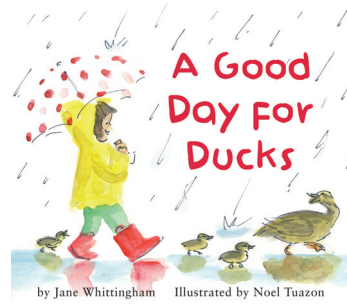
Little Hare is eager to learn about animals at the zoo. His friend Wilson gives him, and readers, the clues to help him guess the names of Canadian animals. Monika Hansen’s acrylic and watercolour illustrations appear throughout the “Wilson” series. For ages 4–8.



A Good Day for Ducks

*Jane Whittingham
and Noel Tuazon*

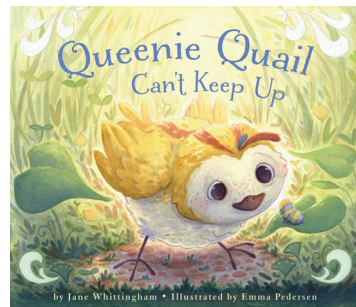
This rhythmical story follows two children as they put on rainy day clothing and walk to a pond where they see ducks and worms. When the storm worsens, they head home, clean up, and drink hot chocolate while painting pictures of their outdoor adventure. Lots of repeated words offer emergent readers an easily decodable text, and Noel Tuazon's watercolour and ink illustrations are captivating. For ages 2–6.



Queenie Quail Can't Keep Up

*Jane Whittingham
and Emma Pedersen*

Queenie Quail is always in trouble as she lags behind her parents and siblings. But one day, when she spots danger, she proves that taking her time is beneficial. This story, unfolding with many repeated words and phrases, is really about stopping to notice the world around us. Emma Pedersen's gouache illustrations encourage readers to notice natural beauty and her quail family glows with personality. For ages 3–7.



Wild One

*Jane Whittingham
and Noel Tuazon*

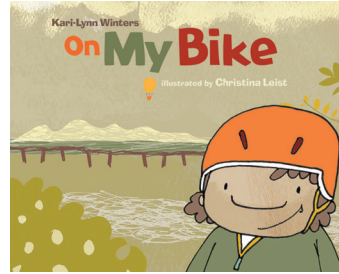
Readers follow a little girl as she pretends to be various animals. The story's rhyming couplets, as well as Noel Tuazon's watercolours, help its audience predict what animal is next, and its softly padded cover makes it extra durable for wild reading! For birth–age 5.



On My Bike

*Kari-Lynn Winters
and Christina Leist*

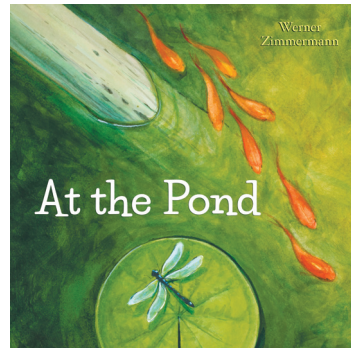
This rhyming story with repeated sounds, a sequel to *On My Walk*, takes readers on a bicycle ride through pathways and trails around a city. After multiple readings, young children may enjoy retelling this story on their own. Christina Leist's mixed-media illustrations offer boldly outlined, flat characters in a textured autumn landscape. For birth–age 5.



At the Pond

Werner Zimmermann

This simple counting book presents numbers of fish from one to ten in a clever storyline that uses richly textured paintings to show what happens when a heron appears. Then readers are encouraged to start again from the beginning. A page at the end of the book tells more about key plants and animals in and around the pond. For birth–age 7.



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*In the spirit of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an asterisk appears beside works created by Indigenous writers or artists.

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Our Living Earth

Earth is a beautiful place to live and these titles help us think about taking care of it. In addition to teaching us ways to look after the planet, many of these titles present a balanced view of equality across animate and inanimate beings – with the survival of all treated as important as the survival of one.

Inspiring eco practices and teaching about the land and its sustainable resources are goals of many contemporary picture books, and Canadian writers and artists are leading the way. We admire the feelings of respect that their words and illustrations inspire in relation to all things great and small in our shared world. In reading these books, a variety of audiences will see ways that they can make a difference to their environment, now and in the future.

This chapter presents spectacular books dedicated to our living Earth, selected from an increasing number of books on this theme. One of the aspects of these books that is particularly noteworthy is their amazing illustrations – created with a wide range of media that delights the eye. In recent years, growth in non-fiction titles has skyrocketed, perhaps to compensate for past favouritism shown to fiction, and all aspects of their production – language, visual appeal, accuracy – have received excellent attention from publishers. It's possible that children's publishing is also responding to new school curricula, especially the emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education.

In addition to the titles in this chapter, we mention other non-fiction picture books in Chapter 10 (Facts and Figures) as well as through connections to the themes of our other chapters. Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

The Imperfect Garden

Melissa Assaly

and April Dela Noche Milne

A child notices that the fruits and vegetables in their home garden look different from symmetrical store-bought produce. This title emphasises the fact that although home-grown food may look different, it really tastes great. For ages 5–8.

Flow Spin Grow: Looking for Patterns in Nature*Patchen Barss**and Todd Stewart*

This title explores various repeated patterns found in nature and the reasons for these patterns. The illustrations were created with silkscreen printing and digital media. An author's note at the end of the book encourages readers to pay close attention to what we see around us, in order to discover how the world works. For ages 7–9+.

Where Are You Now?*Tyler Clark Burke*

This is a book about transformation: a star turns into dust; a snowflake into water, then fog and mist... told in simple, free-verse stanzas, it connects to the way we look towards new life to remember people we have lost. The pencil and watercolour illustrations are subtle, vividly illuminating ideas inspired by the text. For ages 4–10+.

Forest: A See to Learn Book*Kate Moss Gamblin**and Karen Patkau*

This gently questioning picture book prompts children to look and see into the forest across the seasons. Very young listeners will enjoy finding plants and animals in Karen Patkau's dynamic, digitally composed illustrations. A page at the end suggests further reading, a common element in many of the books in this section. For ages 2–7.

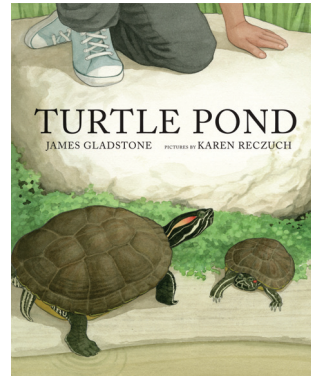
Earthrise: Apollo 8 and the Photo that Changed the World*James Gladstone**and Christy Lundy*

This title ponders the sight of the whole planet – no countries, no borders – captured in a photo from the Apollo 8 mission. Text includes dialogue pulled from NASA's Apollo 8 transcript, and an author's note explains more about how "Earthrise" went on to inspire Earth Day. Rather than photographs, the illustrator has used understated line drawings in gentle colours that represent the era depicted. For ages 4–8.

Turtle Pond

*James Gladstone
and Karen Reczuch*

A boy and his family visit the local public gardens throughout the year to see the turtles. In lyrical free verse, readers learn the habits of Red-eared Sliders across the seasons, with an extra page of information included at the end of the book. Karen Reczuch's illustrations, made with graphite pencil and watercolour, are particularly engaging in this celebration of turtles. For ages 4–8.

**When Planet Earth Was New**

*James Gladstone
and Katherine Diemert*

With simple, large font and brilliant, digitally augmented watercolour illustrations, this book takes us through the history of our Earth. It begins billions of years ago, and ends with the present time. A two-page spread near the end of the book offers a more complex narrative on the transformations in climate, geology, and biology, among other things, followed by a glossary and references to additional sources. For ages 6–9.

When Wolves Howl

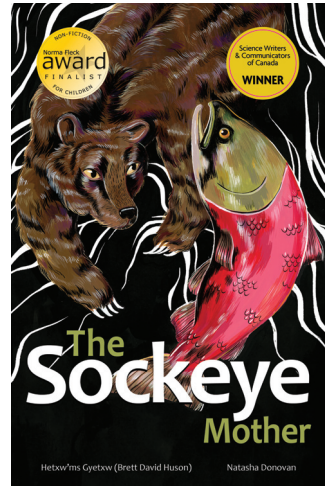
Georgia Graham

This narrative picture book, set in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, presents life in a wolf pack through the story of Haze, the Omega wolf, the least powerful of the group, as he comes into his own and grows up. Georgia Graham paints with acrylic on canvas and illustrates with chalk pastels on sanded paper. For ages 5–8.

The Sockeye Mother

*Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett David Huson)
and Natasha Donovan*

The life cycle of the sockeye salmon is depicted here through text created by Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett David Huson), a writer from the Gitzxan Nation in the Northwest Interior of British Columbia. Illustrations are provided by artist Natasha Donovan, from Vancouver, who is a member of the Métis Nation of BC. This book explores how the animals, water, soil, seasons, and traditional knowledge are all interconnected. For ages 8–12.



The Case of the Growing Bird Feeder

Eric Hogan & Tara Hungerford

Scout and Daisy are having a picnic when Daisy remembers that she needs to water her bird feeders. But what kind of bird feeders need watering? Various clues are given as the book progresses towards the answer... sunflowers! Information about sunflowers “from Daisy’s library book,” along with a recipe for birdseed cookies, conclude this title. The 3D illustrations are original to the book, although reminiscent of the stop motion from the CBC TV series *The Gumboot Kids*. For ages 3–8.

The Case of the Story Rock

Eric Hogan & Tara Hungerford

As with the previous title, this book is connected to a TV series that champions the magic of nature. In this story, a fossil offers clues to life past and present. The stop-motion style images are unique and appealing. For ages 3–8.

The Case of the Vanishing Caterpillar

Eric Hogan & Tara Hungerford

As with the two previous titles, this book is connected to a TV series that uncovers mysteries in nature. The clues in this one lead from a caterpillar to its transformation into a butterfly, with stop-motion 3D images throughout. For ages 3–8.

The Case of the Wooden Timekeeper

Eric Hogan and Tara Hungerford

In a series that includes the previous three titles, this story is about how tree rings show the passage of time. Stop-motion 3D images accompany the text. For ages 3–8.

Charles

S. E. Hume

and Jessica Bromley Bartram

A young girl relates the story of raising a baby crow and then releasing him into the wild. Watermedia illustrations showcase nature in this graceful tale. For ages 3–8.

Animals Do, Too! How They Behave Just Like You

Etta Kaner

and Marilyn Faucher

In a question and answer format, similarities are drawn between the lives of children and animals. A final two-page-spread presents more about the animals depicted in this book. Marilyn Faucher's watercolour illustrations are bright and amusing, bringing the text to life. For ages 4–8.

Do Frogs Drink Hot Chocolate? How Animals Keep Warm

Etta Kaner

and John Martz

In typical form, Etta Kaner's question and answer format takes a humorous look at animals and includes accurate information for young readers who wonder about how various animals survive in cold weather. For ages 4–8.

Once upon a Jungle

Laura Knowles

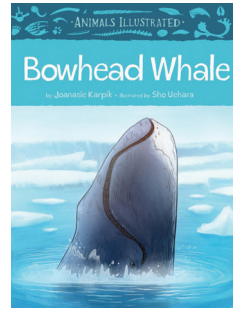
and James Boast

This book explores a rainforest ecosystem through simple text describing a food web. A double-page spread folds out into a giant panorama towards the end of the book, and the last pages tell the story of the food chain in more detail. For ages 3–8.

Bowhead Whale

*Joanasie Karpik
and Sho Uehara*

Readers will learn how bowhead whales raise their babies, where they live, what they eat, and other interesting facts. They will also learn traditional uses of the whale by Inuit peoples, such as making tent frames from bowhead whalebones. Joanasie Karpik is a respected elder from Pangnirtung, Nunavut. For ages 4–8.



You Are Never Alone

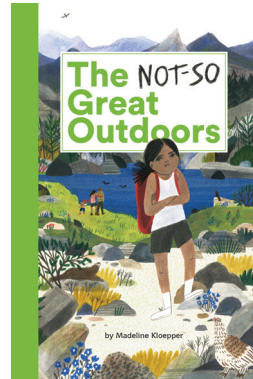
*Elin Kelsey
and Soyeon Kim*

This poetic text uses current science to show how humans survive through our connections to the nature that exists around us. Soyeon Kim's watercolour-and-ink diorama-art beautifully extends this fascinating text. For ages 4–8+.

The Not-So Great Outdoors

Madeline Kloemper

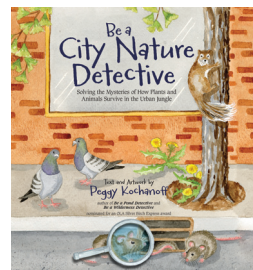
The young narrator of this story is unhappy heading into an outdoor vacation and worried that it isn't going to be fun. One step at a time, exciting possibilities reveal themselves and the experience turns out to be great! The mixed-media artwork, finished digitally, is lush and captivating. For ages 5–8.



Be a City Nature Detective

Peggy Kochanoff

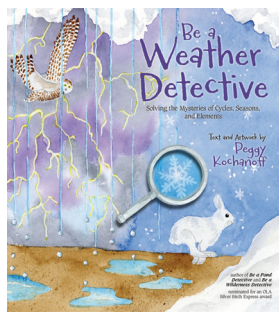
Through question-and-answer format, this title presents facts about bedbugs, cockroaches, rats, and other animals, as well as birds and plants commonly found in an urban environment. It concludes with a visual quiz, a glossary, and a page of additional resource ideas. The watercolour illustrations offer an engaging glimpse into the often taken-for-granted wonders of city life. For ages 8–11.



Be a Weather Detective

Peggy Kochanoff

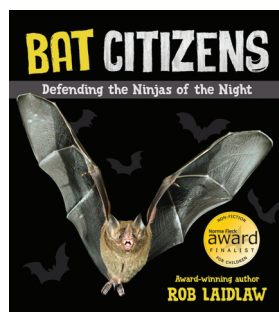
The mysteries of nature are explored here in terms of cycles, seasons and elements. As with Peggy Kochanoff's earlier title, activities, a glossary, and additional resource ideas are included. The watercolour artwork provides an enjoyable window into distinct weather conditions and patterns. For ages 8–11.



Bat Citizens: Defending the Ninjas of the Night

Rob Laidlaw

This is an informative book about bats, their importance to a wide range of ecosystems, and the young “Bat Citizens” who assist in worldwide bat conservation. Detailed photos as well as a table of contents, lists of additional resources, a glossary, and an index, support learning. At 48 pages, this title is a combination of picture book and juvenile literature resource. For ages 8–12+.



Me, Toma and the Concrete Garden

Andrew Larsen

and Anne Villeneuve

Two city children throw dirt balls into an empty lot, not realising they're filled with seeds, and they are surprised and delighted by the resulting flower garden. Anne Villeneuve's ink and watercolour illustrations depict this joyful story well. For ages 6–10.

My Forest is Green

Darren Lebeuf

and Ashley Barron

This simple story tells all the many ways a young boy can describe a forest in an urban setting. Ashley Barron's stunning artwork here combines cut-paper collage, watercolour, acrylic, and pencil crayon. For ages 3–7.

The Biggest Puddle in the World

Mark Lee

and Nathalie Dion

Two children explore nature with their grandfather after a long rain. Through its simple story, as well as its illustrations that are a mix of real and digital watercolours, this story celebrates the water cycle. For ages 4–8.

The Moon Watched It All

Shelley Leedahl

and Aino Anto

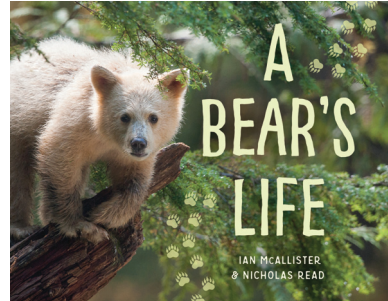
Each night Mirada talks to her only companion, the moon. When a nameless boy takes refuge in her garden, the old woman begins to remember her own children, long gone, and he has thoughts about someone – his mother – from years past. The two of them, with the moon's help, become family. The treatment of the moon here is respectful and unusual. Part fairy tale, part allegory, Shelley Leedahl's engaging text is accompanied by Aino Anto's dreamy watercolour illustrations. For ages 7–9+.

A Bear's Life

Ian McAllister

and Nicholas Read

This title celebrates The Great Bear Rainforest and offers easy-to-read text along with information in Ian McAllister's awe-inspiring photographs about the setting and lives of the spirit bear – the white phase of black bears only found in this environment. The book also includes the Indigenous story about their colour – it is a reminder of the Ice Age and a promise by Raven that they would be expert fishers. For ages 5–8.



The Seal Garden

*Ian McAllister
and Nicholas Read*

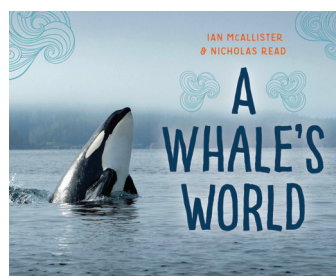
This book focuses on areas in the Great Bear Sea called seal gardens, arrangements of rocks that provide protection to many animals, including seals. Ian McAllister's brilliant photographs complement and extend the short, descriptive text. For ages 5–8.



A Whale's World

*Ian McAllister
and Nicholas Read*

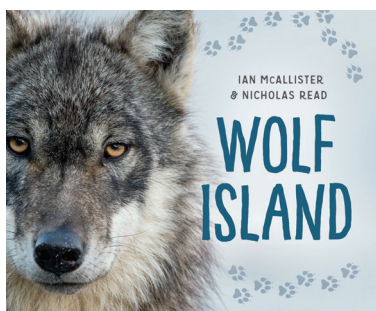
Ian McAllister's stunning photographs, combined with McAllister and Read's informative text, follows a pod of spy-hopping orcas as they explore the ecosystems of the Great Bear Sea. Readers will gain appreciation for the complex coastal food web through this title. For ages 5–8.



Wolf Island

*Ian McAllister
and Nicholas Read*

This is a narrative non-fiction account of one of the wolves that lives in The Great Bear Rainforest. Both the text and Ian McAllister's photographs represent this setting as truly a place of wonder. For ages 5–8.



Big Blue Forever

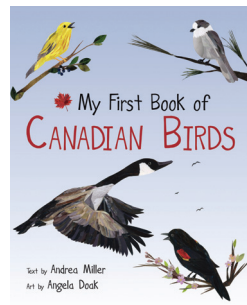
Anita Miettunen

In 1987, a deceased whale washed ashore in Prince Edward Island. It received a careful burial and then years later, when the bones could be helpful to science, it was retrieved for display in Vancouver's biodiversity museum. The book combines information about the whale with facts on the science of moving and preserving its bones as well as short biographies of the team of scientists involved. Informative photographs and suggestions for additional resources complete the package. For ages 9–12+.

My First Book of Canadian Birds

*Andrea Miller
and Angela Doak*

This simple introduction to 14 Canadian birds combines a guessing game pattern with detailed illustrations. Angela Doak's compelling collage images are created with fabric, candy and gum wrappers, and other print sources. For ages 3–8.



One Wild Christmas

Nicholas Oldland

Three animal friends plan to celebrate Christmas but when it comes to cutting down the tree, they have a better, more environmentally friendly idea. The digital illustrations are vibrant and rambunctious. This is a further title in Nicholas Oldland's "Life in the Wild" series. For ages 3–7.

Keep Up, Katmai

*Pili Palm-Leis
and Barrett Hedges*

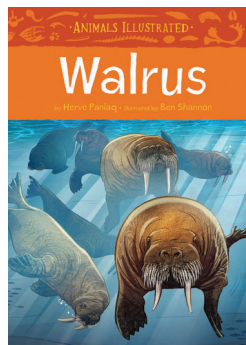
Katmai learns to fish for salmon with her brothers and sister. This narrative picture book celebrates the bond between parents and children. Barrett Hedges' stunning photographs of grizzlies in their natural surroundings will encourage lots of talk as adults read this story with a younger audience. For ages 3–8.



Walrus

*Herve Paniaq
and Ben Shannon*

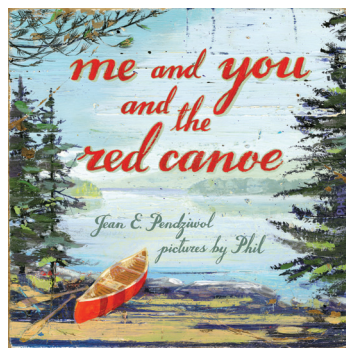
This clear and informative book from the “Animals Illustrated” series takes readers through walrus biology and habitat. Particularly noteworthy is a section on traditional uses, including Inuit hunting tools and meat preparation. Herve Paniaq is an elder from Igloodik, Nunuvut. For ages 4–8.



Me and You and the Red Canoe

*Jean E. Pendziwol
and Phil*

Through lyrical free verse, audiences hear via a first-person perspective the experiences of two siblings during a summer morning on the lake. The textured illustrations by Phil are striking, created with acrylic on wood panels, offering a nostalgic landscape for this evocative nature story. For ages 5–12+.



Poetree

*Caroline Pignat
and François Thisdale*

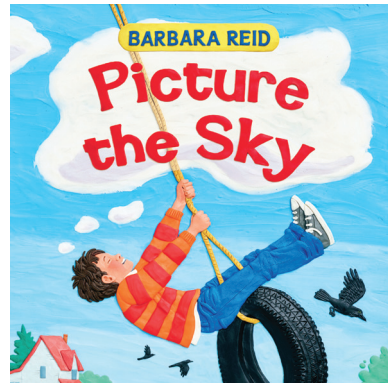
This text includes rhyming couplets to introduce each season as well as acrostic poetry. Words and images combine in a sensory celebration of life. François Thisdale’s mixed-media illustrations fuse hand-drawn and digital elements for a brilliant impression of seasonal change. For ages 5–10+.

Beastly Puzzles: A Brain-Boggling Animal Guessing Game*Rachel Poliquin**and Byron Eggenschwiler*

This interactive text poses questions that help readers think carefully about animal characteristics and then guess a variety of unknown creatures. It conveys appreciation for the complex composition of animals around us and their adaptations, and includes a glossary and additional information about the ways early explorers categorised unfamiliar living things. Byron Eggenschwiler's digitally polished ink illustrations are a monochromatic delight. For ages 7–10+.

Picture the Sky*Barbara Reid*

This simple text presents many views of the sky including a lightning show and northern lights along with endpapers that present diverse thumbnails that include a homage to the skies of Vincent Van Gogh and Edvard Munch. Barbara Reid's distinctive images are made with modelling clay shaped and pressed onto illustration board. For ages 3–8.

**Follow that Bee! A First Book of Bees in the City***Scot Ritchie*

Five friends learn about urban beekeeping from an adult mentor in this addition to the “Exploring Our Community” series. This narrative non-fiction title, illustrated with colourful, digitally-rendered images, has a table of contents, instructions for creating a bee bath, and a section of “words to know.” For ages 4–8.

Spur, a Wolf's Story

Eliza Robertson

and Nora Aoyagi

This story about a young wolf named Spur, and her family, explores what happens when she is injured by a bullet from a helicopter of hunters. It opens the debate about culling wolf populations and advocates for compassion for a vulnerable species. Resources for locating additional information are included. Nora Aoyagi's evocative illustrations were created in acrylic gouache and coloured pencil on watercolour paper. For ages 5–9+.

Bugs from Head to Tail

Stacey Roderick

and Kwanchai Moriya

A guessing game in question-and-answer format encourages young readers to look more closely at bugs. A double-page spread at the end introduces readers to more information about the group of bugs in this book: arthropods. Kwanchai Moriya's vivid artwork was created in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, using original photographs and textures. For ages 3–8.

Hello, Crow!

Candace Savage

and Chelsea O'Byrne

An observant little girl named Franny makes friends with a crow. The author has included an additional page of information about crows, and the book reminds us of the entertainment we can find outdoors simply by using our senses. For ages 4–8.

Tree Song

Tiffany Stone

and Holly Hatam

This book in gentle verse celebrates the life cycle of the oak and reminds us of the importance of conservation. Holly Hatam's illustrations combine simple line drawings, texture, photography, and organic paint. For ages 3–7.



Different? Same!

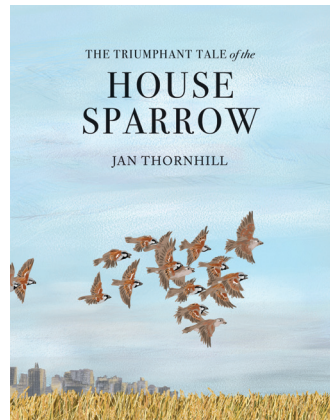
*Heather Tekavec
and Pippa Curnick*

In this creative book the differences and similarities of various animals are examined. While each animal proclaims its special characteristics related to looks, settings or activities, a sentence on each double-page spread tells how a set of seemingly different animals is also the same, a quiet metaphor for human diversity. More information is provided at the end of the book about common animal characteristics and their purpose. Pippa Curnick's playful, textured digital illustrations, created in Adobe Photoshop, are bright and alluring. For ages 2–8.

The Triumphant Tale of the House Sparrow

Jan Thornhill

This digitally-illustrated account of the house sparrow, including concerns about its current decline, shares its beginnings in the Middle East to its spread alongside agriculture to other countries. The book concludes with the idea that even now, this clever bird might be adapting. Additional pages include a glossary and recommended websites and articles for further information. For ages 9–12+.

**An Owl at Sea**

*Susan Vande Griek
and Ian Wallace*

This story, told in spare, free verse, is based on a true story about a short-eared owl that landed on an oil rig in the middle of the North Sea. Further information is included about owls at the end of the book along with suggestions for further reading. Ian Wallace's original watercolour illustrations are spectacular, and were created on natural cotton paper that is chlorine and acid-free. For ages 5–10+.

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*In the spirit of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an asterisk appears beside works created by Indigenous writers or artists.

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- Tekavec, Heather (illustrated by Pippa Curnick) (2017). *Different? Same!* Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
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Newcomer Experiences

We live in a very globalised world, and Canada is a country known for having open arms for newcomers and the myriad of beautiful cultures that come with them. With Canada's large population of immigrants and first generation Canadians, picture books are important artifacts that reflect newcomer narratives.

Working as mirrors for children who are new to Canada and as windows for children who are Canadian born, these picture books are a great way to discuss reasons for immigration, such as searching for a better life or escaping war zones. Older readers learning English might also appreciate the subject matter in these books as well as their simple vocabulary and sentence structures. In addition to these reasons for reading, this particular group of books also shares stories of courage as people move their entire lives from one country to another – and such courage can inspire us all.

While the theme of newcomer experiences is a powerful one, books on this topic published since 2017 are a small but increasing presence. Although this chapter is shorter than others in this volume, it includes some of the very best storytelling and illustration in our entire Canadian collection. In addition to titles specifically about newcomer journeys, a few books that resonate with feelings related to “being the new kid in town” are also included in this group.

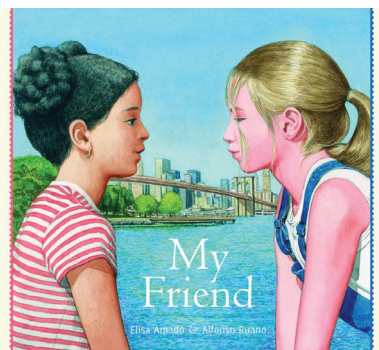
Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

My Friend

*Elisa Amado
and Alfonso Ruano*

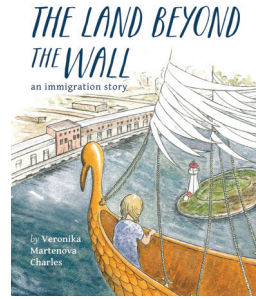
The narrator of this story is a young girl who has recently moved. While her journey is from Mexico to Brooklyn, there may be aspects of her transition relevant to other types of travel. She quickly makes a new friend, but at times their differences seem almost overwhelming. A song

appears in both Spanish and English on the endpapers to represent some of the girl's feelings about missing her homeland. Alfonso Ruano's watercolour-on-paper artwork pulls at the heartstrings. For ages 5–10.



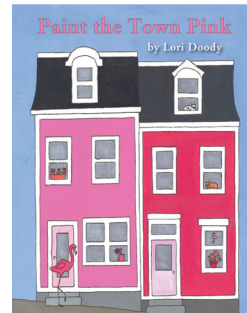
**The Land Beyond the Wall:
An Immigration Story**
Veronika Martenova Charles

A young girl lives on one side of a wall even though there is happiness and colour on the other side. After her parents disappear, and she spends time with her aunt, she travels on a boat to a country where she is free to become an artist. This story is an allegory for the author's real struggles. In her afterword, Veronika Martenova Charles discusses her childhood behind the Iron Curtain and her journey to Canada, arriving via Pier 21 in Halifax. The delicate watercolour illustrations are highly evocative and full of emotional depths. For ages 5–12+.



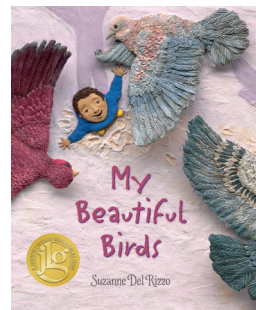
Paint the Town Pink
Lori Doody

This is a delightful story about a flamingo who finds herself in St. John's, Newfoundland. She looks for a flock of her own but doesn't feel at home until people begin to think pink... and their warm welcome pays off. Doody's printmaking background really shines in this colourful book. For ages 3–8.



My Beautiful Birds
Suzanne Del Rizzo

This is a story about a young boy's experience in the Syrian civil war. Sami and his family escape a burning city and move into a refugee camp where he misses the pigeons he left behind. Eventually, he recognises that he is still under the same sky, and makes friends with some new birds. The story ends when he reaches out to another child who is homesick. Suzanne Del Rizzo's illustrations were created with mixed-media, including plasticine, polymer clay, and acrylic. For ages 6–10+.



Birdsong

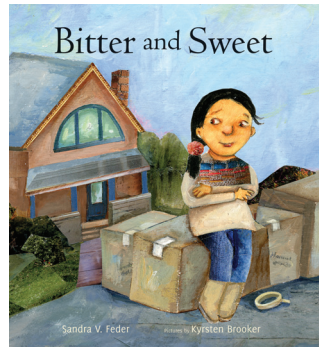
Julie Flett

When Katherena moves to her new home far away from the sea, she feels lonely and out of place. A friendship with an elderly neighbour, who shares her love of nature and art, helps Katherena adjust. When the neighbour is dying, Katherena's art creates a poem for her heart. Cree words included in the text are defined in a glossary on the copyright page. Julie Flett, a Cree-Métis author, illustrator, and artist, has created beautifully muted illustrations here in pastel and pencil, composited digitally. For ages 5–9.

Bitter and Sweet

*Sandra V. Feder
and Kyrsten Brooker*

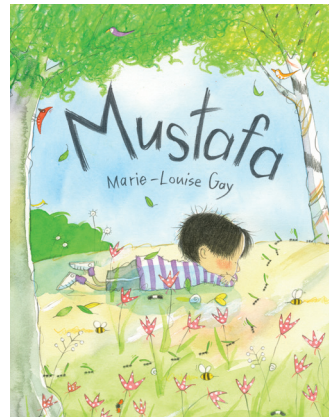
As Hannah prepares to move with her family to a new town, her grandmother explains how it felt when she left the old country – both bitter and sweet. At first, Hannah feels only bitterness, but a new friend helps her feel at home again. In her author's note, Sandra V. Feder explains Jewish traditions that contain elements of sweet and bitter. Kyrsten Brooker's illustrations were done in collage and oil paint on gessoed watercolour paper. For ages 4–8.



Mustafa

Marie-Louise Gay

This is the story of a little boy who travels a long way with his family to live in a different country. At first he feels invisible, and he has bad dreams about the smoke and fire they left behind. Over time he explores the outdoors and makes a friend, and then Mustafa begins to feel like this new place is home. Mari-Louise Gay's whimsical illustrations present her signature style, grounded in watercolour, pen, and ink. For ages 4–8+.



Malaika's Winter Carnival

*Nadia L. Hohn
and Irene Luxbacher*

Malaika moves away from her grandmother's house to live in Canada with her mother, Mummy's new partner, and a new sister. At first, Malaika hates the cold, the way that people speak differently than what she's used to, and even the carnival, where she breaks Adèle's snow castle. Written in a blend of standard English and Caribbean patois, this engaging title has illustrations composed in mixed-media, graphite, and oils on paper. For ages 4–9.



Ira Crumb Makes a Pretty Good Friend

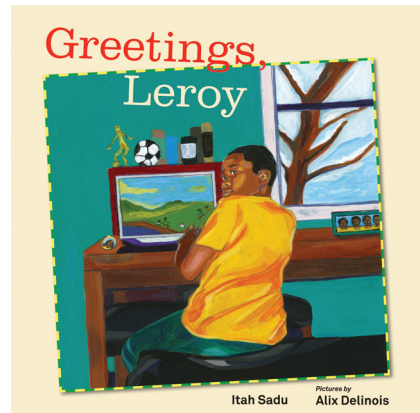
*Naseem Hrab
and Josh Holinaty*

Ira Crumb is a new kid in town and at first he tries too hard to make a friend. This book, told through speech bubbles with some narration, puts a relatable spin on change and fitting in. For ages 4–8.

Greetings, Leroy

*Itah Sadu
and Alix Delinois*

Roy is writing a letter back home to his friend in Jamaica. He tells Leroy all about his new life in North America and how different it is from what he's used to. A Bob Marley button given to Roy by a neighbour before he moved features importantly in this warm story about finding a new home while staying proud of where you're from. The bright illustrations by Alix Delinois were created in acrylic and mixed-media. For ages 4–9.



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*In the spirit of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an asterisk appears beside works created by Indigenous writers or artists.

Amado, Elisa (illustrated by Alfonso Ruano) (2019). *My Friend*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press.

Charles, Veronika Martenova (2017). *The Land Beyond the Wall*. Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing.

Del Rizzo, Suzanne (2017). *My Beautiful Birds*. Toronto, ON: Pajama Press.

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Older Characters

In children's literature circles, it's been common knowledge that children like to read about their own age groups or slightly higher. This pattern is dislodged in a new group of books where the protagonists or dynamic secondary characters are not young; some of these key characters are adults, and some are older adults. From what we can tell, young readers enjoy peeking into the adult world, and as long as the content and themes are appropriate, we suggest that such stories can be powerful additions to various collections.

In addition to presenting engaging stories and information, picture books are a good resource to teach children the importance of listening to and respecting our previous generations. Children who have little or no contact with older adults might find a source of connection in stories. Picture books about older characters also recognise the love and connections that many children share with their grandparents, who in some families are their primary caregivers. This collection of picture books offers wonderful opportunities to increase empathy and heighten interest in reading by following older characters and their storied lives.

Full of caring messages and teachings, many of the picture books here that feature older characters offer important life lessons and models of intergenerational respect. Other titles offer opportunities for readers to observe and learn from adult experiences – not always easy ones. We anticipate that many more titles will emerge in this category over the years to come, and note that a number of titles presenting older characters appear in other chapters, particularly titles with Indigenous languages in addition to English.

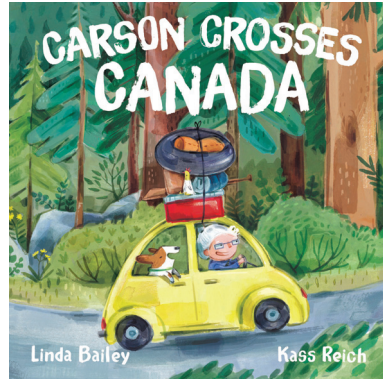
These books are popular with young children, but we also see a place for them across all age groups as they might support adults who are learning to read as well as older readers – far beyond the suggested reading ages here – whose decoding and comprehension skills are limited due to cognitive and other health challenges, or for being new to the English language.

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Carson Crosses Canada

*Linda Bailey
and Kass Reich*

Annie Magruder, a white-haired older woman, journeys from the west coast to the east with her dog, Carson, doing justice to iconic Canadian places along the way. With its spry heroine, this book breaks stereotypes about aging while offering information about Canada. Endpapers show the route across the country as well as



what Annie and Carson experience. Kass Reich’s hand-painted gouache illustrations, with added digital details, are energetic and fun. For ages 3–8.

Under the Umbrella

*Catherine Buquet,
Erin Woods (translator)
and Marion Arbona*

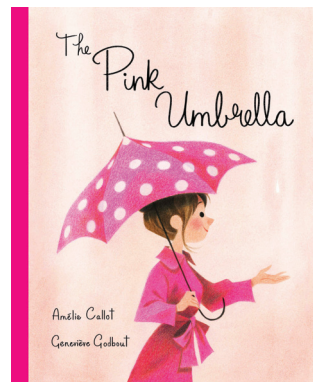
A man with a stormy heart is out in the rain, rushing grumpily to work. His umbrella blows inside out and lands at the feet of a little boy gazing into a bakery window. The man’s internal cloud lifts and he uncharacteristically stops and buys a treat for the boy, a pastry which is subsequently shared. This gently rhyming story reminds us of the importance of caring for others and reassures us that bright moments can be found even on dark days. For ages 4–8.



The Pink Umbrella

*Amélie Callot,
Lara Hinchberger (translator)
and Geneviève Godbout*

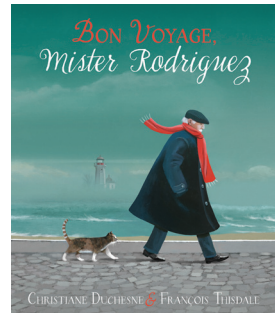
Adele, a café owner, usually sparkles except when it’s raining. Lucas, the grocer, sends her thoughtful gifts to brighten the rainy days. This is a story about compassion and the quiet power of love. Geneviève Godbout’s illustrations were rendered in pastels and coloured pencils and the text is hand-lettered. For ages 6–9.



Bon Voyage, Mister Rodriguez

*Christiane Duchesne
and François Thisdale*

A group of older children study Mr. Rodriguez as he takes his daily walk. His activities become increasingly fantastical until one day, he appears to fly away and they never see him again. What reads as a quirky story can also be digested as an allegory of death. François Thisdale's spectacular images are created with acrylic and digital media. For ages 5–9.



The Eleventh Hour

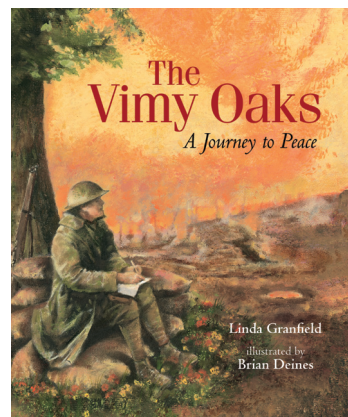
Jacques Goldstyn

Jim and Jules are childhood friends who enlist in World War I. As young adults, they fight together and endure many hardships, but in the end Jim dies in his friend's arms. The story follows Jules as he returns home and struggles to find his way as a watchmaker, his characterisation reflecting the invisible injuries of war. Author Jacques Goldstyn is also a political cartoonist, and his watercolour and pencil illustrations reflect his signature style. For ages 7–12+.

The Vimy Oaks: A Journey to Peace

*Linda Granfield
and Brian Deines*

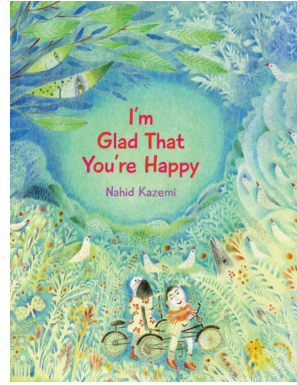
Leslie Miller, a real Canadian soldier in World War I, mails a handful of acorns home from France. Years later, a boy and his family tour the Canadian farm where shady oak trees stand in a line, trees grown and tended by Lieutenant Miller once he returned from the war. Descendants of these trees were sent to the Vimy Ridge battlefield to repatriate the oaks that were lost, as well as distributed across Canada. Many generations have enjoyed these trees and the memories they convey about peace, justice and remembrance. Brian Deines' rich oil-on-canvas illustrations, alongside many photographs, illustrate this title. For ages 8–adult.



I'm Glad That You're Happy

Nahid Kazemi

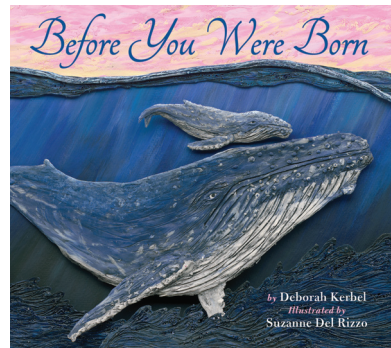
This is a story about two plants. The florist who plants them in one pot tells the bigger one to look after the smaller one. A painter takes them home and eventually divides them, finally putting them in his garden where they grow into trees. This is a story about accepting growth and change. Nahid Kazemi's illustrations include pastel, colour pencil, and collage. For ages 4–8.



Before You Were Born

*Deborah Kerbel
and Suzanne Del Rizzo*

Through the changing seasons, a couple awaits their baby while wild animals nearby welcome their own young. The rhyming text describes the adults' emotions and dreams for their child. Suzanne Del Rizzo's stunning artwork is a combination of polymer clay and acrylic wash. For ages 3–7.



Threads

Torill Kove

This book celebrates the beauty and complexity of parental love. A mother is symbolically threaded to a child and then encourages opportunity and eventually independence. This title is adapted from a National Film Board animated short film of the same name. For ages 7–adult.

My Cat Looks Like My Dad

Thao Lam

This original story is essentially a list of the various ways the narrator's dad resembles their cat. A surprising twist at the end discloses that the narrator is actually a bird. The message of this book is that family is what you make it. The retro style collage artwork was created using patterned paper. For ages 3–8.

Uncle Holland

*JonArno Lawson
and Natalie Nelson*

Holland is always getting into trouble. After continued stealing, he is offered a choice – either go to jail or join the army. He chooses the latter and is stationed in the south, where he developed an interest in fishes and becomes an artist! This story is loosely based on the life of JonArno's uncle. Natalie Nelson's illustrations are digital collage incorporating found photography and ink drawings. For ages 6–9.



Grandmother's Visit

*Betty Quan
and Carmen Mok*

Grandmother lives with Grace's family and teaches her many things, such as how to cook rice. She also tells her stories about growing up in China. As Grandmother grows older, things change. One day her room is empty. In this poignant tale, Grace realises that even though Grandmother has passed away, all of her teachings and memories remain. Carmen Mok's digital paintings capture love, sadness and resiliency in this sensitive and tender story. For ages 5–8+.



Mr. Crum's Potato Predicament

*Anne Renaud
and Felicita Sala*

Diners flock to sample Cook Crum's fare until a demanding customer prompts him to slice the potatoes thinner and thinner until they are crispy thin! This story is loosely based on the life of George Crum, possible inventor of the potato chip. Felicita Sala's watercolour and coloured pencil images are deliciously executed in a feast for the eyes. For ages 4–8.

The Promise Basket

*Bill Richardson
and Slavka Kolesar*

For each celebration with her daughter, a mother wraps up a pretty stone and puts it in the promise basket along with a poem. When her granddaughter is born, the mother gives her daughter the promise basket and the daughter knows it is her turn to write promises to her own daughter. Slavka Kolesar’s illustrations are in coloured pencil, graphite, watercolour and gouache. For ages 5–9.



Tricky

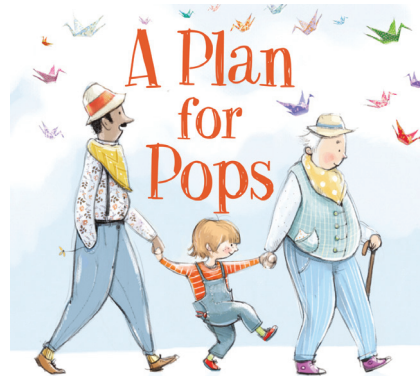
Kari Rust

The Duke and his faithful dog, Tricky, spend their days making people miserable. One day, Tricky realises what they are doing is wrong, and changes his course, although it means going their separate ways. This story shows that an old dog can indeed learn new tricks! For ages 5–9.

A Plan for Pops

*Heather Smith
and Brooke Kerrigan*

Every Saturday Lou visits Grandad and Pops. After lots of experience building inventions, Lou decides to make something to help Pops, whose mobility has changed and who is depressed. Brooke Kerrigan has beautifully rendered this non-traditional family structure using an iPad Pro, with the addition of scanned textures, traditional watercolour washes, and paper collage. For ages 4–8.

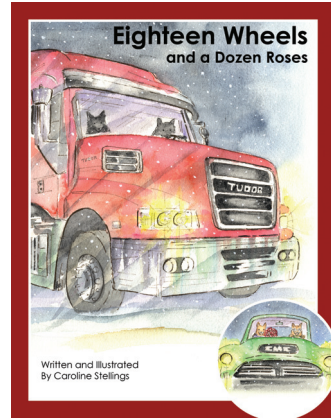


Heather Smith and Brooke Kerrigan

Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses

Caroline Stellings

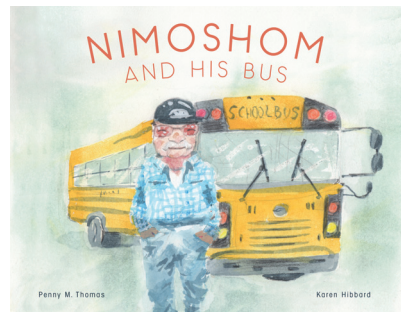
Dog characters Matt and Ben demonstrate adult human characteristics as they operate a garage and fix old cars. Each time Matt thinks the finished product might just be for him, he finds someone who needs it more. In the end, someone he has helped does a nice thing for him in return. The watercolour and pen-and-ink illustrations for this karmic tale are soft and uplifting. For ages 5–8.



Nimoshom and His Bus

*Penny M. Thomas
and Karen Hibbard*

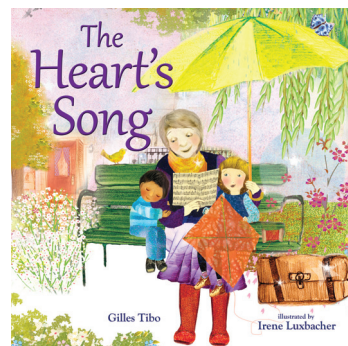
This book is about Nimoshom, a school bus driver. His name means “grandfather” in Cree, and as he drives the bus, he teaches his school-aged passengers – and readers of the book – a number of Cree words. This book does an excellent job of displaying the powerful connection between elders and youth. Penny M. Thomas is of Cree-Ojibway background and she has included a Cree word list, with translations, at the end of the book. Karen Hibbard’s engaging watercolour and pastel illustrations extend the story nicely. For ages 4–8.



The Heart's Song

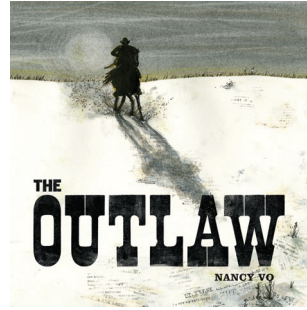
*Gilles Tibo
and Irene Luxbacher*

Miss Matilda sits in the park and uses her special tools to fix the children’s broken toys. Sometimes she sings to those who are sad. When Miss Matilda’s beloved canary dies, the children bring her messages of love in return. Irene Luxbacher’s illustrations were created with acrylics, graphite, charcoal, and found papers, and assembled digitally. This is a story about friendship and compassion. For ages 4–8.



The Outlaw

Nancy Vo



An outlaw known for his misdeeds finally leaves town. Many seasons later, a stranger appears and begins helping out. He is working on the train platform when somebody suddenly recognises him. A young boy sticks up for him and the outlaw is allowed to stay, where he continues to make amends in this story about redemption. In strikingly original images, Nancy Vo works with ink, watercolour and newsprint transfer, using newspaper clippings and fabric patterns from the late 19th century. The text is set in Clarendon, common on “wanted” posters. For ages 5–9+.

The Ranger

Nancy Vo

A ranger named Annie encounters a fox in need, tends to its wounds, and feeds it. A few days later, it is the ranger who needs help, and the fox steps in. The illustrations, ink, watercolour, and acetone transfer depict Annie as a young adult who is comfortable on her own but who benefits from having a companion. For ages 5–9+.

Crackerjack Jack

*Bowman Wilker
and Marie-Ève Tremblay*

This rollicking story, told through rhyme and varying font size, is about a bank robber whose accomplice is a duck. Jack is caught while the duck makes off with the money to live a life of luxury. For ages 4–8.

Bibliography

*In the spirit of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an asterisk appears beside works created by Indigenous writers or artists.

Bailey, Linda (illustrated by Kass Reich) (2017). *Carson Crosses Canada*. Toronto, ON: Tundra Books/Penguin Random House.

- Buquet, Catherine (illustrated by Marion Arbona, translated by Erin Woods) (2017). *Under the Umbrella*. Toronto, ON: Pajama Press.
- Callot, Amélie (illustrated by Geneviève Godbout) (2018). *The Pink Umbrella*. Toronto, ON: Tundra Books/Penguin Random House.
- Duchesne, Christiane (illustrated by François Thisdale) (2019). *Bon Voyage, Mister Rodriguez*. Toronto, ON: Pajama Press.
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- Kazemi, Nahid (2018). *I'm Glad That You're Happy*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press.
- Kerbel, Deborah (illustrated by Suzanne Del Rizzo) (2019). *Before You Were Born*. Toronto, ON: Pajama Press.
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Facts & Figures

Children are like sponges, always absorbing information and learning from their surroundings. Contemporary picture books honour this ability by offering easy-to-read materials, with clear and instructive graphics, on a variety of subjects and themes. Many non-fiction titles are discussed in other chapters, with content about the natural world assigned to Chapter 7: “Our Living Earth.” Here in Chapter 10 we identify other fact-based picture books, including biographies and autobiographies of important people. At times, the titles here seem like combinations of fiction and non-fiction; we have categorised them based on whether their primary goal is to inform as well as entertain, and whether their format promotes recognition of the non-fiction genre.

We read non-fiction materials for both education and entertainment. Classroom libraries have seen transformational changes in this regard, and many of them now contain as many non-fiction titles as fiction. As educators and parents began to realise that children benefit from reading about subjects of interest, the market for non-fiction has increased. In 2005, approximately 16% of Canadian picture book titles were non-fiction; in 2015, that number had risen to 34%. We wonder if similar parallels exist in the adult market – if literary non-fiction is truly experiencing a monumental rise across all reading ages – and we are curious about this possibility.

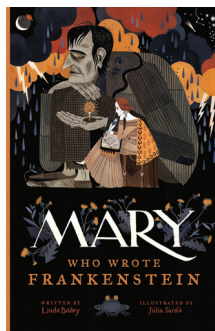
In this chapter, we present some excellent Canadian picture books, published between 2017 and 2019, that aim for compelling storytelling as well as accuracy in both text and image. Some of them are serious while others are exceptionally funny, but all of them encourage reading for a variety of purposes. Additional sources for information are commonly listed in these books, and photographs that present further details are often inserted too. Some of these titles connect to Education’s current focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). We particularly celebrate the inclusion here of previously unheard voices in terms of subject matter, including Phyllis Webstad’s autobiographical title *The Orange Shirt Story* that has inspired Orange Shirt Day across Canada.

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

Mary Who Wrote Frankenstein

*Linda Bailey
and Júlia Sardà*

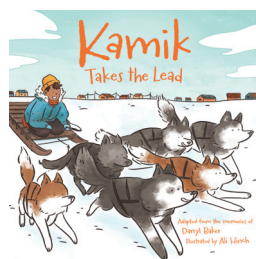
This intriguing book shares key details about the writing of *Frankenstein*, starting with the background of its author, Mary Shelley. Júlia Sardà's moody illustrations combine digital art and watercolour. For ages 7–11+.



Kamik Takes the Lead

*Darryl Baker
and Ali Hinch*

In this installment of the “Kamik” series, Jake and Kamik are finally ready to run their first dogsled race with a full team! This story covers their detailed training and takes readers to the moment the race starts. Darryl Baker is an Inuit teacher in Arviat, Nunavut, and this book is inspired by his joy for dog mushing. For ages 5–8.



Lines, Bars and Circles: How William Playfair Invented Graphs

*Helaine Becker
and Marie-Ève Tremblay*

This book is both the biography of a creative thinker, and a historical and mathematical look at the use of graphs. While the main text is written in simple narrative prose, three pages at the end contain more detailed information, including original 18th century graphs. Marie-Ève Tremblay's digital illustrations are mischievous and absorbing, enhancing the math focus. For ages 6–9.

The Brave Princess and Me

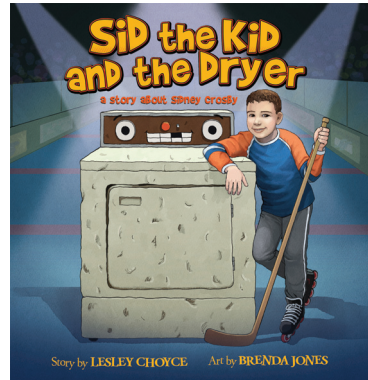
*Kathy Kacer
and Juliana Kolesova*

Inspired by a true story, this book follows a young Jewish girl and her mother who take refuge with Princess Alice of Greece (Prince Philip's mother) during World War II. When the Nazis appear, Princess Alice uses stereotypes about deafness to throw them off the track. For ages 7–10+.

Sid the Kid and the Dryer: **A Story About Sidney Crosby**

*Lesley Choyce
 and Brenda Jones*

This picture book tells a well-known story about hockey player Sidney Crosby, who as a child practiced shooting pucks into his family's dryer. The creative version here, however, is written from the dryer's perspective. With additional facts about Crosby at the end, this title is a slam dinger! For ages 5–8.



A Friend Like Iggy

*Kathryn Cole
 and Ian Richards*

This is the true story of Iggy, a special dog who supports young people in difficult times related to abuse, police interviews, counseling sessions, court preparation, and testifying. It may have specific interest for children in programs similar to Iggy, or for those wanting to learn more about therapy dogs. The photographs included of Iggy in action are engaging, and audiences will find clarity in the scenes with volunteer youngsters posing for the camera. For ages 4–10.

Our New Kittens

*Theo Heras
 and Alice Carter*

Two fictional boys bring home their new kittens and begin to care for them in productive ways. Lists of helpful strategies for looking after cats are included on the endpapers and the extra soft cover will help small hands get a grip on this one. Alice Carter's gentle watercolour, pencil, and digital artwork depicts the joy of having family pets. For ages 3–6.



A Likkle Miss Lou: How Jamaican Poet Louise Bennett Coverley Found Her Voice

Nadia L. Hohn

and Eugenie Fernandes

This narrative non-fiction biography about a girl finding her voice is inspired by the early years of Jamaican poet Louise Bennett Coverley. Later known around the world as Miss Lou, she popularised Jamaican patois on the international stage. Additional information, including a glossary and references, appears at the end of the book. For ages 4–8.

Walking in the City with Jane: A Story of Jane Jacobs

Susan Hughes

and Valérie Boivin

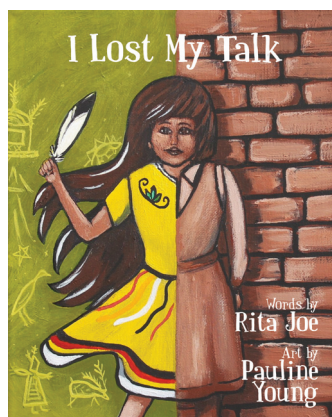
This narrative non-fiction book is based on the life of influential writer, urbanist, and activist Jane Jacobs. Readers may be aware of “Jane’s Walks” in their area, inspired by Jane’s example of adventuring out and learning firsthand about our cities. Valérie Boivin’s stylised Adobe Photoshop illustrations are warm and inviting. For ages 5–9.

I Lost My Talk

Rita Joe

and Pauline Young

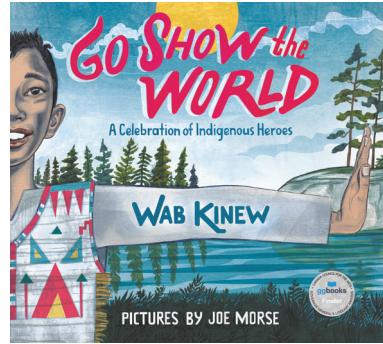
One of Mi’kmaw Elder Rita Joe’s most influential poems tells the story of being forced to lose her language, and the impact of this loss, as a resident of a residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. This powerful yet easy-to-read picture book invites readers to explore the effects of the residential school system as part of Canada’s history, including a biography of Rita Joe and vivid illustrations by Mi’kmaw artist Pauline Young. For ages 4–8+.



Go Show the World: A Celebration of Indigenous Heroes

*Wab Kinew
and Joe Morse*

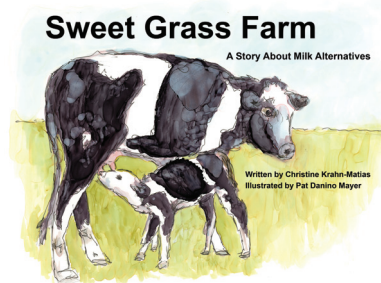
Author Wab Kinew is a member of the Midewin and an honorary witness for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. In this title he uses rhyming couplets to celebrate the impact of contemporary and historical Indigenous heroes. The book spotlights Sacagawea, Jim Thorpe, Sue LaFlesche Picotte, Beatrice Mosionier, Pegahmagabow, Te-Wau-Zee, Evan Adams, John Herrington, Carey Price, Waneeck Horn-Miller, Tecumseh, Crazy Horse, and Net-no-kwa. Joe Morse's captivating artwork involves watercolour, digital colour, and collage. For ages 5–9.



Sweet Grass Farm: A Story About Milk Alternatives

*Christine Krahn-Matias
and Pat Danino Mayer*

A fictional class visit to a farm provides an unexpected context for information on veganism. This book includes perspectives uncommon in other titles for children. Pat Danino Mayer's artwork for this modern view on nutrition was created using alcohol inks. For ages 6–8.



The Man Who Loved Libraries: The Story of Andrew Carnegie

*Andrew Larsen
and Katty Maurey*

This biography of philanthropist Andrew Carnegie shows how he used his wealth to build libraries around the world. Two pages of additional information, including photographs and sources, are included at the end of the book. For ages 5–9.

Stego-cumulus

*Hilary Leung
and Niall Eccles*

Panda loves the shapes and stories of the clouds while Parrot can only see the science. In the end, they combine their perspectives on the last cloud. Instead of calling it a stegosaurus or a cumulus they used the combined name “*STEGO-CUMULUS*.” This title is an interesting combination of fiction and non-fiction, and we have listed it in this chapter for its factual content. Niall Eccles’ ink and watercolour artwork uses colour and detail to demonstrate the differences between Panda and Parrot’s points of view. For ages 3–8.



Bloom: A Story of Fashion Designer

Elsa Schiaparelli

*Kyo Maclear
and Julie Morstad*

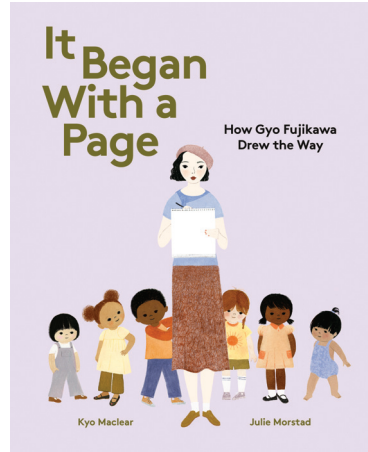
This non-fiction biography uses a first-person narrative to share the life story of fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli. Further information is included in a double-page spread at the end of the book and Julie Morstad’s art deco illustrations, created with liquid watercolour, gouache, and pencil crayons, beautifully convey the difficult childhood and spectacular imagination that underpin Schiaparelli’s work. For ages 5–9.



It Began with a Page: How Gyo Fujikawa Drew the Way

*Kyo Maclear
and Julie Morstad*

This beautiful story chronicles the life of artist Gyo Fujikawa, a groundbreaking hero in the fight for racial diversity in picture books. A timeline and additional information appear at the end of this informative title. Julie Morstad's captivating illustrations extend the text and use liquid watercolour, gouache, and pencil crayons. For ages 5–10.



Meet Chris Hadfield

*Elizabeth MacLeod
and Mike Deas*

This picture book combines narration and comic-style characters with speech bubbles to produce a biography of astronaut Chris Hadfield, part of a Scholastic Canada biography series. A timeline at the end further illustrates Hadfield's life experiences. Mike Deas successfully employs a variety of media here, including watercolour, ink, gouache, and digital components. For ages 6–10.



Meet Elsie MacGill

*Elizabeth MacLeod
and Mike Deas*

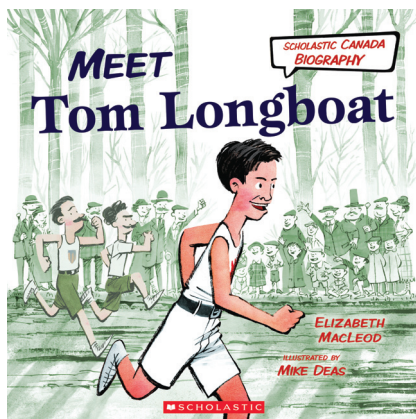
Meet Elsie MacGill, internationally renowned aeronautical engineer and feminist! She was the first woman in the world to earn a master's degree in aeronautical engineering, and she oversaw the production of Canada's Hawker Hurricane war plane during World War II. Mike Deas once again applies mixed-media to extend an inspirational text in this biographical series. For ages 6–10.



Meet Tom Longboat

*Elizabeth MacLeod
and Mike Deas*

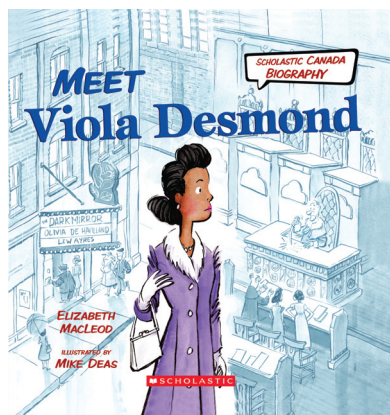
This is a biography of Tom Longboat, an Indigenous athlete who, after escaping from residential school, went on to become a marathon champion. He was part of the 107th Pioneer Battalion during World War I and used his physical agility to deliver important messages. In 1951 he was honoured with the establishment of the Tom Longboat Awards for Aboriginal Athletes, and in 1995 he was posthumously entered into Canada's Hall of Fame. Mike Deas provides mixed-media illustrations, and there are archival photographs included in the endnotes. For ages 5–10.



Meet Viola Desmond

*Elizabeth MacLeod
and Mike Deas*

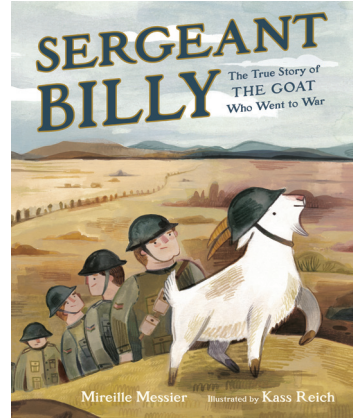
Viola Desmond's experience of racial discrimination and her courageous response is the heart of this biography. On a rainy day in November, 1946, she refused to give up her seat in the unofficial white section of a Nova Scotia movie theatre. The story is told through both narration and speech-bubble dialogue, along with Mike Deas' mixed-media illustrations, helping readers understand characters' emotions and details of a campaign for social justice. For ages 6–10.



Sergeant Billy: The True Story of the Goat Who Went to War

*Mireille Messier
and Kass Reich*

During World War I, Billy the Goat is adopted by a platoon of soldiers and travels from his small prairie town and across the ocean where he saves lives. A photo essay at the end supports the literal truth of this interesting tale! Kass Reich's digitally enhanced gouache illustrations are vivid and comical. For ages 5–10.



Black Women Who Dared

Naomi M. Moyer

Powerful biographies and portraits of ten Black women and women's collectives from North America are presented here, ranging in time from 1793 to the present. This book explores leadership regarding anti-slavery, business, community organising, and education. The beautiful mixed-media images feature acrylic, stencil, ink, and pencil – resulting in a whole that is celebratory, dynamic, inspiring and engaging. For ages 9–13+.

A Voice for the Spirit Bears: How One Boy Inspired Millions to Save a Rare Animal

*Carmen Oliver
and Katy Dockrill*

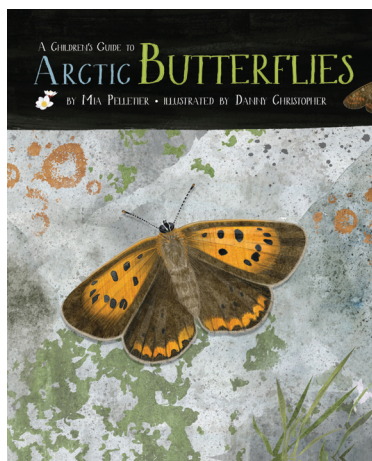
This narrative non-fiction story is based on the real life of David Simon Jackson. His lifelong work protecting the environment and especially endangered bears is ongoing, and began at a young age. Additional facts about Jackson's causes, along with photographs, are presented at the end of the book. Katy Dockrill's illustrations use brush and ink, brushpen and pencil on paper, and are coloured digitally. For ages 6–9.

A Children's Guide to Arctic Butterflies

Mia Pelletier

and *Danny Christopher*

This visually spectacular book discusses twelve of the several dozen species of butterfly found on the tundra of the North American Arctic. With interesting facts, such as how they keep themselves warm in cool summers and endure freezing cold winters, this book is engaging and concise. With a table of contents, tips for butterfly identification, and suggestions for further reading, this title is a rich resource. For ages 8–12+

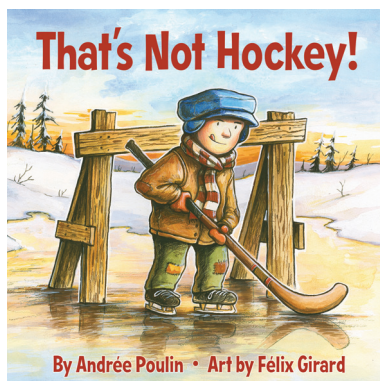


That's Not Hockey!

Andrée Poulin

and *Félix Girard*

This is a highly readable biography of Jacques Plante, goalie for the Montreal Canadiens when they won the Stanley Cup and a seven-time winner of the Vezina Trophy. After experiencing a number of serious injuries during games, Plante is credited for introducing and popularising goalie face-masks. For ages 5–8+.



The Boy Who Invented the Popsicle: The Cool Science Behind Frank Epperson's Famous Frozen Treat

Anne Renaud

and *Milan Pavlović*

This narrative non-fiction story follows the life of Frank Epperson, who always knew he wanted to be an inventor. A lively exploration of the invention of the popsicle, this title also shares four science activities for readers to try, as well as further information and vintage photographs. For ages 4–9.

Fania's Heart*Anne Renaud**and Richard Rudnicki*

This deeply moving true story is based on a tiny cloth heart discovered among the belongings of Sorale's mother, an Auschwitz survivor. As the heart's back-story is revealed, readers learn more about the immeasurable resilience and courage of Fania and the women around her in the concentration camp. In the author's note at the end of the book, more information is provided through additional text and historical photographs. For ages 6–adult.

The True Tale of a Giantess: The Story of Anna Swan*Anne Renaud**and Marie Lafrance*

This picture book biography tells the compelling story of a girl whose physical differences were both a barrier and a gift. Told in Anna's own first-person voice, readers will learn more about her Nova Scotia home and the world of the mid-19th century. An informative section at the end of the book extends the learning. Marie Lafrance's pastel-toned illustrations were rendered in mixed-media and Adobe Photoshop. For ages 4–8.

Join the No-Plastic Challenge! A First Book of Reducing Waste*Scot Ritchie*

This book supports caring for the environment by reducing the use of plastic in our homes and communities. Part of the "Exploring our Community" series, it covers how plastic is made as well as how it is harmful to our environment, and includes a table of contents and a list of definitions. Scot Ritchie's digital illustrations are engaging and educational. For ages 4–8.

See How We Move! A First Book of Health and Well-Being*Scot Ritchie*

In this addition to the non-fiction "Exploring our Community" series, five fictional friends prepare for their school's swim meet. In the process, they discover that keeping their bodies and minds healthy can advance their performance and improve their lives. This book covers the benefits of physical fitness, goal setting, and nutrition, and includes three fun activities to try. The digital illustrations continue to highlight the relationships among the five children. For ages 4–7.

See What We Eat! A First Book of Healthy Eating

Scot Ritchie

In the framework of making an apple crisp for a potluck supper, five friends go on a quest to find out where food comes from, exploring the farm, grocery store, and kitchen. This book includes details on nutrition as well as beneficial activities such as composting. A table of contents and a glossary are included, along with Scot Ritchie's signature digital illustrations. For ages 4–9.

Why Do Families Change? Our First Talk About Separation and Divorce

*Jillian Roberts
and Cindy Revell*

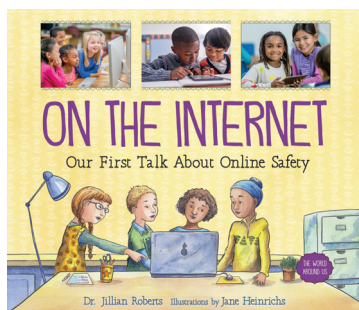
Child psychologist Dr. Jillian Roberts provides answers and explanations to common questions young children may have about separation and divorce. Cindy Revell's digital illustrations include many cultural groups as well as diverse family composition. For ages 5–8.



On the Internet: Our First Talk About Online Safety

*Jillian Roberts
and Jane Heinrichs*

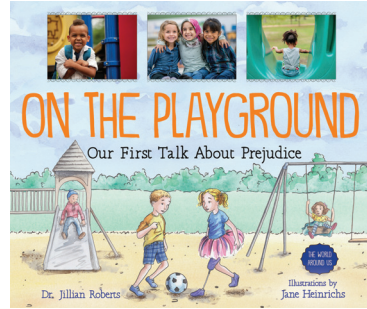
This title is part of a series called “The World Around Us,” written by child psychologist Dr. Jillian Roberts. Common safety concerns related to online contexts are addressed in this installation, with advice on how to maintain smart boundaries when using the internet. Jane Heinrichs' lively watercolour illustrations blend well with the stock photographs displayed. For ages 7–11.



On the Playground: Our First Talk About Prejudice

*Jillian Roberts
and Jane Heinrichs*

Covering different types of discrimination, this timely book in a series by child psychologist Dr. Jillian Roberts supports inclusion and acceptance. Additional resources, print and online, are included on the last page, and photographs are presented throughout. Jane Heinrichs' illustrations, created with English watercolours and Japanese brush pens on Italian watercolour paper, show a diverse group of children. For ages 7–11.



On the News: Our First Talk About Tragedy

*Jillian Roberts
and Jane Heinrichs*

This well designed and informative series' book works hard to help children who are exposed to tragic events through media. Dr. Jill Roberts has experience as a primary school teacher, a child psychologist, and an associate professor at the University of Victoria. Jane Heinrichs' skillful illustrations, combined with full-colour photographs, extend the learning potential of this book. For ages 7–11.



On Our Street: Our First Talk About Poverty

*Jillian Roberts,
Jaime Casap
and Jane Heinrichs*

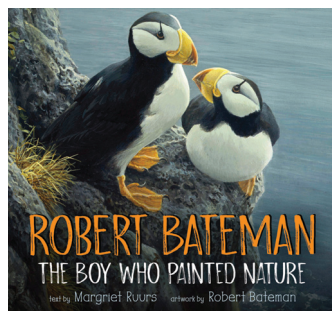
Simple and straightforward answers are provided here to kid-centred questions about poverty and homelessness. This series' book also touches on mental health, refugee experiences, and essential services offered in communities. The last page includes a helpful resource list for extra information, and Jane Heinrichs' signature watercolour illustrations add to full-colour photographs used throughout. For ages 7–11.



Robert Bateman: The Boy Who Painted Nature

*Margriet Ruurs
and Robert Bateman*

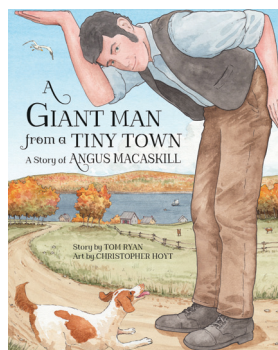
This spectacular biography of nature artist Robert Bateman includes many of his paintings and sketches as well as photographs of aspects of his life and craft. It is dedicated to all children who enjoy and protect nature as well as to the young at heart. For ages 5–9.



A Giant Man from a Tiny Town: A Story of Angus MacAskill

*Tom Ryan
and Christopher Hoyt*

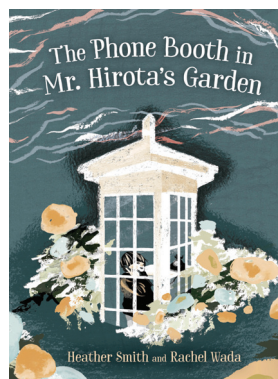
This biography of a 19th-century Cape Breton man who travelled all over the world in P. T. Barnum's circus focuses selectively on his positive experiences in a book that celebrates difference. For ages 3–8.



The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden

*Heather Smith
and Rachel Wada*

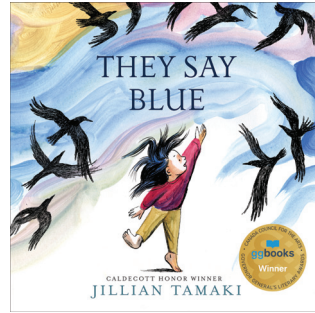
This is a touching fictionalised story in the aftermath of a Japanese tsunami. A surviving neighbour, based on the character of a real man, places a phone booth in his garden, and Makio, who has lost his father, uses it as a way to speak to his dad and begin the process of healing. Based on the real “phone of the wind” created by Itaru Sasaki and described on the last page, this book is about grief and recovery. Rachel Wada's digitally assembled watercolour, black ink, and pencil illustrations were inspired by traditional Japanese art techniques. For ages 6–8.



They Say Blue

Jillian Tamaki

In this evocative book, a young girl matter-of-factly ponders the colours of her life through the changing seasons. Jillian Tamaki's extraordinary artwork combines acrylic paint on watercolour paper and Adobe Photoshop techniques. For ages 4–8.



One is a Lot (Except When It's Not)

Mượn Thị Văn

and *Pierre Pratt*

This fun story explores how the value of numbers really depends on perspective. For example, “1 sun is a lot”... but for a squirrel, “2 nuts are too much.” Pierre Pratt's active illustrations, rendered in pencil and then digitally in Photograph, convey multiple plotlines. For ages 3–9.

The Orange Shirt Story

Phyllis Webstad

and *Brock Nicol*

Author Phyllis Webstad is Northern Secwepemc (Shuswap) from the Stswecem's Zgat'tem First Nation (Canoe Creek Indian Band). In this honest autobiography, she relates an experience from residential school when her orange shirt was taken away and lost forever. Additional information and conversation starters are included at the end of the book. This story has inspired national Orange Shirt Day, an important time of remembrance for all Canadians when we honour residential school survivors. A book for younger children, *Phyllis's Orange Shirt*, is also available from Medicine Wheel Education. For ages 6–9.

Our Future: How Kids Are Taking Action

Janet Wilson

This socially conscious book spotlights children around the world, including Greta Thunberg, whose voices are contributing to positive change. Janet Wilson's illustrations demonstrate a mixed-media encaustic technique: hot beeswax, combined with resin and oil colour, is applied in layers and fused with heat. For ages 7–12+.

A Pocket of Time: The Poetic Childhood of Elizabeth Bishop

Rita Wilson

and *Emma FitzGerald*

This is the story of Elizabeth Bishop's childhood days in Great Village, Nova Scotia, paired with quotations from her poetry and Emma FitzGerald's college-style illustrations. Additional resources at the end of the book provide fuel for further understanding. For ages 7–10+.

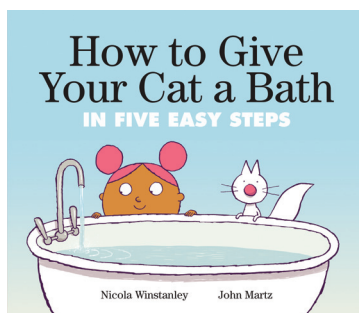


How to Give Your Cat a Bath in Five Easy Steps

Nicola Winstanley

and *John Martz*

This hilarious title offers a little girl's step-by-step guide to bathing a cat – a fictional story encased in a non-fiction format. After many failures, she realises that this activity really only has one step: sit quietly while your cat licks himself clean. John Martz's ink and digital colour illustrations add action and humour to this genre-bending title. For ages 4–8.



Hungry for Science: Poems to Crunch On

Kari-Lynn Winters,

Lori Sherritt-Fleming

and *Peggy Collins*

These humorous rhyming poems introduce children to science topics that include magnetism, pollination, geology, the seasons, and the life cycle of fleas. The last page of this book includes definitions to extend the learning. For ages 4–8.

How Emily Saved the Bridge: The Story of Emily Warrant Roebling and the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge

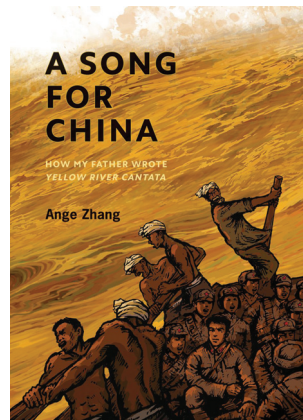
Frieda Wishinsky
and Natalie Nelson

This inspiring story relates how the chief engineer's daughter-in-law stepped in to finish building the Brooklyn Bridge after John Roebling's death and the illness of her husband. At a time when many people considered women incapable of achievements in math and science, Emily Warren Roebling proved them wrong. She became a lawyer and continued to champion equal rights for women. A page at the end of the book extends further facts about the Brooklyn Bridge. Natalie Nelson's illustrations were created using digital collage and found photographs. For ages 7–10.

A Song for China: How My Father Wrote *Yellow River Cantata*

Ange Zhang

This is the fascinating story of how Guang Weiran, a young Chinese author, fought with art, theatre, poetry and song, for a socially just China. Ange Zhang's text and wood block-style art are accompanied by sidebars and photographs that explain historical details. For ages 10–adult.



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*In the spirit of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an asterisk appears beside works created by Indigenous writers or artists.

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- Poulin, Andrée (illustrated by Félix Girard) (2018). *That's Not Hockey!* Toronto, ON: Annick Press.
- Renaud, Anne (illustrated by Marie Lafrance) (2018). *The True Tale of a Giantess: The Story of Anna Swan*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
- Renaud, Anne (illustrated by Milan Pavlović) (2019). *The Boy Who Invented the Popsicle: The Cool Science Behind Frank Epperson's Famous Frozen Treat*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
- Renaud, Anne (illustrated by Richard Rudnicki) (2018). *Fania's Heart*. Toronto, ON: Second Story Press.
- Ritchie, Scot (2017). *See What We Eat! A First Book of Healthy Eating*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
- Ritchie, Scot (2018). *See How We Move! A First Book of Health and Well-Being*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
- Ritchie, Scot (2019). *Join the No-Plastic Challenge! A First Book of Reducing Waste*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
- Roberts, Jillian (illustrated by Cindy Revell) (2017). *Why Do Families Change? Our First Talk About Separation and Divorce*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
- Roberts, Jillian (illustrated by Cindy Revell) (2019). *On the Internet: Our First Talk About Online Safety*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
- Roberts, Jillian (illustrated by Jane Heinrichs) (2018). *On the News: Our First Talk About Tragedy*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
- Roberts, Jillian (illustrated by Jane Heinrichs) (2019). *On the Playground: Our First Talk About Prejudice*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
- Roberts, Jillian & Casap, Jaime (illustrated by Jane Heinrichs) (2018). *On Our Street: Our First Talk About Poverty*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
- Ruurs, Margriet (illustrated by Robert Bateman) (2018). *Robert Bateman: The Boy Who Painted Nature*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
- Ryan, Tom (illustrated by Christopher Hoyt) (2018). *A Giant Man from a Tiny Town: A Story of Angus MacAskill*. Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing.
- Smith, Heather (illustrated by Rachel Wada) (2019). *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.
- Tamaki, Jillian (2018). *They Say Blue*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press.
- Van, Muon Thi (illustrated by Pierre Pratt) (2019). *One is a Lot (Except When It's Not)*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.
- *Webstad, Phyllis (illustrated by Brock Nicol) (2018). *The Orange Shirt Story*. Victoria, BC: Medicine Wheel Education.
- *Webstad, Phyllis (illustrated by Brock Nicol) (2019). *Phyllis's Orange Shirt*. Victoria, BC: Medicine Wheel Education.

- Wilson, Janet (2019). *Our Future: How Kids are Taking Action*. Toronto, ON: Second Story Press.
- Wilson, Rita (illustrated by Emma FitzGerald) (2019). *A Pocket of Time: The Poetic Childhood of Elizabeth Bishop*. Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing.
- Winstanley, Nicola (illustrated by John Martz) (2019). *How to Give Your Cat a Bath: In Five Easy Steps*. Toronto, ON: Tundra Books/Penguin Random House.
- Winters, Kari-Lynn & Lori Sherritt-Fleming (illustrated by Peggy Collins) (2018). *Hungry for Science: Poems to Crunch On*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
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- Zhang, Ange (2019). *A Song for China: How My Father Wrote Yellow River Cantata*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press.

Teachable Moments

Picture books carry wonderful opportunities for learning as well as entertainment! Listening to these books read aloud builds vocabulary (so that children understand new words when they encounter them again) and grammar (the syntax of how words and sentences go together). Examining illustrations develops viewing skills and builds context that often helps with decoding words. These skills and strategies are important to ongoing reading and writing development. But shared reading does more than teach. Interesting content also inspires a love of reading.

Many picture books are terrific sources of information – in addition to telling powerful stories – and present contexts for topics that many adults may find difficult to introduce, such as the loss of a loved one, changing family structures, or social justice themes like homelessness and racism. Picture books can be trusted to start these conversations in simple but effective ways. In this chapter, we summarise some of the Canadian picture books published in our three-year-window that work particularly well towards teachable moments that parents, caregivers or teachers might be seeking, along with developing engagement in a process that will hopefully support lifelong reading! We suggest that these picture books will open the doors to many interesting and valuable conversations as well as great life lessons.

Let's be totally clear about this: we are not advocating for prioritising learning above the joy of simply sharing these titles. Reading without specific educational expectations provides a great deal of incidental teaching and establishes literacy as a lifelong pleasurable pursuit. However, books are wonderful teachers, especially with additional care given to choices of literature and response activities that enhance understanding.

This chapter begins with ideas for sharing picture books with very young children. Then we look at ideas that encourage various age groups to respond to shared reading through art, drama, and creative writing, deepening the understanding of what is read. Finally, this chapter unpacks titles that are particularly good for critical literacy lessons – disrupting stereotypes, considering diverse perspectives, focusing on social and political themes, and enhancing ideas for taking action to support social justice. Rather than duplicating titles from other chapters, we have selected new titles to spotlight here – anticipating that our readers will easily connect them to other themes in the groups of books we spotlight in this guide.

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last. As with other chapters, we have provided target age ranges where we think these books will find their best audience, but there will be exceptions where older or younger children may enjoy reading/listening to these titles.

1 Strategies for Sharing Picture Books with Young Children

One of the most supportive literacy activities we can do with young children is shared reading. Families who read together, and talk about books, in a warm, fun environment, are building many skills that underpin the independent reading and writing tasks that children grow into. Classrooms, libraries and homes that offer shared reading opportunities are rich settings in which children's literacy development can flourish.

1.1 *The Importance of Reading Aloud to Children*

When children listen to books read aloud, it's like they're feasting on literacy vitamins! As children repeatedly hear new words in context, over time they add these words to their listening and speaking vocabularies. Through exposure to the language of books they also gain knowledge of sentence structures and other kinds of grammar – absorbing patterns for how words work together. People don't usually talk like books are written, in complex (or even complete!) sentences. Exposure to the language and syntax of books extends the rich oral language that children bring with them into school, setting the stage for the generous array of texts that older youth may encounter in their development.

Children who sit closely with adults and look at the illustrations are building meaning for what is being read, realising that picture cues support decoding. And if they are watching an adult track along with a finger during reading aloud, these children are being gently invited into a literacy club where rules like “English text works from left to right” and “the story goes from top to bottom” are internalised. As long as the experience of shared reading is fun and relaxed, even more importantly, children are experiencing the joy of reading which we hope will remain with them lifelong!

1.2 *The Importance of Talking about What Is Read*

In addition to listening to stories, youngsters who are actively engaged with older children or adults in talking about what is read gain many skills including confidence in forming and sharing opinions. This kind of talk can also draw attention to the building blocks of words – phonics – and little by little, gain

knowledge about letters and their sounds that supports decoding and reading fluency later in life.

For example, as a parent finishes reading aloud a page in a story, they might say to the young child, “Hey, there’s a word on this page that starts with the same sound as your name.” Maybe the child can successfully guess the answer, or the adult can gently point out and celebrate the special letter. This can develop over time into talking about letter names, and rhyming words, and all sorts of important cues and conventions that underpin reading and writing. Key in all of this is that the conversations are relaxed and the shared time is fun. As soon as it takes on the feeling of “skill drills” or has the potential for the child to fail and lose confidence, it’s critical to stop.

Families who experience stress during shared-reading should take a step back. Ask a teacher or a trusted friend for advice. Draw on resources from special education if you are a teacher or parent concerned about a struggling reader. Pushing children into negative space related to reading slows down a process where we all hope for success.

A valuable point to remember is that we want children to enjoy lifelong experiences with books and reading. As we share literature with young children, let’s do our best to make it fun. This means selecting topics of mutual interest and planning for achievement by allowing the re-reading of familiar texts. If children have memorised a story, we can celebrate their great reading as well as encourage them to track with a finger, or point to particular words and letters.

If we have had good experiences with books in our past, let’s recall what drew us in – the humour, the poignancy, the warmth, the emotion, the *connectedness* a book made us feel, the curiosity and hunger for information, all beautifully mixed together – and envision similar experiences for the children in our care.

1.3 *Connecting Reading and Writing*

As young children read materials of interest, it makes sense to let them process what they’ve read. Drawing a picture and talking about their favourite part or something they’ve learned are great ways to do this. As their confidence grows in sharing ideas, a connection to writing can be encouraged. Children who are emergent writers can use magic writing, or dictate something for an adult to write down.

As adults scribe a child’s message, we are modelling many important skills. We are showing children that text is something a person thinks and says, written down. This is a very abstract idea that takes multiple concrete experiences to understand thoroughly. In addition, we are using common conventions –

printing left to right, top to bottom, for example. We are showing how we form letters, and how individual letters combine to make words, and how words can go into sentences. We are putting finger spaces between words, to help us read them later. We are demonstrating punctuation as we stick in periods and exclamation marks.

When we scribe for a child, we can model saying each word slowly, stretching it like an elastic band, and then printing each sound that we hear. Again, remember to work with what children can understand, in their “zone of proximal development” – making sure they are comfortable and interested – or else switch off the activity. Online resources can be found under the heading *Language Experience Approach* that explains more about this method.

As children record their own message, they may follow developmental patterns of growth:

- Scribbling
- Beginning to include letter-like shapes
- Printing letters but without sound-correspondences
- Using letters and sounds to shape words that have invented spellings
- Beginning to use a mix of the above with some conventional spellings
- Using conventional spellings most of the time

All of the above stages in writing are important. Emergent writers need to be encouraged to put what they know into practice, without censure or perfectionistic frameworks. Also important is that children are writing to communicate something they know – an opinion, a fact they’ve read, a message they want to share with someone else.

A valuable point to remember is that we want children to enjoy lifelong experiences with writing and communicating ideas. Again, let’s do our best to make it fun. This means, as with reading, selecting topics of mutual interest and planning for success by scribing for youngsters, when necessary and when children have something *they* want to communicate. We can also encourage independent practice where children can celebrate seeing their writing taped onto the family fridge for others to read.

1.4 *How Learning to Read and Write Are Like Learning to Swim*

Let’s think about teaching reading and writing like teaching swimming. What if we kept children sitting outside the pool doing exercises? Would they have any fun if they weren’t actually in the water? What if we kept telling them that they weren’t swimming well enough for their age group, and compared them with other youngsters that were doing *so much better...* would our children want to go to the pool at all?

By giving children access to the very best children's literature and encouraging them to enjoy it, we are keeping them in "the pool" while workbooks and isolated skills' drills take them out of the water.

By scribing for them, and letting them re-read dictated or favourite published materials, we are building confidence and fluency. By suggesting that children tell their own stories – maybe practicing forms of material they have heard – youngsters learn that we can all take part in the creation of stories. By encouraging close observation of the art work in books, interpreting the pictures and creating their own illustrations, we are building visual literacy and a lifelong appreciation for artistic creations. And by asking questions our children can answer, engaging their personal responses to what they are hearing, reading and viewing, we are telling them that they are really good at these things we call reading and writing. Should we take another trip to the library? Should we write letters or emails to Grandma? Let's cheer if their answer is a resounding YES!

1.5 *When in Difficulty...*

Learning to read and write are difficult activities for many children. The human brain is wired for sound – in most cases prepared from birth to listen and speak. But it is not wired for text. Reading and writing are complex processes that must be learned quite painstakingly, bit by bit.

Instead of thinking our children are somehow flawed if reading and writing don't come "naturally" we need to think about first steps. Keep it light and fun. Keep it interesting. Encourage them to tell their own stories aloud, and then figure out together how to put them on paper. Play oral word games to help young children hear and manipulate the sounds that will eventually become attached to letters, creating written words. Such word games can be found online under headings like "phonemic awareness" and they involve activities like this:

- "Say the word *hat*. Now say the word *hat* but instead of a 'huh' sound, give me a 'buh' sound (*bat*). Good! Okay, say the word *bat*. Now say the word *bat* but instead of a 'buh' sound, give me a 'sssss' (*sat*)."
- "Listen to these two words, and put your hands on your head if they rhyme: bat, cat (yippee!); night, light (yahoo!); dog, elephant (good for you, I guess I couldn't trick you that time!)."

When families are concerned about children's reading and writing progress, it's important to remember that teachers are trained to support striving and reluctant readers. Special Education Teachers (sometimes called Resource Teachers or Learning Assistance Teachers) have had extra training in this area.

Speech & Language Pathologists are great at identifying whether underlying language problems are interfering with the literacy development of young children, and they may have programming that can help. Community programs, such as those offered by associations for people with learning disabilities, can often support families as well, whether a child has a reading/writing disability or not.

Be cautious of packaged programs that promise to carry a child to “grade-level.” These programs feel a lot like swimming outside the pool to children unless they have actual, real literature, *related to the children’s interests*, that presents rich vocabulary and syntax in the context of literary stories and informational texts as well as abundant illustrations created through diverse media. Workbooks and fill-in-the-blank sheets are not equivalent to the performance of reading for enjoyment and information. Workbooks and fill-in-the-blank sheets are also not equivalent to the enterprise of using drawing and writing to communicate opinions, reflect, organise one’s thoughts, or tell a story that a child is bursting to tell.

In addition to any of the books in previous chapters you think the children you know will like, here are summaries of a few additional “early childhood” titles from our set of Canadian books published since 2017. Full speed ahead into supporting the joy of reading wonderful stories and inhabiting vivid art.

1.6 *Teachable Moments’ Book Suggestions for Younger Readers/ Listeners*

Sloth at the Zoom

*Helaine Becker
and Orbie*

A sloth anticipating delivery to a restful zoo accidentally finds herself at the zoosoom where everybody moves at high speed. With only a small amount of text on each page, along with clever crayon-inspired illustrations, this is a super book for early readers. The quality of the language is also rich, with exciting verbs used throughout. Children may enjoy responding to the verbs by doing their own actions. For ages 3–7.

Big Words Small Stories: The Missing Donut

*Judith Henderson
and T. L. McBeth*

The five stories in this book offer a great transition between typical picture book formatting and chapter books. Each plot revolves around Chris and his cat, Crat, and big juicy words are included and celebrated. T. L. McBeth's graphite-pencil digital artwork is cartoonish and eye-catching, and readers might enjoy creating their own sequels to these tales. For ages 4–8.

How to Catch a Bear Who Loves to Read

*Andrew Katz,
Juliana Léveillé-Trudel
and Joseph Sherman*

This is an imaginative story about the love of reading, based on a storyline about a little girl who catches a bear with books. Reading it aloud with young children can provide a great chance to reinforce the value of reading. Drawing other ways to catch a bear might be fun for everyone! For ages 3–7.



The Better Tree Fort

*Jessica Scott Kerrin
and Qin Leng*

With a lot of persistence and hard work, Russel and his dad build a tree fort together even though Dad is not the most experienced carpenter. When Russel discovers their neighbour's tree fort has all the bells and whistles, he learns an important lesson: there will always be a better tree fort... but not a better dad. This title might inspire discussions and drawings for tree house floor plans designed by other young architects. Qin Leng's alluring artwork was created with ink, watercolour, and pencil crayon. For ages 4–8.



Owls are Good at Keeping Secrets: An Unusual Alphabet

*Sara O'Leary
and Jacob Grant*

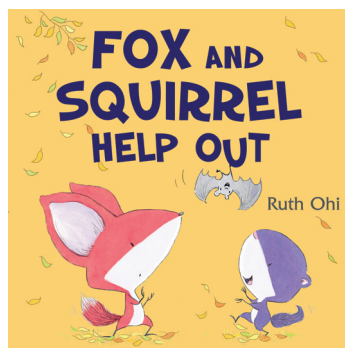
This spectacular alphabet book combines animal facts and fiction in a way that entices children to guess what's not true, and many of the animals represent situations and feelings with which young children can identify. Children responding to this one might want to create their own alphabet books, one letter at a time. For ages 3–6.



Fox and Squirrel Help Out

Ruth Ohi

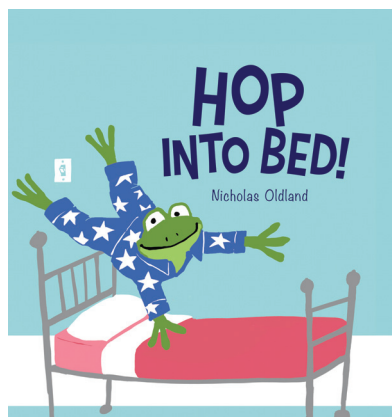
Fox is immediately busy helping out a baby bat who literally drops in, and Squirrel reacts with understandable jealousy. The book's simple language might encourage shared reading, where partners take turns on alternate pages, or entice young children to read the repeated “squeaks” of the bat. For ages 2–7.



Hop into Bed!

Nicholas Oldland

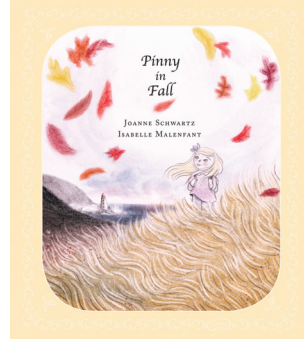
This adventure relates a day in the life of Hop, a frog who loves to... hop! A reading where children respond to the verbs and mimic Hop's actions – bouncing, twisting, jumping, springing, leaping, and flopping – will encourage active vocabulary learning. Art created in Adobe Photoshop and drawn with a Wacom tablet has resulted in humorous, vibrant illustrations. For ages 3–7.



Pinny in Fall

Joanne Schwartz
and Isabelle Malenfant

This book is part of a series about the outdoor adventures of a girl and her friends. It offers a bridge between picture books and early chapter books, organised with a simple table of contents and “chapter titles” for each section. Practicing use of the table of contents to find particular sections might help children use this tool with other books. Isabelle Malenfant’s use of mixed-media here includes soft pastel, graphite pencil, Q-tips, and an electric eraser. For ages 4–8.



2 Reader Response

Reading comprehension is the goal of reading. Activities that help readers think more carefully about the characters, situations, and information in what they read deepen their understandings. Making connections to themselves, other texts, and the wider world is an important skill that children learn and improve over time. These connections can be practiced at home, in other community settings, and at school.

Dr. Louise Rosenblatt was a major theorist in literacy education and one of her contributions involved the idea that reading is a *dynamic transaction* between reader and text. Her work helps us understand that readers bring thoughts and feelings to what they read, and this affects what they take away from the reading.

Answering only *literal* comprehension questions after reading – such as “What colour was the jacket she wore?” – does not encourage readers to think deeply about what they read or to reflect upon it in the context of their own lives. Literal comprehension questions, given as tests, privilege the kinds of information valued by the creators of the test and not necessarily the kinds of information valued by the reader or prioritised in the reader’s family or community. In this way, testing children on accuracy of recalled details can label them as poor readers when in fact their comprehension is good, it just doesn’t match the narrow band of responses expected regarding the literal questions that were asked.

In contrast to literal comprehension, *inferential* comprehension (being able to “read between the lines”) and personal response are important signs

of reader understanding. They aren't easily measured by standardised tests, however, and for this reason, have often been overlooked on testing protocols.

Art, Drama and Creative Writing Activities are three categories of response that greatly support reading comprehension, according to children's literature expert Dr. Charlotte Huck. Many contemporary literacy specialists such as Nanci Atwell, Lucy Calkins, Kelly Gallagher, and Penny Kittle – rock stars of the literacy world – support the view that independent reading skills and strategies are encouraged by wide reading, interest-based reading, and follow-ups that respect children's authentic responses to what they read.

In addition to books suggested in previous chapters, here are summaries of some more titles from our set of Canadian books published between 2017 and 2019. We offer specific response activities as ideas from which to springboard. Enjoy the heights as creativity really knows no bounds! For each of the suggestions made for the books listed, the reader might instead decide on some other path to demonstrate the creative potential of reader-response. The sky is the limit!

2.1 *Book Suggestions That Inspire Art Activities*

Come Back to Earth, Esther!

Josée Bisailon

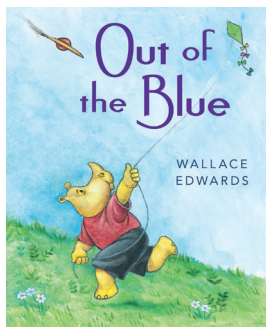
Esther is an ordinary girl who imagines her future in space. Readers can be encouraged to imagine themselves in new places, as well, creating cut-paper collage-type pictures similar to Josée Bisailon's style. For ages 4–8.



Out of the Blue

Wallace Edwards

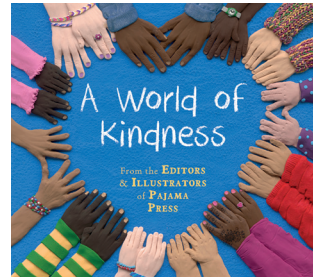
Ernest meets a space creature and both are afraid. With time and patience, the two discover they have something in common and become friends who help one another. This title unfolds in comic panels as well as full-page pictures, and could inspire young artists to create a storyboard of either the beginning/middle/end presented here, or their own creative tale. For ages 3–7.



A World of Kindness

Ann Featherstone (editor)

Various illustrators present images of kindness in this lovely picture book that could invite readers to create their own pictures of what kindness means to them. Emergent writers could dictate sentences underneath their picture for productive re-reading. For ages 2–6.



Fox and Raccoon

Lesley-Anne Green

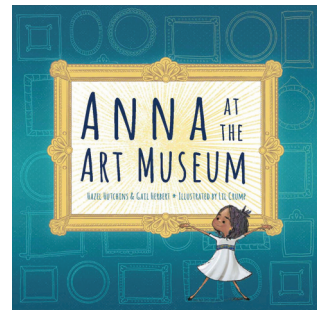
From the “Juniper Hollows” series, Fox and Raccoon are good friends who help each other. Shoebox dioramas could be an art project inspired by the three-dimensional textile art in this title. For ages 3–7.



Anna at the Art Museum

*Hazel Hutchins,
Gail Herbert
and Lil Crump*

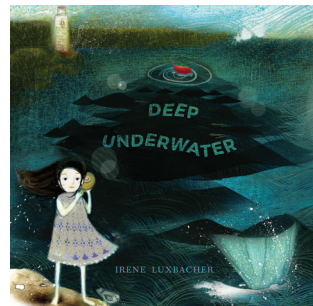
Anna and her mother visit an art museum where Anna is extremely bored. However, she eventually discovers a work of art she likes, and her perspectives on the gallery change. Children might enjoy creating a piece of original art along with a reason why the gallery should acquire it for their collection. For ages 4–7.



Deep Underwater

Irene Luxbacher

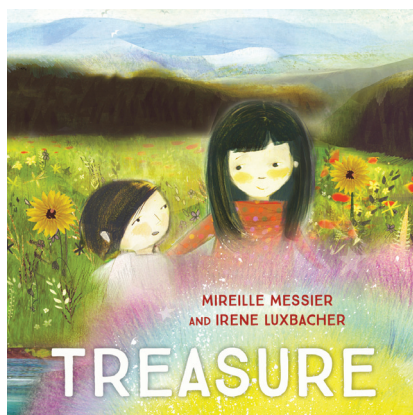
No other title would be better to motivate paintings of the undersea world than this dreamy picture book by Irene Luxbacher, whose watercolour, acrylic, and collage illustrations are truly inspirational. For ages 5–8.



Treasure

*Mireille Messier
and Irene Luxbacher*

This charming book about two children searching the woods for a treasure reminds readers that the best treasures are hard to find and very personal. Children may enjoy drawing their vision of the best treasure ever. Irene Luxbacher's elaborate, dreamy mixed-media illustrations were produced using graphite, watercolour, acrylic, soft pencil crayon, and found paper. For ages 3–8.



The Clothesline

Orbie

Here we have the creative problem of an active boy stuck on a clothesline. Solving this challenge as a puzzle, through drawing and explaining a solution, would offer great fuel for critical thinking and expressing ideas. Orbie's dramatic watercolour artwork is uncluttered and captivating. For ages 4–8+.

Sleep, Sheep!

*Kerry Lyn Sparrow
and Guillaume Perreault*

Duncan dodges bedtime as best he can, until counting sheep presents him with an animal whose excuses rival his own. Children could create artistic advice to add to a “Bedtime Book for Tired Parents” – what ideas could help Duncan and other youngsters turn off the light? Guillaume Perreault's illustrations offer warmth, humour, and an illuminative use of colour. For ages 3–7.

Small in the City

Sydney Smith

This poetic, visual feast for the senses depicts what it's like for one child to be small in the city. It might inspire readers to explore Sydney Smith's ink and watercolour media and present what it's like for them to be children where they live. For ages 4–8+.

Moon Wishes

*Guy Storms,
Patricia Storms
and Milan Pavlović*

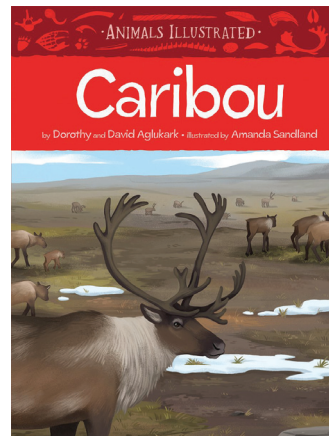
This title lists all sorts of things the narrator would do “... if I were the moon.” Young children can be encouraged to use watercolour or some other media to show what they would do if they were the moon. Milan Pavlović’s kaleidoscopic images use mixed-media, drawing inks and colour pencils. For ages 4–7.

2.2 *Book Suggestions That Inspire Drama Activities*

Caribou

*Dorothy Aglukark,
David Aglukark
and Amanda Sandland*

This beautiful volume contains a wealth of facts about the caribou, along with firsthand accounts from elders Dorothy and David Aglukark, who live in the Arctic. Excellent non-fiction titles such as this one offer interesting opportunities for children to present informative soliloquys or interviews from the perspective of the focus animal. For ages 4–9.



Sir Simon: Super Scarer

Cale Atkinson

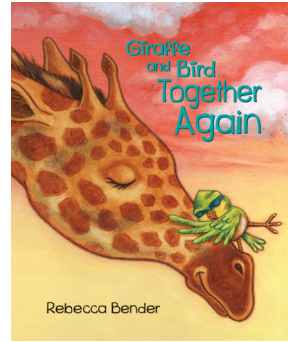
Sir Simon, a ghost, tricks Chester into doing his chores, freeing himself up for cross stitching, eating pizza, and various other activities. Children could role play how they would convince someone else to do chores they dislike and mime things they would do in their additional spare time. The richly toned, digital artwork here is witty and sweet. For ages 4–8.



Giraffe and Bird Together Again

Rebecca Bender

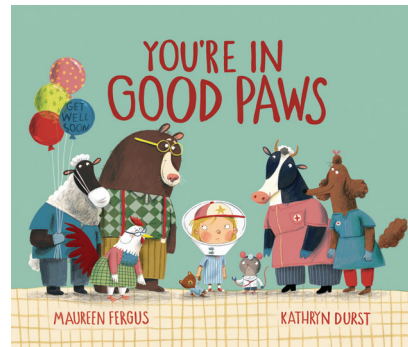
Third in Rebecca Bender's series of books about two squabbling friends, this book, chock full of Bender's acrylic and coloured pencil illustrations, offers loads of rich fare for improvisation. Children can present arguments from one side or another, or create dramatic scenes of these animals in conflict... and then creating peace with one another. For ages 4–7.



You're in Good Paws

*Maureen Fergus
and Kathryn Durst*

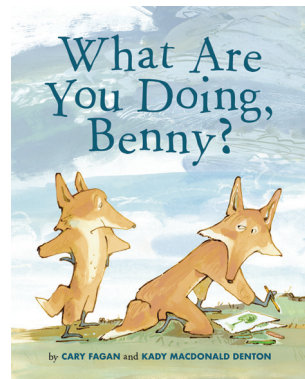
A mix-up occurs for young Leo when his parents take him to the animal hospital instead of the human hospital. Kathryn Durst's pastel and coloured pencil illustrations add to the hilarity. Children can be encouraged to “interview” various animals in the context of Leo's care, and improvise the weary parents who just want their son to get better soon, offering rich contexts for language use. For ages 4–8.



What Are You Doing, Benny?

*Cary Fagan
and Kady MacDonald Denton*

This story about two siblings, enhanced by Kady MacDonald Denton's spectacular panel illustrations, lends itself to improvised scene work as children take on “big brother/little brother” dialogues. For ages 3–8.

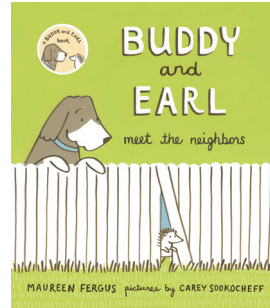


Buddy and Earl Meet the Neighbors

Maureen Fergus

and *Carey Sookocheff*

In this volume of the “Buddy and Earl” series, the dog characteristically wants to nap but the hedgehog wants to play superheroes saving the city, a storyline supported by Carey Sookocheff’s elegant acrylic gouache illustrations on watercolour paper, assembled in Adobe Photoshop. Taking this theme into imaginary play can support language development in young children. For ages 4–8.

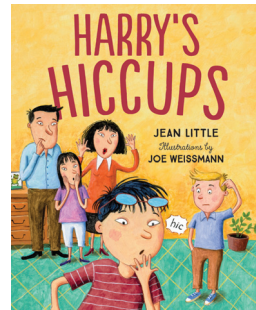


Harry's Hiccups

Jean Little

and *Joe Weissmann*

In this picture book written by children’s literature legend Jean Little, and marvellously illustrated by Joe Weissmann, using acrylics on board, Harry Chung has a case of the hiccups. He follows the advice of one person after another until a frog finally surprises the hiccups away. Children could interview others to discover various ways to get rid of hiccups, and then dramatise their favourites. For ages 4–8.

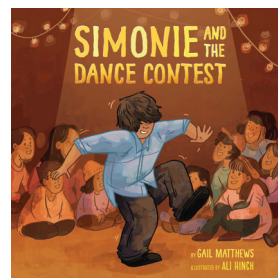


Simonie and the Dance Contest

Gail Matthews

and *Ali Hinch*

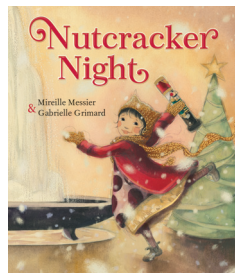
This heartwarming story shows how practice – and a little inspiration – can go a long way. It is based on the annual Christmas dance contest in the community of Taloyoak, Nunavut. Groups of children could create tableaus (frozen scenes) of contest preparation and experience. They could also improvise TV interviews of the winner, and even “hotseat” the floor itself in seeking different perspectives of the dance-off. For ages 4–9.



Nutcracker Night

*Mireille Messier
and Gabrielle Grimard*

The magic of a child's visit to the ballet with her father, illustrated with watercolour, gouache, oil, coloured pencil, and digital media, is captured in a text with the full range of onomatopoeic possibilities! Creating a “soundscape” for the story, or simply chiming in with the “noisy words,” will offer lots of auditory play for children listening to the tale. For ages 3–7.



No Help Wanted!

Ruth Ohi

With brightly corresponding mixed-media watercolour and coloured pencil illustrations, this tale explores conflict when one child wants sole care of a school pet. Role playing among characters might work well to explore related issues and solutions as Posey, Jacob, and Sam discuss the care of Bluey.

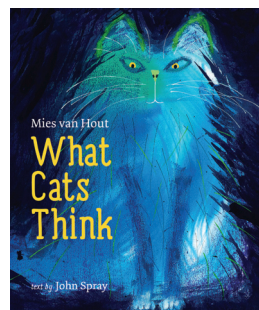
In addition, a character study of Bluey by “hotseating” – where a child plays Bluey and others ask him questions – might give individual children a chance to respond to information they have learned about fish, speaking from Bluey’s perspective: “*First I want you to remember not to overfeed me....*” For ages 4–8.



What Cats Think

*John Spray
and Mies van Hout*

The many facets of a cat's personality are celebrated here. Capricious free verse from author John Spray pairs with Mies van Hout's striking acrylic ink, oil pastel and gouache illustrations. Evocative vocabulary in bold text may inspire elegant mime as young children can be encouraged to portray these words with their faces and bodies. For ages 5–9.



2.3 *Book Suggestions that Inspire Creative Writing Activities*

Unicorns 101

Cale Atkinson

This creatively zany picture book contains everything everyone always wanted to know about unicorns. It could inspire book-making on all sorts of creatures – made-up, of course! For ages 5–10.

Little Brothers & Little Sisters

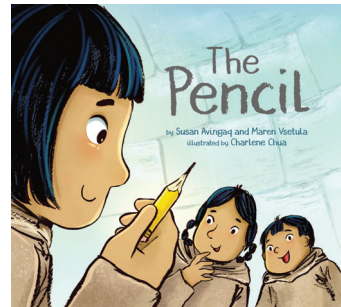
Monica Arnaldo

This book celebrates the negatives and positives of having an older sibling. Children could respond by creating lists of benefits and drawbacks for various family positions: an only child, the eldest child, a child in the middle, or the youngest child. For ages 4–7.

The Pencil

*Susan Avingaq,
Maren Vsetula
and Charlene Chua*

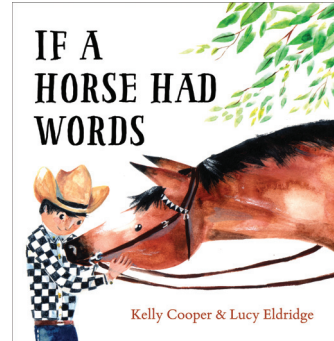
Susan loves watching Anaana write letters to people in other camps. Anaana has one precious pencil, and she keeps it safe in her box for special things... until Anaana is away helping a neighbour and Ataata brings out the pencil! This story is about the importance of using things wisely. Researching the origins of pencils, and creating pencil pamphlets (in pencil, of course!), might inspire youngsters to think about the history of common objects. For ages 3–8.



If a Horse Had Words

*Kelly Cooper
and Lucy Eldridge*

This engaging book, illustrated in dramatic watercolour, is a celebration of the friendship between a boy and a horse. Written in simple, evocative text that suggests key words from the horse's perspective, it offers a great opportunity for young writers to create their own word-lists pertinent to other animals. For example, a puppy's list might include: SHOES, PARK, and BLANKET. For ages 4–8.



Hotel Fantastic

Thomas Gibault

From superheroes and dragons to monsters and aliens, everyone is welcome at this hotel, and the suits are designed to meet everyone's needs – depicted through cinematic, digital illustrations. A twist at the end reveals the vivid imagination of one child, and others can be invited to create their own spectacular guest house. For ages 3–8.

The Magician's Secret

*Zachary Hyman
and Joe Bluhm*

Charlie is transported into his grandpa's adventures through a collection of objects in an old trunk, illustrated with Joe Bluhm's fantastical digital artwork. Children can be offered a range of objects to choose from, and write their own escapades. For ages 5–9.



The Bagel King

Andrew Larsen

and Sandy Nichols

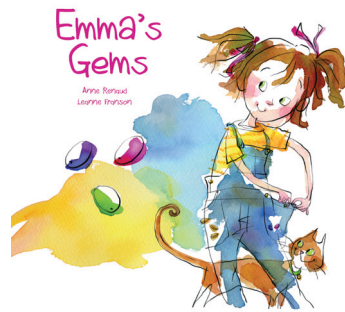
Eli's grandfather treats his grandson to bagels and cream cheese every Saturday. But when Zaida has an accident and needs to rest, Eli must find a way to treat him in return, a story vividly illustrated in delicious-looking acrylics. Young writers can list other ways to help Zaida, or note things they themselves have done to assist people in need. For ages 4–8.

Emma's Gems

Anne Renaud

and Leanne Franson

Emma's grandfather carries three stones in one of his pockets. Each day, as he carries out three acts of kindness – one for a person, one for an animal, and one for the planet – the stones change pockets, a story stylishly illustrated by Leanne Franson with ink and water-colour. Children can experiment with stones of their own, keeping a diary of the helpful tasks completed each day. For ages 4–8+.



Gargantua (Jr!): Defender of Earth

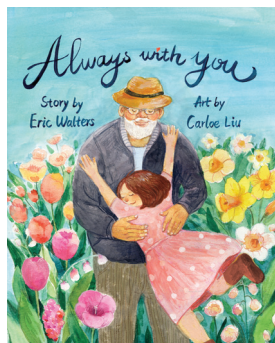
Kevin Sylvester

A young Godzilla-like narrator wants to grow up to be just like Mom. This title, brightly illustrated with pencil, pen and ink on Bristol board, with finishing and colour added in Adobe Photoshop, can inspire older readers to create parallel stories based on other fictional monsters (and their families). For ages 4–8.

Always With You

*Eric Walters
and Carloe Liu*

Emily's grandfather has passed away, but he leaves her a series of letters – appearing as pop-out letters within this book – that she opens over time. Children can be encouraged to create letters of their own to connect with loved ones or even for their older selves. For ages 5–9+.



Dog vs. Ultra Dog

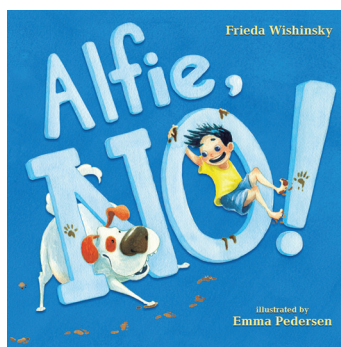
*Troy Wilson
and Clayton Hanmer*

When Tim becomes obsessed with a superhero, his dog jealously tries to win his attention. This title uses a number of graphic novel conventions that might inspire young writers to pen their own pet-inspired stories with speech bubbles, thought bubbles, and narration as well as comic-style illustrations. For ages 5–8.

Alfie, No!

*Frieda Wishinsky
and Emma Pedersen*

This captivating title is the story of a boy and his dog that both get dirty playing, with highly engaging illustrations in gouache on cold pressed watercolour paper. Its surprise ending tells us that the narrator is actually the dog. Children might enjoy dictating or writing their own stories from the point of view of a real or imagined pet. For ages 4–8.



3 Critical Literacy

Some adults might suggest that critical literacy lessons are the most important teachings of all in order to help young readers grow up to be positive change-makers. In addition, we think about critical literacy as a skill that also motivates

reading and writing, as children realise the impact of words on themselves, their peers and families, and the wider world around them.

We see critical literacy lesson as disrupting the commonplace – helping children unpack stereotypes in what they read. We also believe these lessons will help young readers consider multiple perspectives – an important skill when working with other people – focusing on socio-political themes important to the ongoing wellbeing of Planet Earth and its occupants. We also suggest that critical literacy is one way of taking action to support social justice – talking about what is right and wrong, good and bad, and then figuring out ways to improve things as best we can.

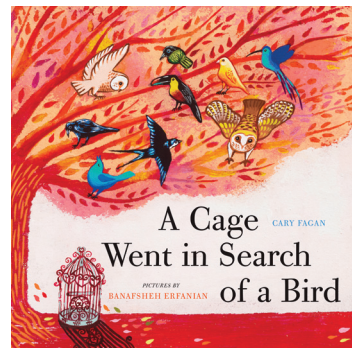
In addition to applying critical listening, reading, and viewing strategies to books previously listed in this text, the following section has titles listed with examples of critical literacy lessons, although learning can also occur very nicely through diverse reading without direct follow-up.

3.1 *Book Suggestions That Connect to Critical Literacy Topics*

A Cage Went in Search of a Bird

*Cary Fagan
and Banafsheh Erfanian*

This story is based upon an aphorism by Franz Kafka and follows themes of belonging and friendship, accompanied by luxurious acrylic and oil illustrations. Readers can discuss characteristics they look for in a friend, and consider how other objects might be re-purposed to save the environment. For ages 4–8.



Little Blue Chair

*Cary Fagan
and Madeline Kloepfer*

A chair embarks on a journey from one occupant to another, with vintage ink and pencil illustrations extending additional details. Readers can think further about reusing and recycling possessions of their own. For ages 4–8.



The Day Dad Joined My Soccer Team

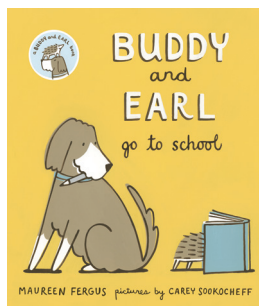
*Maureen Fergus
and Mike Lowery*

This timely story presents a father who volunteers to help out with his son's soccer team and competitively jumps into the game. His son very responsibly teaches him some rules about parenting as well as coaching, leading to good lessons for helicopter parents tempted to interfere with their own children's activities, as well as good lessons, for everyone, about respect. Mike Lowery's comic-esque Adobe Photoshop illustrations pay attention to many engaging details. For ages 4–8+.

Buddy and Earl Go to School

*Maureen Fergus
and Carey Sookocheff*

Buddy, the dog, and Earl, the hedgehog, spend an entertaining day at school where Earl unexpectedly becomes the teacher. Acryl gouache illustrations engage and enhance. There is an interesting theme here about achievement depending on the relationship between what is taught and the learner, as Buddy excels at Earl's lessons. Questions for older students about who decides school curriculum could naturally follow. For ages 4–9+.



Hand over Hand

*Alma Fullerton
and Renné Benoit*

Nina wants to fish but her grandfather discourages her: “A boat is not the place for a girl.” Various messages to identify include: girls can succeed in areas stereotypically associated with boys; be self-sufficient; follow your dreams; ask for help when you need it. In addition, the full storyline as Grandfather changes his mind is a powerful example of growth, extended by Benoit's eye-catching illustrations in coloured pencil and watercolour. For ages 4–8+.

What Happens Next

Susan Hughes

and *Carey Sookocheff*

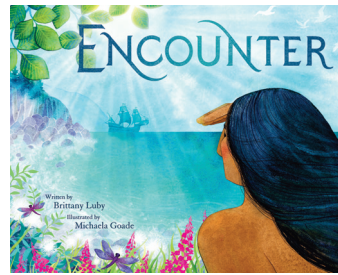
This picture book focuses on a child's experiences of being bullied at school, simply yet poignantly illustrated in acryl gouache. While the narrator's difficult situation is resolved in the story, children can be encouraged to talk about whether they think this would happen in real life. Through discussions after reading the book, alternative ideas for supporting victims and facing bullies can flourish. For ages 6–10+.

Encounter

Brittany Luby

and *Michaela Goade*

Fisher and Sailor meet on local soil in 1534, but what if things had been quite different? This spectacular picture book, illustrated in digital and mixed-media, involves a re-writing of history by two Indigenous creators. Brittany Luby, of Anishinaabe descent, is a historian at the University of Guelph; Michaela Goade, of Tlingit descent, is a designer and illustrator living in Alaska. Questions for young readers include: “How does this story differ from historical accounts about the Jacques Cartier expedition to what is now known as North America?” and “What does this story help us understand?” For ages 7–10.



The Fog

Kyo Maclear

and *Kenard Pak*

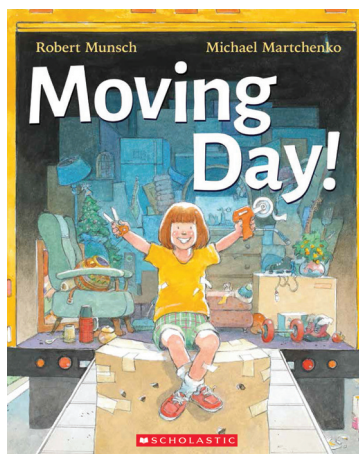
This dreamy picture book offers a metaphor for environmental awareness as two friends become concerned about the increasing fog around their island. Readers could be encouraged to think about how “the fog” could actually be any social justice issue to which the author is nudging us to attend. For ages 4–12.



Moving Day!

*Robert Munsch
and Michael Martchenko*

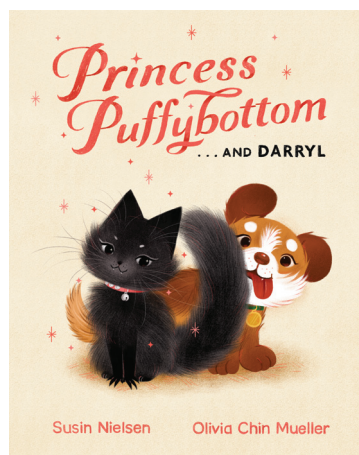
This exuberant story, accompanied by emotive watercolour, pencil, and digital media, covers a moving day where Danielle is asked to help pack... and subsequently puts her siblings in boxes. While all in good fun here, readers can be asked to examine the actions of parents and children and describe their own moving day ideas where things run a little more smoothly. For ages 3–8.



Princess Puffybottom... and Darryl

*Susin Nielsen
and Olivia Chin Mueller*

An age-old story about a pampered cat who is annoyed when a cute puppy arrives on the scene, this title has a contemporary twist along with lavish, digital illustrations. The pet owners, soon to bring home a new baby, are a same-sex couple. Older readers might be encouraged to think about how this book fills some gaps in stories about families. For ages 4–8.



The House at the End of the Road

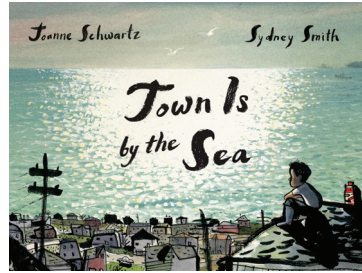
Kari Rust

Three children vandalise an old house and confess their actions to Grandma. When they return to apologise, they meet an old man who was once their grandma's favourite teacher and they visit him all summer. When Mr. Peterson is suddenly moved into a retirement house, the young people long to do something nice for him... and eventually create a care parcel with photos of his old digs. Discussions of this book could lead into conversations about ageism, impulsivity, and personal agency. For ages 5–8+.

Town Is by the Sea

Joanne Schwartz
and Sydney Smith

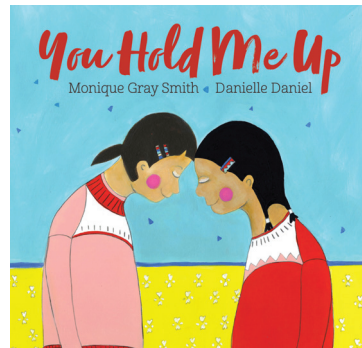
Set in 1950s Cape Breton, this story depicts the legacy of a mining town through the eyes of a young boy who will no doubt follow his father underground. Illustrations by Sydney Smith will enchant audiences with their blend of muted watercolour, ink, and gouache. Readers will be inspired to think about choice and agency, as well as environmental law and worker safety. For ages 5–adult.



You Hold Me Up

Monique Gray Smith
and Danielle Daniel

This beautiful book presents different ways people help one another. It can be a simple story about friendship, or a complex metaphor for entire countries. Author Monique Gray Smith has Cree and Lakota ancestry while illustrator Danielle Daniel – who has created bold and sensitive images for this book, using gouache, acrylic, and pencil – is Métis. There is also another version of this book available in Plains Cree and English, translated by Mary Cardinal Collins. For ages 3–8+.



The Couch Potato

Kerry Lyn Sparrow
and Yinfan Huang

Mr. Russet, a stay-at-home dad, can't keep up with his family's clutter so he goes on strike. In the spirit of *The Little Red Hen* and other traditional tales, he finally fries up the living-room potato into a glorious snack that no one else wants to eat... so he enjoys it himself. The images, in coloured pencil, gouache, and watercolour, are hilarious. Conversations about ways to divide chores in busy families, as well as Dad's role as home-maker, might arise from this one. For ages 4–8.

Fairy Science

Ashley Spires

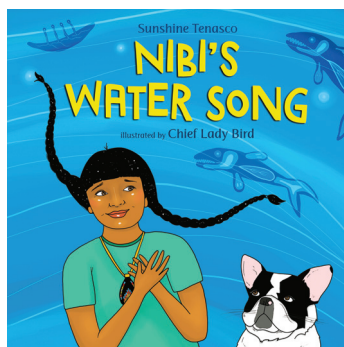
A fairy named Esther pits magic against science to save a tree, a storyline presented in engaging prose and mesmerising digital illustrations. Discussions for older readers about women in science, as well as how to determine what is fact in contemporary media, are both topics worthy of air time. For ages 4–8.



Nibi's Water Song

*Sunshine Tenasco
and Chief Lady Bird*

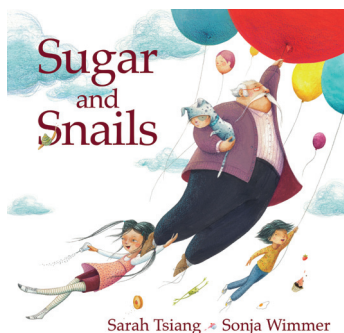
A young girl's powerful voice enlists others to stand together in support of fresh water for her community and beyond. An afterword presents a call to action in relation to the many Indigenous communities in Canada without access to clean water. Author Sunshine Tenasco is Anishinabe and a clean water activist. Chief Lady Bird is a Chippewa and Potawatomi artist from Rama First Nation and Moose Deer Point First Nation, and her inspiring illustrations here were created digitally. For ages 4–10+.



Sugar and Snails

*Sarah Tsiang
and Sonja Wimmer*

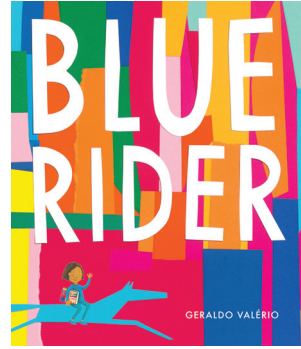
This picture book unpacks the gender stereotype that depicts girls as “sugar and spice” and boys as “frogs and snails.” Readers can be encouraged to consider books and other media that propagate or challenge gender stereotypes, and interrogate the messaging they hear in their communities. For ages 4–8.



Blue Rider

Geraldo Valério

A city wakes, a young girl glimpses the morning, and goes outside into a crowd. In this wordless picture book, the young girl finds a book with a beautiful blue horse on the cover. Her imagination takes flight as the horse gallops into episodes of colour that continue to spill from the girl's memory when she returns home. Geraldo Valério was inspired by the German Expressionist group Der Blaue Reiter, and his images here demonstrate how art can transform the everyday. Audiences can talk about the therapeutic power of art. For ages 3–10+.



Great Job, Mom!

Holman Wang

Paired with *Great job, Dad!* this story dislodges gender stereotypes by describing what two parents do as occupations, and for love. Mom, for example, is employed as a carpenter but at home she has many other roles. A “behind the scenes” section at the back of the book offers information on the creation of Wang’s unique, needle-felted 3D illustrations. For ages 4–7.



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Canadian Classics New and Old

Although the other chapters in this volume are focused on the best new picture books, this chapter spotlights some Canadian titles of exceptional quality, published before 2017, that we think are groundbreaking as change-agents in the field of children's literature. They have either already remained highly relevant over time, or else we predict their lasting qualities. We call these titles "Canadian Classics New and Old."

We think these books will continue to capture the hearts and minds of young readers. Some of them will also offer nostalgic connections for adults who read them in years gone by. Because quality children's literature takes us back into childhood rather than simply talking about childhood, adult readers have an opportunity to time travel into their younger years by reading these titles, which can appeal to all ages.

In addition to offering a summary of the content of each of the books we have selected for this section, we have also included special indications of merit or aspects of titles that we think demonstrated new ways of seeing and representing the world at the time of publication. This originality can be thought of as Radical Change, a term coined by Dr. Eliza Dresang as she researched the evolution of children's literature. In her view, the content and design of children's books is shifting over time, partly as a result of influences from the digital world. The three areas of change she lists are: *new forms and formats*; *changing perspectives*; and *changing boundaries*. We have grouped the titles in this chapter under these topic headings as a way to think about their contributions to *radical* in the field of children's books.

While we have given suggestions about audience age regarding the books summarised in earlier chapters, we open the titles in this chapter to wider considerations because of their ability to stand the test of time, and/or the innovations they present to the picture book field. For this reason, we have not included an age range for the titles summarised in this section.

1 New Forms and Formats

The books here definitely break the mold when it comes to forms and formats. There are titles that combine graphic novel conventions such as speech bubbles, font, and colour use with more conventional picture book traditions.

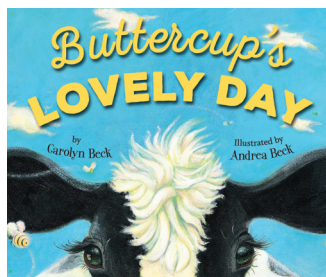
Some of the non-fiction titles use sidebars and other design choices that reflect online reading. Books with seemingly unfinished endings and non-sequential storylines also appear in this category as well as stories that have shifted from one form to another.

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last. We have also included the original year of publication after the title.

Buttercup's Lovely Day (2008)

*Carolyn Beck
and Andrea Beck*

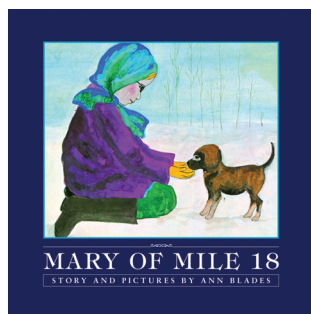
Rhyming text carries us through a day in the life of a joyful Holstein whose motto is “It’s so so fine/ to be bovine.” Carolyn Beck plays with humour in tremendously original vocabulary sequences that include “the fluzz of the flies” and “stinky slinky funky skunk.” Her sister Andrea Beck has created dazzling acrylics that overflow with greens and blues.



Mary of Mile 18 (1971)

Ann Blades

A girl who finds a wolf pup is forbidden to keep it as a farm pet until it proves its worth in alerting the family to coyotes. Ann Blades was a 19-year-old teacher in remote British Columbia (Mile 18, now called Buick) when she wrote and illustrated this book, inspired by the lack of titles reflecting her students’ lives. Originally published in 1971, it is one of the first Canadian titles in full colour, and was awarded Book of the Year by the Canadian Library Association.

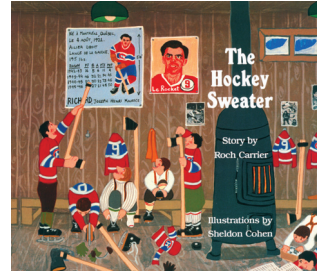


The Hockey Sweater (1984, from a short story first published in 1979)

Roch Carrier,

Sheila Fischman (translator)

and Sheldon Cohen



This autobiographical adult short story, originally in French, was adapted into an animated short film as well as this brightly illustrated picture book. It is an iconic piece of Canadian literature, and some audiences interpret it as an allegory for tensions between francophone and anglophone communities. A line from this story appears on Canadian five-dollar bills as part of the Canadian Journey banknote series, making Carrier the first author to be quoted in this way.

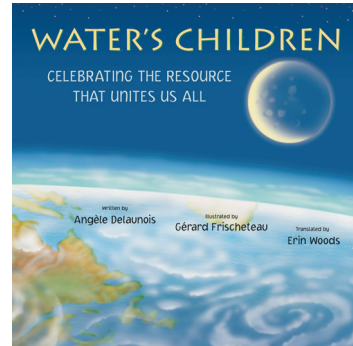
Water's Children: Creating the Resource that Unites Us All

(2006, French; 2017, English)

Angèle Delaunois,

Erin Woods (translator)

and Gérard Frischeteau



The importance of water unfolds from twelve different perspectives as young people around the world describe in lyrical text what water means to them. The final page offers translations of the various languages used in order to metaphorically describe how water is important. This title was first published in Quebec, in French, and received many positive reviews for both text and illustrations.

Lii Yiiboo Nayaapiwak lii Swer: L'alfabet di Michif/Owls See Clearly at Night: A Michif Alphabet (2010)

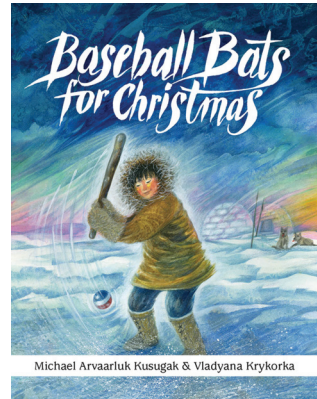
Julie Flett

This is a bilingual alphabet book that uses Michif as the book's primary language and English secondarily. While alphabet books have traditionally been seen as only resources for younger children, this beautiful book promotes *Métis* culture and supports the growth of a language at risk of being lost.

Baseball Bats for Christmas (1990)

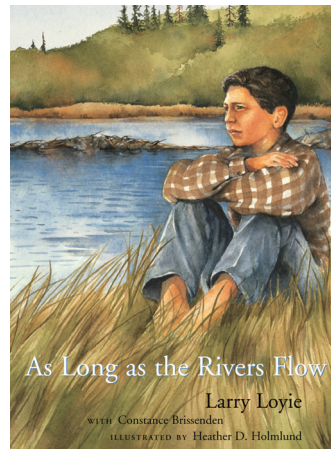
*Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak
and Vladyana Krykorka*

This story from Inuit author Michael Kusugak flows from the oral storytelling tradition, and during its 1990 debut, it was praised for its fresh, original voice on the landscape of children's picture books. Six-year-old Arvaarluk is an asthmatic Inuit boy who loves baseball; his friend takes an axe to one of the mysterious trees a bush pilot leaves at the local store, and all the young people in Repulse Bay learn the game.

**As Long as the Rivers Flow** (2002)

*Larry Loyie,
Constance Brissenden
and Heather D. Holmlund*

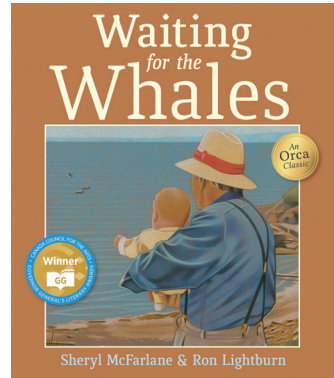
Larry Loyie (Oskiniko) was an award-winning Canadian author and playwright of Cree ancestry who was known for works about his childhood residential school experiences. This picture book tells about his last summer prior to entering the St. Bernard Indian Residential School in Grouard, Alberta, which he attended between the ages of 9 and 14. The book, uniquely written in four chapters, contain autobiographical episodes. Its title, spoken by Larry's grandfather as a reminder to his grandchildren, foreshadows words spoken years later by Chief Dan George.



Waiting for the Whales (1991)

*Sheryl McFarlane
and Ron Lightburn*

This multi-award winning title (for both author and illustrator) was described as “timeless” when it was originally published in 1991. In prose that suggests non-fiction, it follows the circle of life for both a human family and a pod of whales, with nameless characters that foster empathy. Aspects of the story are left unexplained, and readers fill in the blanks through text-based inferences as well as personal connections.

**Josepha: A Prairie Boy's Story** (1994)

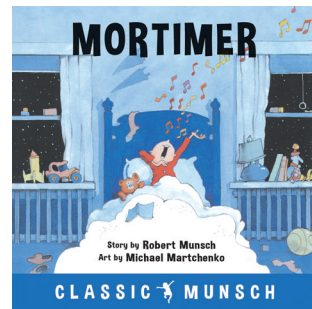
*Jim McGugan
and Murray Kimber*

This story, set on the prairies in 1900, follows a friendship between two boys, one of whom is an older immigrant remaining in the primary row at school because he hasn't learned English. Unusual choices in perspective make Murray Kimber's illustrations really stand out, and the story itself has an ending that is unique in a gentle deviation from happily-ever-after.

Mortimer (1983)

*Robert Munsch
and Michael Martchenko*

Classic Munsch, this book resounds with exuberance, as its repeated refrains entice young children to chime in as noisily as possible, encouraged by bolded text. As with many of Robert Munsch's titles, it fastens on a particularly common childhood experience – in this instance, aversion to bedtime – and plays it up into a performance of over-the-top characters and delightful child-centred humour. All Munsch works, loved by decades of children, began as stories that he told to youngsters, and his written work resounds with polish from those repeated tellings.



My Family Tree and Me (2015)

Dušan Petričić

This is one child's exploration of his family tree, uniquely borrowing from a "photo album" style that works splendidly with this subject matter. The book's front-to-middle is dedicated to the boy's father's side of the family, while the back-to-middle is devoted to his mother's family, and thus various directions of page-turning are encouraged.

The Party (1997)

Barbara Reid

This popular title encourages multiple readings to discover all the small details of a family birthday party hidden in the three-dimensional illustrations captivantly created with plasticine, which is shaped and pressed onto an illustration board. Acrylic paint and other materials are also used for special effects. What is important in this subject matter is the full range of experiences shared by two sisters in a yard full of relatives.



Away (2017)

Emil Sher

and *Qin Leng*

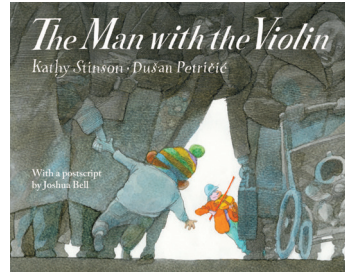
Summer camp is approaching and Skip doesn't want to go. A series of interactions between mother and daughter shifts her unease to confidence and is presented entirely through illustrations and post-it notes. Qin Leng's captivating watercolour illustrations extend the brief yet evocative text, and Michael Solomon's design work here is spectacular.



The Man with the Violin (2013)

*Kathy Stinson
and Dušan Petricic*

This outstanding story, based on an actual event arising out of a 2007 experiment by the *Washington Post*, celebrates the power of music and a child who is willing to stop and listen. World famous violinist Joshua Bell appeared in a subway station with his Stradivarius and played a free concert – and while adults passed him by, many children would have liked to pause and listen to him. Dušan Petricic's illustrations creatively use colour to present musical sounds and the effect music has on young listeners.

**The Wildlife 123: A Nature Counting Book** (1989)

Jan Thornhill

Similar to her clever alphabet book, *The Wildlife ABC*, first published in 1988, Jan Thornhill presents numbers in words and symbols alongside an interesting array of animals in their natural habitats, with the number of animals also repeated in colourful page borders. Flowing rhymes and a “nature notes” section at the end elevate the learning. Thornhill’s exceptional artwork here far surpasses the typical fare in counting and alphabet titles.

Ancient Thunder (2006)

Leo Yerxa

Leo Yerxa was born in 1947 on the Little Eagle Reserve, Couchiching First Nation, in north-western Ontario, and this collage-style book celebrates Indigenous art along with wild horses. The artist uses hand-made water colour paper, treated to look like leather, and then painted with bright watercolours mixed with gouache – absolutely stunning. This book won a 2006 Governor General’s Award for Children’s Illustration.



2 Changing Perspectives

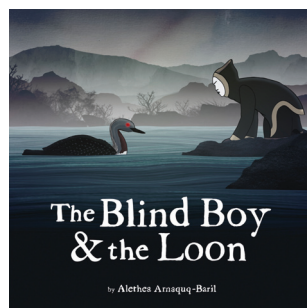
New perspectives can be seen in titles that include voices previously unheard in the picture book form. Adult characters appear in some of these books, dislodging an old idea about the necessity of child protagonists. Characters from various cultures and language groups often emerge from their authors' and illustrators' personal experiences. Characters with disabilities, who present as protagonists, add important points of view. We are cheering at the mirrors and windows here.

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

The Blind Boy & the Loon (2014)

*Alethea Arnaquq-Baril
and Daniel Gies*

This traditional Inuit story explains the origins of the narwhal, while warning against becoming sightless through a desire for revenge. Alethea Arnaquq-Baril is an Inuit filmmaker, animator, and documentarian. Daniel Gies' underwater scenes and Northern landscapes are haunting.



Long Powwow Nights (2009)

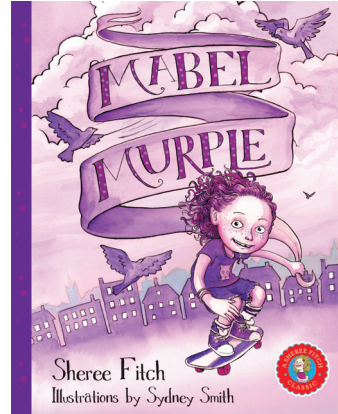
*David Bouchard,
Pam Aleekuk,
Buffy Sainte-Marie (music),
Patsy Paul-Martin (translator)
and Leonard Paul*

This book celebrates powwows and their significance to Indigenous people. Its narrator reflects upon his mother's love of the dance, and his mother's life and teachings as she grows older and passes away – a full circle not often presented in older picture book resources. The book contains dual English and Mi'kmaq text (while another version uses French/Mi'kmaq) as well as a CD recording that includes music by Buffy Sainte-Marie. David Bouchard's website identifies him as a Métis author and educator born in Saskatchewan; Leonard Paul's website indicates that he is a Mi'kmaq artist born in Halifax.

Mabel Murple (1995/2010)

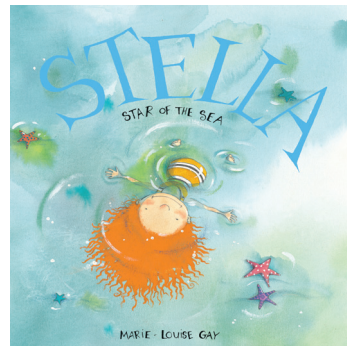
*Sheree Fitch
and Sydney Smith*

In delightful rhythm and rhyme, this story about a daring young girl, first published in 1995 when it was illustrated by Maryann Kovalski, celebrates a strong female character while at the same time honouring human differences. Sydney Smith's new illustrations are delightful in various degrees of purple, violet, mauve and plum.

**Stella, Star of the Sea** (1999)

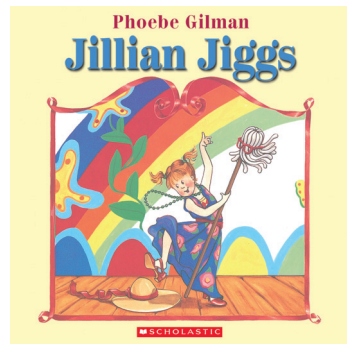
Marie-Louise Gay

This story catapults a feisty female heroine into what eventually became a series of six "Stella" titles (along with others that focus on her younger brother, Sam). Marie-Louise Gay's body of work is hugely important in the realm of Canadian picture books – particularly noteworthy for its deep understanding of the emotional world of children. Through watercolour as well as dialogue, Gay skillfully depicts Stella and Sam, and the imaginative world they inhabit, with warmth and imagination.

**Jillian Jiggs** (1985)

Phoebe Gilman

Another strong heroine is championed in this title, the first of a series of books about a non-traditional girl in a context where creativity abounds. Phoebe Gilman, who taught at the Ontario College of Art, considered herself an artist first and foremost, with a profound love of words.



A Screaming Kind of Day (1999)

*Rachna Gilmore
and Gordon Sauvé*

Scully navigates her bad day by yanking out her hearing aids. A character presenting an exceptionality as one aspect of her characterisation was unusual at the time this book was published and is still uncommon on today's literary landscape. This beautiful book won the 1999 Governor General's Literary Award for its text. Gordon Sauvé's high-realistic paintings were created with vivid acrylics, and superbly capture the heightened emotional content of this story.

Sweetest Kulu (2014)

*Celina Kalluk
and Alexandria Neonakis*

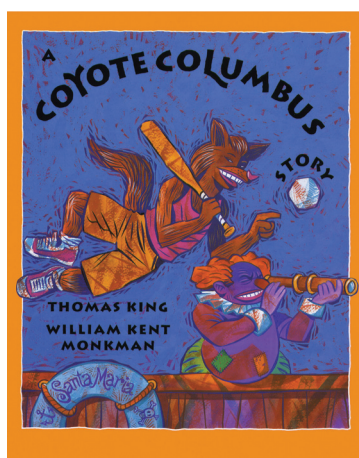
The birth of Kulu is a joyous time and northern animals arrive with lessons and gifts in this beautiful bedtime poem. The connectedness of our living Earth resounds here, and this title offers an experience of the Arctic world unique to the picture book format. Celina Kalluk is an Inuit-Canadian author from Resolute Bay, Nunavut. Alexandria Neonakis is from Nova Scotia; her illustrations here glow with warmth.



A Coyote Columbus Story (1992)

*Thomas King
and Kent Monkman*

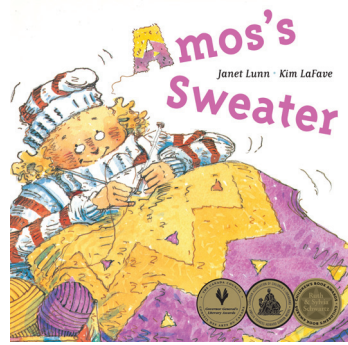
This book presents a retelling of the Christopher Columbus story from an Indigenous point of view. Coyote, a trickster, unwittingly allows Columbus to bring about the downfall of Coyote's human friends. An important point here is that history is influenced by the perspective of the reporter. Kent Monkman's vivid illustrations complement the vibrant storyline and the book was a finalist for a Governor General's Literary Award.



Amos's Sweater (1988)

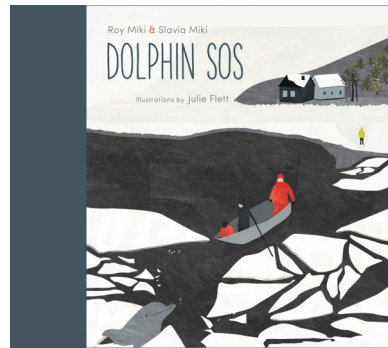
*Janet Lunn
and Kim LaFave*

Amos the sheep is old and cold and wants his wool back. In a stellar picture book that has won both a Governor General's Literary Award and an Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Award for illustration, as well as the Ruth Schwartz Award, this title is on one level a terrifically funny animal story and, on another level, a story about advocating for one's rights.

**Dolphin SOS** (2014)

*Roy Miki,
Slavia Miki
and Julie Flett*

This serious picture book helps readers understand the tragedies experienced by dolphins trapped in ice flows. It presents local heroes as people who champion the natural world, and inspires its audience to think about their own backyard, and what lies beyond it, with sustainability in mind. Julie Flett's stylised figures and digitally combined collage are spare and striking.

**Love You Forever** (1986)

*Robert Munsch
and Sheila McGraw*

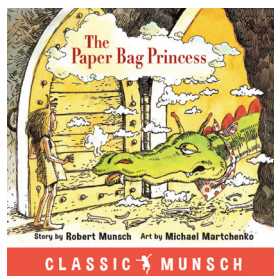
Originally published in 1986, this is one of the best-selling Canadian paperback picture books of all time, with over 30 million copies sold in English as well as translations, and reaching intergenerational audiences with its story about the evolving parent-child relationship. However, this book has faced much controversy, with the discussion centring on whether the story depicts a mother's heartwarming and unending love or a creepy, unhealthy helicopter parent.

The Paper Bag Princess (1980)

Robert Munsch

and *Michael Martchenko*

Princess Elizabeth reverses the princess and dragon stereotypical narrative while championing feminism, as haughty but well-dressed Prince Ronald is discarded for being “a bum.” First published in 1980, this book has won critical acclaim, including endorsement from the National Organization for Women. This was the first collaboration between Robert Munsch and Michael Martchenko, whose zany, comic style has become associated with Munsch works.



Red is Best (1982)

Kathy Stinson

and *Robin Baird Lewis*

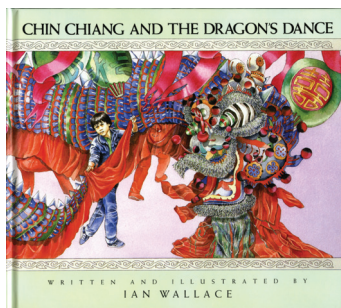
This timeless tale of one child’s stubborn preference for the colour red has won the hearts of readers for over 30 years. One of the authors of this guide loves this title so much that she carries around miniatures to give away to children in airports or other places where children are in need of something to read and delight in. The illustrator made a brilliant choice in the spare use of colour that showcases red so vibrantly.



Chin Chiang and the Dragon’s Dance (1984)

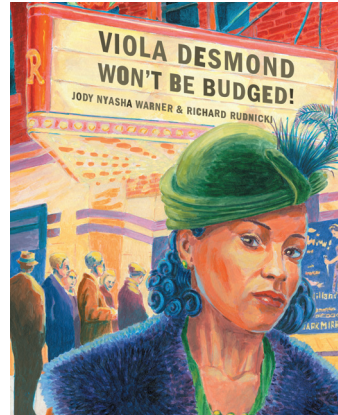
Ian Wallace

This spectacular title blends legend and reality with an authentic Chinatown setting and a reverence for both history and modern-day life. Winner of the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator Award, the story itself dislodged stereotypes at the time of publication as its young hero finds the courage to be seen dancing.



Viola Desmond Won't Be Budged! (2010)*Jody Warner**and Richard Rudnicki*

This title narrates a true story about racism when an African Canadian is asked to move out of her theatre seat in 1946 Nova Scotia. Viola Desmond continues her fight against segregation with inspiring results, and a page on African Canadian history is included at the end of the book to further investigate the history of racism in Canada. Illustrations include accurate details of the Roseland Theatre along with a *Pictou Advocate* delivery truck, setting the scene carefully.

**3 Changing Boundaries**

Changing boundaries occur as serious subjects are increasingly represented, respecting the need for children to explore these topics in order to learn and grow. Diverse depictions of gender and sexuality also emerge in some of these titles, a rare element in children's literature until recently.

Canada has come a long way since the Canadian picture book *Asha's Mums* (written by Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paulse, illustrated by Dawn Lee) was banned in 2002 by a British Columbia school board and eventually reinstated by the Supreme Court of Canada, but we still seek equity in our range of offerings, encouraging authentic portrayals of the full range of human experiences. The book *Stories for Every Classroom* (Beverley Brenna, 2015) identifies various forms of children's literature, including picture books, that present characters with disabilities, and it specifically advocates for more representation of characters who are differently abled.

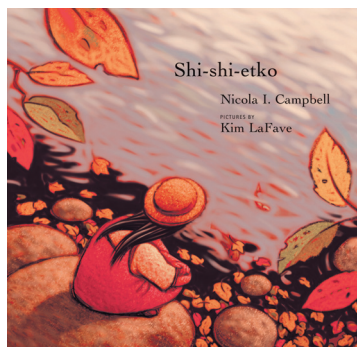
Many of the excellent books summarised in this section of "classics" are trailblazers that have inspired additional work in Canada, and beyond, to ensure that children will find important aspects of themselves and their world, past and present, illuminated in picture book form.

Where not otherwise indicated, the name of the author(s) appears first under each title, and the illustrator last.

Shi-shi-etko (2005)

Nicola I. Campbell,
David Unger (translator)
and Kim LaFave

This is the story of a little girl whose mother prepares her to attend residential school. It was the winner of the Anskohk Aboriginal Children's Book of the Year, and a finalist for the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award, the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award and the Ruth Schwartz Award.

**How Smudge Came** (1995)

Nan Gregory
and Ron Lightburn

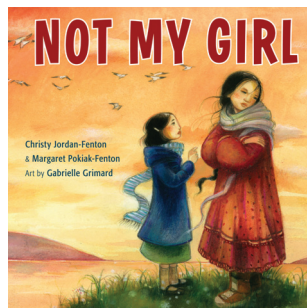
This title, first published in 1995, follows Cindy, a young adult who lives in a group home and works as a cleaner in a hospice. The heart of the story involves Cindy's struggle for independence when she isn't allowed to have a puppy. Ron Lightburn's soft, pointillistic illustrations use coloured pencil on paper to depict Cindy as a character with Down Syndrome.

Not My Girl (2014)

Christy Jordan-Fenton,
Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
and Gabrielle Grimard

Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's story from *When I Was Eight* is continued in this title that addresses her difficult experiences returning home from residential school. Both picture books are adaptations of award-winning novels for older readers

(*A Stranger at Home: A True Story*, and *Fatty Legs*), and all Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's memoirs, in collaboration with daughter-in-law Christy Jordan-Fenton.

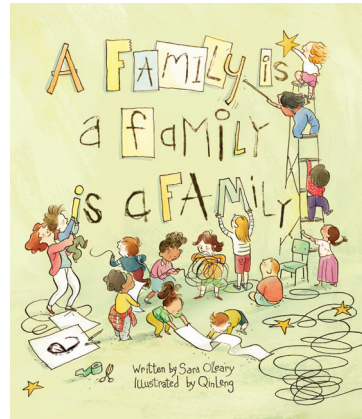


Virginia Woolf (2012)*Kyo Maclear**and Isabelle Arsenault*

Based on the early relationship between writer Virginia Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, this title seamlessly introduces the theme of childhood depression. At the time of publication, the subject of mental health was not a strong presence in picture book resources. Isabelle Arsenault's illustrations are a striking blend of media: ink, pencil, watercolour, and gouache.

A Family is a Family is a Family (2016)*Sara O'Leary**and Qin Leng*

Every student in a fictional class of 12 explains what makes their family special. Many different families are constructed here in a sequence that includes two moms or dads, single or separated parents, blended and foster families, and parents with exceptionalities. Qin Leng's soft pastel illustrations are characterful and captivating.

**The Cremation of Sam McGee** (1986)*Robert W. Service**and Ted Harrison*

A classic Canadian ballad about death, cold, and dedication is illustrated in twelve brilliant paintings by artist Ted Harrison – including his signature layered landscapes and bold colour choices. Life in the Yukon is on stage here as well as serious subject matter for older readers. Its publication combined great lines for reading aloud with gallery-quality art work, at that time an innovative approach to children's illustrated books.

Scaredy Squirrel (2006)*Mélanie Watt*

This is the first title in Mélanie Watt's successful series about an anxiety-ridden squirrel. Many readers will identify with the individual differences presented here and benefit from considering the mental health supports – humorous in the forest context – provided to Scaredy throughout these empathetic books that offer a contemporary design, including narration, labels, and lists.

Ten Birds (2011)*Cybèle Young*

This innovative story relates how ten curious birds each make their way across a demanding river. The intricate pen-and-ink illustrations portray a fabulous alternative world that offers positive room for individual qualities to shine, as well as a chance for children to practice their counting skills.

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*In the spirit of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an asterisk appears beside works created by Indigenous writers or artists.

The editions below are not necessarily the originals; for original year of publication, please see titles in previous section.

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Author and Illustrator Spotlight

From Alan Daniels's and Anne Laurel Carter's breathtaking *My Home Bay*, to Nan Gregory's and Ron Lightburn's heart-wrenching *How Smudge Came*, Canada's new and upcoming picture book writers certainly have an inspiring literary heritage from which to draw. And this shows in their work. Today's picture book artists represent a diverse group of individuals that hail from every region of the country. They are embracing new story lines, lost and avoided histories, new techniques, and spectacular modern mediums. The result? Canadian picture book creators are now producing some of the finest, most exciting books this country has ever seen.

This section spotlights 12 new and upcoming Canadian picture book writers and illustrators who are now making waves across the country. Many more could have been chosen, indeed. But we decided on a workable sample of critically acclaimed authors and illustrators representing regions coast to coast, that together offer a bellwether of Canadian picture books. We also wanted to capture the many meanings and the drift of what picture books are, what they do, how they are created and what impact they might carry – straight from creators themselves. We also decided to complement our research with in-depth interviews probing various aspects of picture books. The result, however restricted to a sampling of new and up-and-coming writers and illustrators, will hopefully provide valuable insights we don't otherwise get from other sources. These professionals have been very gracious in responding to our requests for interviews and spending time perusing the transcripts to ensure we captured their original ideas. The correspondence we have had with them has been greatly inspiring to us, to say the least.

Some might be new to you; others will already be on your favourites' list. Yet together, they represent some of the best writing and illustration today – and their spotlights an introduction to the future of Canadian picture books.

1 Spotlight on Melanie Florence

An insider's tip: When a publisher assigns one of the country's finest illustrators to a first time picture book writer, you know you'll soon see something special in your local bookstore. And when that writer's second book is paired

up with another equally acclaimed illustrator, you know that writer is going to have a long, healthy career in Canadian book publishing. Such is the case with Melanie Florence, a new picture book writer who is making waves across the industry wherever she turns.

Melanie Florence was born in Hamilton, Ontario to parents of Cree and Scottish heritage. As a child, she was very close with her grandfather, a relationship that would later inspire her to write about Indigenous people. “My grandfather,” Melanie explains, “was my first reader. I’d write stories and he’d read them. I’d tell him stories that I came up with and he’d listen without ever interrupting. He’d go to yard sales and bring me back books to read. He was someone who always thought I was a natural storyteller and encouraged my love of books.”

But writing picture books wasn’t Melanie’s first love. Her early work focused on books for teens, such as the novel *The Missing*, and *Righting Canada’s Wrongs*, a historical account of Residential Schools and their impact on First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. “It’s when I read a picture book called *The Stamp Collector*,” Melanie recalls, “that it really affected me.” Melanie met the book’s editor, Christie Harkin, telling her she’d love to see a picture book like that about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. “She told me I should write it. I ended up working on *Missing Nimama* with her, and she got François Thisdale to illustrate it.”

This book is written from the perspective of a missing mother watching *in absentia* as her daughter – aided by her grandmother – grows and passes through life’s most cherished stages. Award-winning illustrator François Thisdale gorgeously incorporated multimedia layerings to provide stunning complex scenes and spreads. The book was the winner of the 2016 TD Canadian Children’s Literature Award, the 2017 Forest of Reading Golden Oak Award and was a finalist for the 2017 First Nation Communities READ award. Librarians will also tell you that it is a landmark publication in Indigenous-themed picture books.

Her second picture book – *Stolen Words* – was illustrated by the extraordinary Montreal artist, Gabrielle Grimard, who has worked on over 30 picture books. Together these artists tell the story of a young girl helping her grandfather relearn the language that had been stolen from him at Residential School. This touching piece has been referred to by reviewers as “poignant” and “unforgettable.” *Stolen Words* won the Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children’s Book Award, was shortlisted for the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award, and was given a starred review by *Kirkus*. And it too became another landmark in Canadian picture book publishing.

With such a strong connection to her grandfather, it's understandable that both these picture books deal with strong intergenerational themes. "My grandfather had a lot of trauma that he never dealt with," Melanie explains, "so there was so much I didn't know. I think a lot of my stories deal with that relationship because it was so special to me and because I want to honour him in some small way. I think many kids have a close relationship with a grandparent and books that reflect that bond are appealing for that reason."

To be sure, Melanie does not pursue easy, facile subject matter. But she does believe that young people should not be sheltered from difficult stories if they are presented properly. "Kids are able to handle more than we give them credit for," she shares. "You have to be sensitive to the age of the readers but not talk down to them. Stories about difficult subjects are important because it shows kids that they're not alone in their experience. That whatever they're feeling is okay."

Melanie Florence has become part of a new wave of Indigenous artists that are producing some of the most exciting writing and illustration this country has ever seen. And she finds this recent change an important turn in the country's cultural history. "We've had so many years where FNMI kids didn't have books that reflected them or their experiences," she notes, "and now we're seeing books from the most amazingly talented creators where Indigenous kids can see themselves in the pages – and it's an amazing thing. It's exciting to see so many amazing books coming out by Indigenous creators like Monique Gray Smith and Julie Flett and David Alexander Robertson and Nicola Campbell and Danielle Daniel and Richard van Camp. To name a few."

We thank you Melanie, for being part of it.

Current Faves

Anything by The Fan Brothers.

Recommended for my local school board: *My Heart Fills With Happiness* by Monique Gray Smith, illustrated by Julie Flett.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

It's always pretty surreal. I always have a little moment where I think, "I can't believe I'm actually holding it in my hands" because the process from random idea to finished book is such a long journey.

Melanie Florence Picture Books

Upcoming: 2021 re-issue of *Missing Nimama*, illustrated by François Thisdale, Scholastic Canada

Upcoming: *Benjamin's Thunderstorm*, illustrated by Natasha Donovan, Kids Can Press

Upcoming: *My Nohkom Sings Me to Sleep*, TBA

2017: *Stolen Words*, illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard, Second Story Press

2015: *Missing Nimama*, illustrated by François Thisdale, Clockwise Press

See more on Melanie Florence at www.melanieflorence.com



PHOTO CREDIT: IAN CRYSLER

2 Spotlight on James Gladstone

The current body of picture book work written by James Gladstone is at first a little hard to pin down. There's books on history, science, nature. There's traditional fiction. Some stories take on rhythmic forms, others a more straightforward narrative. And each book to date has been produced with a different illustrator, all beautiful but all very different looking as well. Maybe that's why when we first reached out to James he forewarned us that his work was, "a bit all over the map, since I have varied interests." But when one looks a little more closely at his picture books, there are three things that tie his wonderful stories together – they are inspired by nature, they carry a vision of hope, and all are books you'll want to go back to again and again.

James developed a passion for picture book writing during downtimes when working as a freelance writer and editor. During these breaks he started writing "little rhymes related to science concepts that children learn about in

school.” To sharpen his skills James began reading a lot of children’s books, something that developed into a full-blown passion. “Once I went down that rabbit hole,” he explained, “it was difficult to return. So I started to write a lot of picture book manuscripts, many of which were really poor quality. I spent time finding out how best to go about presenting material to publishers. And when I found solid listings of publishers and agents in Canada and internationally, I began my years-long journey of pitching manuscripts. Eventually, Owlkids Books found my manuscript, *When Planet Earth Was New*, in its slush pile and asked to publish it.”

This first book, with its bold poetic approach, sweeps readers through a rush of Earth history, from its early origins as a bubbling cauldron of proto-lifeforms to its current state where life is becoming greener and bluer and “more comfortable.” Complete with authoritative author notes, glossary, and STEM connections to biology, geology, and evolution, *When Planet Earth Was New* will surely inspire further interest in our glorious planet. But more than that, it’s “beautiful,” as *Booklist* described it, so it’s not surprising that it received a host of honours, including being a finalist for the K-3 Shining Willow Award and receiving a nomination for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre Norma Fleck Award.

His subsequent books have been no less inspiring, and no less acclaimed. If it’s reflecting on the beauty of a snow-blanketed day with the suggestion that there will be something wonderful more to come (*My Winter City*), to seeing the hope of a new day dawn on a troubled world from space (*Earthrise: Apollo 8 and the Photo that Changed the World*), to the gradual natural advancement of life in a turtle pond (*Turtle Pond*, winner of the 2019 Norma Fleck Award), James’s books will consistently help kids find wonder, even hope, in the natural world.

But why picture books? Why did James select this particular genre to inspire and enthrall young readers? James thinks it’s because picture books are so *engaging*. “You turn the pages,” he explains, “and literally open up a whole visual world. This is cliché, but there really is an element of enchantment that takes place inside a picture book – fiction and non-fiction. And with so many phenomenal illustrators working today, I think these books more easily draw people into the idea or message that an author may want to share. Writing a picture book forces an author to distill that idea or message down to a few simple sentences or phrases in a carefully conceived structure. These two combined qualities – compelling visuals and succinct language – seem to be an almost ideal way to present much-needed visions of wonder and hope.”

And hope is certainly something in dire need these days because kids will be inheriting a much more different and unpredictable world than the one we did. James believes that it's because of this we are starting to see a lot more inspiring books about nature being produced for a young audience, "especially as publishers seek innovative ways to help address school curricula. My real hope is that humanity quickly decarbonises its economies, so that books do not simply present dire warnings to children or visions of what has been lost, but rather inspiring windows into the natural phenomena that surround and sustain us."

And that's exactly what James Gladstone has been doing in so many different ways. And that's why Canadian children's book publishing has been a much better place since his big break with *When Planet Earth Was New*.

Current Faves

Canadian: *Over the Rooftops, Under the Moon* by JonArno Lawson, illustrated by Nahid Kazemi.

International: *Why Am I Me?* by Paige Britt, illustrated by Sean Qualls and Selina Alko.

Recommended for my local school board: *Climbing Shadows*, by Shannon Bramer, illustrated by Cindy Derby.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

Disbelief. From when I first started writing picture book manuscripts to my first published book was nearly a decade, so it hardly seemed possible that it had happened.



James Gladstone Picture Books

2021: *Journey Around the Sun: The Story of Halley's Comet*, illustrated by Yaara Eshet, Owlkids Books

2019: *My Winter City*, illustrated by Gary Clement, Greenwood Books

2018: *Earthrise: Apollo 8 and the Photo That Changed the World*, illustrated by Christy Lundy, Owlkids Books

2018: *Turtle Pond*, illustrated by Karen Reczuch, Greenwood Books

2017: *When Planet Earth Was New*, illustrated by Katherine Diemert, Owlkids Books

3 Spotlight on Shauntay Grant

Shauntay Grant is a multi-disciplinary artist with degrees in creative writing and music. She's a highly respected Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Dalhousie University. A Member of the College of the Royal Society of Canada. A Canada Council for the Arts Joseph S. Stauffer Prize winner. A performance artist. An award-winning playwright. And Halifax's third Poet Laureate. Shauntay Grant is also one of the most exciting picture book authors working in Canada today.

A descendant of Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons and Black Refugees, Shauntay has roots in Canada that stretch back hundreds of years to places like North Preston, Nova Scotia, the largest historic Black community in the country. And she says her love of language can be traced right back to the storytelling roots grounded in such communities. "My family moved to Mainland Halifax from North Preston when I was very young," Shauntay explains, "but we still made weekly visits to the community, sometimes a few times a week, and for extended periods in the summer. Family gatherings with good food, storytelling, and music were a regular event. And in many ways the sights, smells, sounds, and stories of my childhood have been an ongoing source of inspiration. Certainly my first picture book, *Up Home*, is a reflection of my childhood experiences in North Preston; in many ways it is my way of saying 'thank you' to a community that helped raise me."

Gorgeously illustrated by award-winning East Coast artist Susan Tooke, *Up Home* is a lyrical romp that won an Atlantic Book Award for Best Atlantic Published Book, and was shortlisted for the Hackmatack Children's Choice Book Awards. It would also launch a stellar career in Canadian picture books.

Shauntay's strong sense of community was again illuminated in the book *Africville*, her second picture book focusing on an historic Black Nova Scotian community. Africville was a settlement started by Black Refugees who had fled enslavement in the US in the early 1800s. This vibrant self-sustaining neighbourhood once sat on the shores of the Bedford Basin, but was razed by the city of Halifax in the 1960s. Homes were bulldozed and residents were displaced or relocated. Illustrated by Eva Campbell and named after the community, *Africville* is a poetic rendering of the old town as reimaged by a child.

This truly remarkable work of historical fiction carries a rare transcendent quality. It takes a small historic neighbourhood and turns it into something bigger. Shauntay and Eva Campbell make *Africville* a *Canadian* story that all can relate to, young and old alike. Perhaps this is why the book is so beloved, coast to coast. "I think 'community,'" Shauntay explains, "is what makes it possible for a book like *Africville* to resonate with people who didn't grow up there – people from different communities and cultural backgrounds. No matter where we grow up, so many of us have common threads in our respective stories. We know the feeling of summer grass under our feet. The smell of Grandma's kitchen. The taste of fresh blueberries. The breathtaking sight of purple and rose painted across the sky at dawn. It's these familiar notes that connect us, and make us care about places we've never been and people we've never met. And because of this, *Africville* – a home to many – feels like home to many more."

The book received immediate acclaim. *Canadian Review of Materials* said it is "destined to become a picture book classic." *Africville* would win the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award, the Lillian Shepherd Memorial Award for Excellence in Illustration, was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award, Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award, and the Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Books Award. It was also on CBC Books' Best Canadian Children's Literature list 2018 and appeared on USBBY's 2019 International Books List.

Despite her busy career and varying, ongoing contributions to Canadian arts and culture, Shauntay has been able to produce five acclaimed picture books to date. And despite the varying subject matter, each carry a strong sense of togetherness, family and community. And surely, that's something we all need more of these days. And that's why we look forward to the next picture book by Shauntay Grant.

Childhood Faves

The Balloon Tree by author/illustrator Phoebe Gilman, and *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* by John Steptoe.

Current Faves

Canadian: *Birdsong* by Julie Flett.

International: *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López.

Recommended for my local school board: *Mi'kmaw Waisisk (Mi'kmaw Animals)* by Alan Syliboy.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

It was really moving, seeing my words in print, but also the artwork – Susan Tooke's illustrations were informed by photographs she took of people in the community, including my family, so it was nice to see the faces of so many people I love in one book.

Shauntay Grant Picture Books

2018: *Africville*, illustrated by Eva Campbell, Groundwood Books (a French translation by Josephine Watson was published in 2020 by Bouton d'or Acadie)

2017: *The Walking Bathroom*, Shauntay Grant/Erin Bennett Banks, Nimbus Publishing

2012: *Apples and Butterflies*, illustrated by Tamara Thiébaux-Heikalo, Nimbus Publishing

2010: *The City Speaks in Drums*, illustrated by Susan Tooke, Nimbus Publishing

2008: *Up Home*, illustrated by Susan Tooke, Nimbus Publishing

Find more on Shauntay Grant at shauntaygrant.com and facebook.com/shauntaygrant



PHOTO CREDIT: SHYRONN SMARDON

4 Spotlight on Nadia L. Hohn

Few new Canadian picture book writers produce entertaining stories set against complex global issues as seamlessly as Toronto's Nadia L. Hohn. Maybe it's because of the sheer joy one discovers in her lyrical poetic prose, or maybe it's the dead seriousness underscoring it all – whatever the case, a Nadia L. Hohn book matters – and they're also a heck of a lot of fun to read.

Nadia is a Christian writer, a cancer survivor, a teacher with a graduate degree in education and an MFA student; she's been a mentor and writing professor, written for magazines and for adults. But it wasn't until 2009 that her beacon returned to her childhood love, picture book writing. "It started the summer before I taught at Toronto's Africentric Alternative School," Nadia explains, "the first publicly-funded Africentric school in Canada. I began to search for books with Black characters, history, and culture for my Grade One classroom. I went to several bookstores in Toronto and travelled as far as New York City to find books. At the same time, an idea for a story came to mind, one that featured a hero for my predominantly Black and biracial students. I began to work on this story, taking writing for children classes at George Brown College, attending conferences and workshops. At one workshop in 2011, I met Sheila Barry who was at the time, a publisher at Kids Can Press. We exchanged contact information and stayed in touch. Two years later, I reached out to Sheila who by then became the publisher at Groundwood Books."

From that auspicious beginning came *Malaika's Costume*. Set in the Caribbean and lavishly illustrated by Irene Luxbacher, the story follows little Malaika whose mother must move to Canada to work and provide for her family back home. All the while, Malaika receives the news that the money to buy her costume for the upcoming Carnival is no longer coming, so she tries to find a solution. The dynamic, lyrical text is presented in colloquial form, with Caribbean patois, bringing greater realism to the suspenseful fun-filled plot. In fact, Nadia is also a musician, and often creates playlists inspired by her stories. It's not surprising then that the prose often leaps from the page with rhythmic bounce. *Malaika's Costume* won the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario Children's Literature Award, was an Américas Award honouree, and a commended title from School Library Journal Best Picture Books, USBBY's Outstanding International Books, and CCBC Best Books for Children and Teens.

Nadia's follow-up title, *Malaika's Winter Carnival*, again focuses on young Malaika who now reunites with her mother in Canada and must adapt to a whole new life – including the strange cold glories of a Quebec Winter

Carnival. Nadia describes these fine Malaika titles as *colourful realism*, picture books that are “realistic and deal with social issues, and yet ‘colourful’ which reflects the diversity of the characters and joy.” The sequel, *Malaika’s Surprise*, continues the series.

These titles get to the heart of Nadia’s work to date and her ability to write heartwarming accessible picture books that are subtly positioned against sweeping social issues, the kind of issues that touch so many kids today – like the impact of global migration patterns on family and community in the Malaika titles, or the importance of pride in culture and decolonisation of language in her highly acclaimed third picture book, *A Likkle Miss Lou: How Jamaican Poet Louise Bennett Coverley Found Her Voice*. “I construct my stories,” Nadia explains, “by understanding that children and young adults are fairly honest and appreciate authenticity. They also deserve to know the truth and, especially, need to know about the world around them. I try to keep my stories relevant and socially conscious with a thick layer of the poetic and ‘entertaining’ on top. I also believe in the importance of teaching children about social issues and justice despite their age.”

Nadia’s approach to storytelling, and her endless respect for the capacity of children, has resulted in a tidy yet lasting contribution to Canadian children’s book publishing – and all signs indicate that this gift will only grow.

Current Faves

Canadian: *Africville* by Shauntay Grant, illustrated by Eva Campbell.

International: *Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong’o, illustrated by Vashti Harrison.

Recommended for my local school board: *All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman.



What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

I was very excited. I hugged my picture book and thought “this all started as an idea” for a story. I had to pinch myself.

Nadia L. Hohn Picture Books

2021: *Malaika's Surprise*, illustrated by Irene Luxbacher, Greenwood Books

2019: *A Likkle Miss Lou: How Jamaican Poet Louise Bennett Coverley Found Her Voice*, illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes, Owlkids Books

2018: *Harriet Tubman: Freedom Fighter*, illustrated by Gustavo Mazali, HarperCollins

2017: *Malaika's Winter Carnival*, illustrated by Irene Luxbacher, Greenwood Books

2016: *Malaika's Costume*, illustrated by Irene Luxbacher, Greenwood Books

2015: *Music*, Rubicon Publishing

2015: *Media*, Rubicon Publishing

5 Spotlight on Soyeon Kim

It might be misleading to call Soyeon Kim a children's book illustrator. Instead, she might better be called a magic maker. Because you don't necessarily look at a Soyeon Kim illustration – you enter right into it.

Soyeon was born in Seoul, South Korea and moved to Toronto as an international student when she was 13. She was later joined in Canada by her mother and brother while working toward a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at York University. Now a Korean Canadian, Soyeon has since held residencies at The Spark Box in Picton, Ontario and The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Soyeon's first break was the result of hard work and boundless talent that tumbled head over heels into unexpected good fortune. “It actually started with what would become my first book,” Soyeon explained. “I was participating at the Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition as a student, showcasing my first series of dioramas when Mary Beth Leatherdale, who was editor at Owlkids at the time, came to see my booth. She later emailed to see if I would be interested in illustrating *You Are Stardust*. Ever since I've worked with Mary Beth and author Elin Kelsey on such books as *Wild Ideas*, *You Are Never Alone* and the latest, *A Last Goodbye*.”

From that chance meeting it's been Canadian picture book magic ever since. That first book, *You Are Stardust*, won the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award, and was nominated for the prestigious OLA Blue Spruce award. Many honours have flowed since. And so too has critical acclaim. Reviewers have been wowed, referring to her as an artist who "transcends typical illustration" (*Scientific American* review of *Stardust*), whose work is "breathtakingly beautiful" (*Kirkus* review of *You Are Never Alone*), "stunning" (*Booklist* review of *Last Goodbye*), even "sublime" (*Quill and Quire* review of *Wild Ideas*).

Soyeon's imagination and inimitable style are what makes her work special. You see, each spread of a Soyeon Kim book is a beautifully crafted three-dimensional diorama – a wood framed box strung with exquisite illustrations interspersed with varying materials that make a fabulous story box, fantastical artwork that children can seemingly step right into and discover. "When kids see my work," Soyeon explains, "I want them to feel that they can be inside the dioramas, exploring and becoming part of the scene. Like a playground where they can play hide and seek, touch and feel everything and anything! I want them to be themselves and express what they think and feel."

Soyeon has contributed to six masterful picture books to date, some fiction, others non-fiction. Illustrating fiction and non-fiction picture books definitely have their own challenges. "When illustrating fiction books, there are so many ideas that I sometimes find myself not knowing where to start. In a way it's kind of like solving a puzzle. When working with non-fiction, it is important to create illustrations that are based on the research and scientific facts. The challenging part of it is that I want to create the world that is both true to the research and fascinating enough to spark curiosity."

If you were to ask Soyeon what is the thread that runs through all her work, she'd tell you it's nature. "Nature is all around us," she responds. "Whether it's our friends, parents, grandparents or great grandparents, we are all connected to nature. It's what we share in common. With its diversity and interconnection of all living things, I want to inspire young readers about its endless wonders and curiosity."

Canada is certainly a diverse nation and a good picture book has that rare ability to transcend cultural and geographic limits. "A good picture book," Soyeon explains, "can be read and appreciated by kids all over the world without any boundaries. No matter what their cultural background is, kids and families should be able to relate to the book, be inspired by its message and allow them to question and think about what's behind the messages."

Soyeon Kim is now showing the world that her books are doing just that.

Current Faves

Canadian: *This Is Not My Hat* by Jon Klassen.

International: *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

Recommended for my local school board: *Today* by Julie Morstad.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

When I saw a finished copy of my first picture book, it really felt like I was dreaming. I still feel the same way every time I receive advance copies. I question myself, “Did I really do this?” Then I replay of all the work that was involved and the sleepless nights. But it was all worth it when I saw the finished copy of *You Are Stardust*, and I was excited to share with everyone!

Soyeon Kim Picture Books

2020: *Once Upon An Hour*, written by Ann Yu-Kyung Choi, Orca Book Publishers

2020: *A Last Goodbye*, written by Elin Kelsey, Owlkids Books

2019: *You Are Never Alone*, written by Elin Kelsey, Owlkids Books

2017: *Sukaq and the Raven*, written by Roy Goose and Kerry McCluskey, Inhabit Media

2015: *Wild Ideas – Let Nature Inspire Your Thinking*, written by Elin Kelsey, Owlkids Books

2013: *Is this Panama? A Migration Story*, written by Jan Thornhill, Owlkids Books

2012: *You Are Stardust*, written by Elin Kelsey, Owlkids Books

See more on Soyeon Kim at www.kimsoyeonart.com and on Instagram: @soyeonis



6 Spotlight on Miriam Körner

Award-winning picture book illustrator (and YA novelist) Miriam Körner lives in a hand-built cabin set deep in the boreal forest. She is surrounded by a team of sled dogs – and lakes and rivers stretching thousands of kilometres. This is Potato Lake, northern Saskatchewan, and it's a far cry indeed from Recklinghausen, the sprawling coal mining city in Germany's Rhine-Ruhr region where she grew up. Miriam has now called Canada's North home for the last 18 years. And it's this land and its people which inspire her stunning picture book illustrations.

Miriam didn't see many Canadian children's books as a kid. In fact, she didn't see any at all. The only book from this side of the Atlantic that she read was the American classic, *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. "I remember being scared of it," Miriam recalls. "But I loved *Frederick* by Leo Lionni and *Kommt in den Wald* (In the Forest) by Hilde Heyduck Huth. Oh, and Janosch! Everything by Janosch!"

As Miriam became more familiar with Canadian publishing, she saw differences between Canadian and European picture book styles. "European books seem to be a bit more daring in creating a visual language that goes beyond the simple illustration of the text," she explains. "Lots of them have an 'old world' feel to them. Peter Sís is a good example. But I also think this is changing in Canadian picture books. I'm actually quite excited about the direction Canadian picture books are taking."

What brought Miriam to Canada? It was a "longing for wilderness," something that has been luring her countryfolk to this country for generations. Marrying and settling North, Miriam began guiding sled dog tours in winter and canoe trips in summer. A background not typically associated with a career in children's book writing. But inspiration comes in weird and wild ways. "The nearest bookstore is about 400 kilometres south of where I live," she says. "At every visit to buy books I ended up in the picture book section. Eventually, I realised that was because secretly that's what I wanted to be: an author/illustrator for children's books. One thing struck me though: there were very few books that reflected life in the North." And Miriam soon set out to change that.

Her first non-commissioned picture book collaboration was with her friend and Elder Bernice Johnson-Laxdal. Called *When the Trees Crackle with Cold: A Cree Calendar/pisimwasinahikan*, the book brings together Ms Johnson-Laxdal's memories of growing up in a Northern Cree/Métis community. "It was a book," Miriam recalls, "created in our community for our community." Published in English and Cree, the gorgeous warmly rendered watercolours capture dynamic Northern scenes all washed over with the colours of each changing season. The colour palette suggests the Woodlands Style – and a little J.E.H. Macdonald; the stylings a little Maud Lewis, and a little Alan Sapp. It's a

perfect match for Northern storytelling – and wholly unique. *When the Trees Crackle with Cold* won the Saskatchewan Book Award and the Shining Willow.

The next title, told by the late Ida Tremblay, is *When We Had Sled Dogs: A Story from the Trapline/ācimowin ohci wanihikiskanāhk*. Written in both English and Woodland Cree, the book was inspired by Elder Ida Tremblay's childhood memories of the seasonal cycle of trapline life. With unmistakable Körner illustration, the book won two prestigious Saskatchewan Book Awards.

Miriam Körner's picture books are truly celebrations of Northern life. But they go beyond that. There's something more essential about them. Miriam notes that the Canadian boreal forest represents 25% per cent of the planet's remaining intact forests. And we need "to make sure to protect that forest." Many Indigenous people in the North, she explains, live in a reciprocal relationship with the land, with a worldview that treats the land with great respect. "I don't want to tell anyone what they should do or think," she says, "but I do hope when young kids and families read my books and learn about Northern lifestyles, they will start to ask questions. And maybe, if I'm lucky, those questions will lead to changes in the way they see the world and live their lives."

Is this then, what makes a Canadian picture book? Miriam thinks so. "I heard someone say that 'Canada is a country not yet emerged.' What that means is that Canadians are just starting to understand the history of this land and the people who've made this land their home long before Canada existed. At its core 'Canada' is an Indigenous country. And I think this search for identity is happening right now in the picture book market. It's super exciting to see Indigenous voices across the country emerge in beautifully written and illustrated books. And that's truly unique to this country."

And so too is Miriam's art, and her growing contributions to the Canadian picture book industry.

Current Faves

Canadian: *The Water Walker* by Joanne Robertson.

International: *Il Giardino dei Sogni* (The Dream Garden), by Maike Neundorff.

Recommended for local school board: *When We Were Alone*, written by David A. Robertson, illustrated by Julie Flett.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

I didn't just see a copy of my book, 2,000 arrived at my doorstep! I remember my co-author Bernice Johnson-Laxdal and I looking at the boxes and

thinking, “What have we done? Who wants to read our book?” I think we only realised that we had created something special when Bernice and I went down to a book signing at McNally Robinson Booksellers and we sold boxes of books that very day. The book has won several awards and has been reprinted many times since.

Miriam Körner Picture Books

2020: *Ti-Shadd: L’Ujima au Quotidien*, written by Alix Llwanga/Miriam Körner, (French translation of *Li’l Shadd*), YNWP

2019: *When We Had Sled Dogs: a Story from the Trapline/ ācimowin ohci wanihikīskanāhk*, story by Ida Tremblay, YNWP

2018: *When the Trees Crackle with Cold: A Cree Seasons Activity Book*, written by Bernice Johnson-Laxdal/Miriam Körner, YNWP

2016: *When the Trees Crackle with Cold: A Cree Calendar/ pīsīmwasiṇahikan*, story by Bernice Johnson-Laxdal YNWP

2015: *Li’l Shadd: A Story of Ujima*, written by Alix Lwanga/Miriam Körner, YNWP, commission by Saskatchewan African Heritage Museum

Find more on Miriam Körner at <http://miriamkoerner.blogspot.com/>



PHOTO CREDIT: QUINCY MILLER

7 Interview: Spotlight on David Alexander Robertson

David Alexander Robertson is an award-winning novelist and picture book author. Based in Winnipeg and member of the Norway Cree Nation, David’s work reflects Indigenous cultures, histories and communities. David’s extraordinary picture books speak to contemporary issues in ways that are accessible and have the ability to both educate and entertain.

His graphic novel, *Will I See?* won the Manuela Dias Book Design and Illustration Award in the Graphic Novel category; his YA novel *Strangers* won the

Michael Van Rooy Award for Genre Fiction while the novel *Monsters* was a McNally Robinson Best Book for Young People. He has written two extremely popular illustrated graphic novel series – “7 Generations” and “Tales from Big Spirit” – that are prized by young readers across the country. His first picture book, *When We Were Alone*, was illustrated by Julie Flett. It is a truly remarkable, touching story about pride, healing and resilience. This quiet masterpiece won the Governor General’s Literary Award.

We were able to talk with David about picture book writing and some of the issues raised in his work:

Recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission inspired a wave of new books about the legacy of Residential Schools. Why do you think it is important for young kids – especially picture book-aged kids – to hear stories about or based on Residential Schools?

It’s important for a number of reasons. First, we need to build a foundation of knowledge and awareness. We do the same with other subjects in a school setting. We don’t introduce concept math in high school out of nowhere. We start kids off with basic math in kindergarten, and we build on that until, in high school, they’re ready for calculus. The residential school system is a complicated subject, and potentially traumatising for kids. Introducing it first even in middle years is too late. We need to build a base. That base is something we can build on. We have to introduce basic concepts that kids can understand and absorb in a safe learning environment. As they get older, we can get into the more difficult aspects of that history. And teaching it is hard. That’s why, second, books are an incredible support for teachers in the classroom. Stories are what we need in the process of reconciliation. Stories are truth. We don’t have healing, which is what I understand reconciliation to be, without truth. Own Voices stories give us truths we never had before, and they are the foundation we need to build this knowledge with. Picture books are vitally important to teach residential school system, because it’s not just truth in the words, but it’s truth in the representation. It puts a face to the history, and it helps kids to build empathy. That’s third. When we build empathy in kids, we also build their capacity to become better leaders. Today and tomorrow.

How does writing and the process of developing a picture book differ from writing YA novels or graphic books?

Well, what stands out most for me is that every single word needs to be perfect. You use so few words in a picture book that every one of them needs to count. I am

meticulous when I write a picture book. I read it aloud over and over again until I'm sure every single word works. That it means something, and that it creates the sort of rhythm you need to make the book really shine. So that it's the most engaging story it can be. That's not to say that every word doesn't count in, say, a YA novel. But you have more wiggle room, I think. I have found, in my experience, that writing a picture book is the hardest form of writing that I've attempted. As time has gone on, I've gotten better at it, but even now, I might make 1,000 revisions in a manuscript before it's right where I, and my editor, want it.

Picture books are mostly written by adults, edited by adults, published, reviewed and, for the most part, selected for awards by adults. The gatekeepers too – teachers and librarians – are also all adults. As a writer, how do you cut through this generational divide to write books that speak directly to modern kids?

I think you have to understand that kids get it. They're smart. They're empathetic. They're emotionally honest. And you can't fool them. So you, in turn, have to not talk down to them, you have to write with truth and sincerity, and you have to be willing to write with heart. Because kids read with heart. The only thing I really have to watch is the appropriateness of content. I have to think about the kids' readiness for what I'm saying. That's, at times, a delicate balance. It's helped, for me, to have five kids of my own, and by extension, to have all of my kids' friends too. I feel like it's given me a handle on how to connect with them, how to talk to them, how to tell stories to them, and understand the kinds of stories that resonate with them. It also helps to be a kid at heart. It also helps to read a lot of picture books, to see how the best ones have been written, and how the writers have approached storytelling. It's helped me to get pretty good at picture book writing, and to write stories that matter to kids, that they want to bring home and talk about, that has hopefully given them gifts that they can share with others.

Do you have plans for a new picture book?

I have two picture books coming, one in summer 2021 and one in summer 2022. They are both with Tundra Books. The first one is called *On The Trapline*, and it's about a grandfather and his grandson going out onto the land to learn about how the Elder used to live as a child on his trapline. It's a story about intergenerational and cultural connections. The second book is top secret, so you'll just have to wait for that one.

Much thanks, David!

Current Faves

Canadian: *Birdsong* by Julie Flett.

International: *Thanku*, edited by Miranda Paul, illustrated by Marlena Myles.

Recommended for my local school board: *Birdsong* by Julie Flett.

What was your reaction on seeing the finished copy of your first picture book?

It was an incredible feeling. I was very proud of the book, I was honoured to have worked with Julie Flett, and I believed *When We Were Alone* would help make a difference.

David Alexander Robertson Picture Books

2022: Untitled Picture Book with Tundra Books

2021: *On the Trampoline*, Tundra Books

2017: *When We Were Alone*, illustrated by Julie Flett, HighWater Press

Find more about David Alexander Robertson at www.darobertson.ca;

Facebook: www.facebook.com/davidalexanderrobertson;

Twitter @davealexroberts; and Instagram @davidrobertsonwriter



PHOTO CREDIT: AMBER GREEN

8 Spotlight on Nancy Vo

They say you should never judge a book by its cover. But that certainly doesn't apply when it comes to Canadian picture books. And it certainly doesn't apply to any book written and illustrated by the inimitable Nancy Vo. Because once you see – and feel – a Nancy Vo cover, you know with certainty that you and your child are in for a real treat.

Nancy was born and raised in Calgary and now calls Vancouver home. She holds degrees in both Fine Art and Architecture and works as a facility planner when not writing or illustrating.

Inspiration for her first book came in the form of a homemade story book she created to explain her colicky child. The creation process proved intoxicating, inspiring Nancy to take book making courses at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, followed by similar courses in the art of picture book making.

It was at this time that this author-illustrator came up with the first of her two books to date. *The Outlaw*, her first book, was a confluence of inspirations. "I had finished reading the darkly funny *Sisters Brothers*, by Patrick DeWitt and attended my first SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators) conference in Western Washington. I made a drawing of a gunman's shadow over a train track, which was the genesis for the story. When I was happy with the story, I rented a studio and started to develop the art. Then I made and sent an unsolicited dummy to Groundwood Books because they are part of Anansi Press, publisher of the *Sisters Brothers*. The late, great Sheila Barry offered me a contract and I said yes."

Groundwood scored big. And so too did young Canadian readers coast to coast. This sparsely beautiful story set in the Antebellum American West follows an outlaw along a path of redemption – with the help of a delightfully precocious young child. Long shadows, wide open spaces, far reaching railway tracks punctuate and enhance the Wild West scenes. And scenes these are. Indigos, acetone golds, burnt ambers form haunting spreads reminiscent of Sergio Leone. At the same time, contemporary newsprint and fabric transferred to the canvas add texture and further the historic authenticity of the imagery. It's an old timey feel, yet modern and alive. This most unusually breathtaking book received overwhelming acclaim. *The New York Times* called it "bewitching," *School Library Journal* raved that it was "stunning" and *Resource Links* "powerful and profound."

The follow-up title – *The Ranger* – was no less striking. And just as celebrated by readers and reviewers across North America. Also set in the eighteen hundreds, *The Ranger* provides a sense of place hard to match in a books for any age. "I started with the premise," Nancy explains, "that *The Outlaw* was pre-Civil War and at the height of the gold rush in the 1850s, somewhere between Oregon and California. *The Ranger* was post-Civil War in the South and during Reconstruction, somewhere between Oklahoma and Arkansas. I know this sounds so specific, but this gave me a way to focus the research and attempt to create a tangible Western. I am a fan of the Coen brothers' adaptation of *True Grit*. A sense of place is a big reason for the success of their film."

Another wonderful feature of a Nancy Vo book is the ever-changing perspective. The reader is constantly seeing the evolving story from a different

point of view, above the scene, beside it, right in the middle. The technique draws the reader right into the story, and gives it ever changing meanings with each read. It's all consistently unexpected, and a thrill to read.

Another feature tying together these beautiful works is the theme of human connectivity. While *The Outlaw* focuses on redemption, *The Ranger* follows a young woman seeking private solace in the sparsely populated South – only to connect to a special fox in a time of need. Like *The Outlaw*, it's a story where healing and empathy become the convergent points. But this was not a goal that Nancy had while starting out with the stories: "It was not a conscious decision, no, but I think connection and acceptance are themes that came up in both stories. And if I look back on some of my favourite novels, the element of connection or relating to a main character underpins those stories."

As for those covers – the haunting historic figures coupled with highly tactile, deeply embossed titles truly presage the stark inspired beauty wrapped within. Readers will surely find them irresistible.

Current Faves

Canadian: *Small in the City* by Sydney Smith.

International: *Brief Thief*, written by Michaël Escoffier, illustrated by Kris Di Giacomo.

Recommended for my local school board: *Funeral* by Matt James for young readers;

Louis Undercover, written by Fanny Britt, illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault for older readers.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

Wow, I was so impressed with the final product. Art Director, Michael Solomon did a great job with selecting the finishes and laying out the final design. I remember tracing my fingers over the title to feel the indentation of the text.

On endpapers:

Some of my favourite picture books have the best endpapers. They are more than just decorative pages and complete the experience of the story. For example, Mo Willems always hides his bus-coveting pigeon in the endpapers of his *Elephant and Piggie* books, creating a game for his fans. Even

more subtle because the endpapers are not illustrated is Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen's *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole*. It is simply a change in colour between front and back endpapers, but once you get the story – and all the kids seem to get it before the adults – it is definitely a “Whoa!” moment.

Nancy Vo Picture Books

2022: *Aa Glenn as Can Be*, written by Sarah Ellis, Groundwood Books

2019: *The Ranger*, by Nancy Vo, Groundwood Books

2018: *The Outlaw*, by Nancy Vo, Groundwood Books

Find more on Nancy Vo at www.nancyvo.com



PHOTO CREDIT: MAKITO INOMATA

9 Spotlight on Katty Maurey

Katty Maurey has a world of experience to draw from when she sits down to illustrate her enchanting picture books. Born in France to a Chinese mother and French father, raised in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, formally educated in Quebec and now calling Montreal home, Katty's stunning work is as unique as her background. And perhaps this is why her books are so uniquely Canadian.

Katty had a fast start out of the publishing gate. Her very first illustrated work was the graphic novel, *Quand j'étais chien*, written by Louise Bombardier, a startling title about a troubled youth who lost his mother. Quebec's *Le Libraire* referred to it as “a daring book, with breathtaking graphics, which remains in mind for a long time.” [trans]. The book was nominated for the coveted Governor General's Award for children's illustration, not a bad way to start a career in Canadian book publishing.

Katty has since illustrated seven other titles to more critical acclaim, including the wonderful “Renaud” series, written by Véronique Boisjoly, about the adventures of a jaunty fox, and the breathtaking *The Specific Ocean*, written by Kyo Maclear, which follows a reluctant young girl on a family vacation to the glorious “Specific” Ocean. Here ocean scenes are enlivened with breathtaking ocean blues coupled with the muted greens and browns of the littoral. Not unlike her other titles, Katty plays with the flatness of the page, with generous blank space which allows the story to flow seamlessly from spread to spread. The woodcut-like paintings do not overcrowd, and instead leap out from apparent starkness, providing stunning two-dimensional scenes.

Katty says that her French and Chinese backgrounds, and love of all things American growing up, have converged to form a “jumble of imagery that makes up my imagination.” Her inspiration stems from Asian and European woodcuts, engravings and folkloric textile arts. But she’s also inspired by classical art, including that from Archaic and Hellenistic Greece.

Katty explains that she approaches book illustration as she would a film. “I’ll start by reading the text,” she notes, “and dividing it so that the flow of pages feel natural to me. Then letting the text lead, I focus the tension between pages where the illustrations have just enough complementary information and others have less. Sometimes the image will depart from the text, but help the reader glimpse a context I have in mind. Often I’ll compose images to enhance a feeling of repose and focus on the story. I like to use a lot of negative space in order to give the reader plenty of room. I want the reader to feel like this reading time is their quiet time, so I won’t unnecessarily fill up the page.”

With such wide ranging talents, it is no wonder that Katty has been sought after by some of the best French- and English-language publishers in the country. And she’s been very successful in both arenas. But did she find differences in the ways these publishers worked? “I feel like they are quite similar in their approach and their tone,” she explained. “I feel like Canadian children books (Quebec included in here) have a generally thoughtful quality. As for the differences, I can only speak from my own experience in the Canadian illustrated book world. I have noticed with publishers, on the French Quebecois side, editors are often willing to take risks and are frequently open to experimental approaches; in some cases, I’ve even been given complete free reign. On the English side, the editors are often more involved in the process, perhaps because the teams are bigger, as are the initial markets. This probably impacts the creation process which tends to be more conservative at times. In both cases, I’m appreciative of the quality Canadian publishers strive for, I think we have a gem of a children’s books landscape.”

And based on what we’ve seen of Katty Maurey so far, it looks she’ll remain one of the brightest gems in this landscape for a long time to come.

Current Fave

The Shadow Elephant by Nadine Robert, illustrated by Valerio Vidali.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

It's often a moment of relief. It's the moment when you look at the work completed and bound, and all your pictorial decisions finally make sense. Before then, you always worry about certain images that may not shine on their own. When you see everything working together, (the story, the images, the flow of the pages cover to cover) that's when you finally see a book! And all the struggle and doubts that accompany you along the way can take a rest.

Katty Maurey Picture Books

2020: *David Jumps In*, written by Alan Woo, Kids Can Press

2016: *Andrew Carnegie, the Man Who Loved Libraries*, written by Andrew Larsen, Owlkids

2015: *The Specific Ocean*, written by Kyo Maclear, Kids Can Press

2014: *Renaud en Hiver*, written by Véronique Boisjoly, La Pastèque

2014: *Dans Mon Livre de Coeur*, written by Martine Audet, la Courte Échelle

2013: *Mon Ami Bao*, written by Stéphane Lafleur, La Pastèque

2012: *Renaud Le Petit Renard*, written by Véronique Boisjoly, La Pastèque

2011: *Quand J'étais Chien*, written by Louise Bombardiere, La Courte échelle

For more on Katty Maurey see www.kattymaurey.com and kattymaurey.tumblr.com



PHOTO CREDIT: DAN POPA

10 Interview: Spotlight on Sydney Smith

If Sydney Smith's name didn't appear on the cover of his books, it wouldn't matter – not to the reader anyway. Because a Sydney Smith book is a Sydney Smith book – it couldn't be anyone else's.

Sydney's mix of ink and watercolour masterfully creates tension between light and dark, setting off moods and tremors of anticipation spread to spread. And his occasional use of gouache provides a luminosity and shimmer unparalleled in the trade. There is always action too; if it isn't a dynamic character it's the angle from which we see it. And oftentimes, a look in a face that adds ripples of suspense that you can feel right in the gut. And the amazing part – it all looks so seamless, so simple. Without doubt, he is one of the finest picture book author/illustrators the country has ever seen.

It's not surprising then that Sydney Smith has received buckets of honours for his work. *Sidewalk Flowers*, a wordless picture book conceived by JonArno Lawson, won a Governor General's Award and was named a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children's Book. *Small in the City*, the first picture book Sydney both wrote and illustrated, also won a Governor General's Award and was named a *New York Times* 25 Best Children's Books of the year. *Town Is by the Sea*, written by Joanne Schwartz, was awarded the Kate Greenaway Medal, and won the TD Canadian Children's Literature Prize... the list goes on.

Sydney was kind enough to take some time to answer a few queries:

You are a master in the use of shadows – they inform so much of the stories you illustrate. How do you use shadows to build your illustrated books for young readers?

Ink can be a bold medium and there is something very powerful and beautiful about confident simplicity. It does not come naturally to me and that is why I approach mark making in an almost therapeutic way. A dark shape, or shadow can inform an image by what it hides. I am intrigued by storytelling that does not reveal everything and I guess I am same way with images. There is so much interactive dynamism when the image and the words leave room for interpretation.

What challenges and benefits are there in illustrating your own story compared to that of another?

The challenges of writing your own story is that it is harder to know when you are finished. There can be an unending feedback loop of images talking to words talking to images talking to words, etc. When I work on books written

by other authors, my goals are simpler. How can my illustrations best serve the story and work well with the text? The result is often more interesting because it is something I would never have discovered on my own. As well, writing for yourself can have its advantages. Too often a text will be complete before an illustrator can add images to it. Understandably, an author often thinks with words and the illustrations are an afterthought. When writing for yourself, image and text can have equal roles as story tellers, allowing the reader to not just read the words but experience the entirety of the book, images included.

What are the challenges and benefits of writing a wordless picture book?

A wordless picture book is a wonderful exercise in pacing and anticipating how a reader processes sequential images. Similar to film, when images are presented in a certain sequence or order, the reader infers a truth to the narrative. How you present the story changes how it impacts the reader as they follow your images. Carefully revealing information can add emphasis to an emotion. As the sole storyteller, the illustrations provide a rewarding experience for the active reader. The images are ostensibly passive, displaying the action for the reader to piece together a narrative.

I'll leave it to you to answer the classic question every writer and illustrator gets again and again: What advice would you give to an aspiring young Canadian picture book writer or illustrator?

There are three aspects to a good illustrator. Punctuality, artistic ability, and the ability to work well with others and accept direction with grace. If you have two of the three, you will survive. If you can have all three you will succeed.

At a certain point an illustrator will discover that the role of images in a picture book is to serve the story. The picture book is not a gallery to hang art and a pretty picture is worthless unless it elevates the text. The sooner that is fully understood, the better.

What inspired you to get involved with Canadian children's picture books and how did you get your first start?

I have always loved art that elicits a feeling or emotion. I love art that connects people. Picture books are a perfect place to explore the power of images and words working together. I started illustrating picture books while in University, working with local authors and publishers in Nova Scotia.

Thank you, Sydney!

Current Faves

Canadian: *Jelly Belly* by Dennis Lee, illustrated by Juan Wijngaard.

International: *Duck, Death and the Tulip* by Wolf Erlbruch.

Recommended for my local school board: *When We Were Alone* by David Robertson, illustrated by Julie Flett.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

I was thrilled to see my first picture book – but I knew I had a lot to learn.

Sydney Smith Picture Books

2020: *I Talk Like a River*, written by Jordan Scott, Neal Porter Books/Holiday House

2019: *Small in the City*, by Sydney Smith, Neal Porter Books/Holiday House

2017: *Town is by the Sea*, written by Joanne Schwartz, Groundwood Books

2017: *Smoot: A Rebellious Shadow*, written by Michelle Cuevas, Dial Books for Young Readers

2016: *The White Cat and the Monk: A retelling of the Poem “Pangur Bán”*, written by Jo Ellen Bogart, Groundwood Books

2016: *Canada Year by Year*, written by Elizabeth MacLeod, Kids Can Press

2015: *Sidewalk Flowers*, “written” by Jon Arno Lawson, Groundwood Books

2015: *Grant and Tillie Go Walking*, written by Monica Kulling, Groundwood Books

2014: *Music is For Everyone*, written by Jill Barber, Nimbus Publishing

2012: *Toes in my Nose, and Other Poems*, written by Sheree Fitch, Nimbus Publishing



PHOTO CREDIT: STEVE FARMER

2011: *There Were Monkeys in my Kitchen*, written by Sheree Fitch, Nimbus Publishing

2010: *Mabel Murple*, written by Sheree Fitch, Nimbus Publishing

See more on Sydney Smith at www.sydneydraws.ca

11 Interview: Spotlight on Nhung Tran Davies

Nhung Tran Davies is a family physician, a social justice advocate and an exciting new children's picture book author. Born in a rural village in war-torn Vietnam, her family was so poor that her mother and older siblings would often go without so the younger children could get something meagre to eat. Then the floods hit. And they had to get out. Fast. The family boarded a leaking old boat that ferried them on a harrowing journey to Malaysia. Here they survived eight months in a refugee camp until an Alberta group sponsored the relocation of Nhung, her mother and five siblings to Edmonton, Alberta. Here in Canada, a new life began.

We had the honour to talk with this special woman, about picture books and what motivates her to write for children.

You've often noted that a major life goal is to pay back the kindness and generosity that you've received in life. Is writing children's books part of this goal?

Yes, one of the goals for everything I do is to pay forward the kindness and generosity I have received throughout my life. When it comes to writing, I write, first and foremost, because I have a love of writing and a passion for words. I love to write children's stories because for me, children are wonderful reminders of the beauty in a grain of sand. Children embody the hope we have for the future, and because books have an amazing ability to not only educate but create empathy, compassion, understanding and respect for one another, I write for them, the children. I write about the humanity in our lives. Therefore, writing for me is just not an artistic endeavour, but a tool to empower and effect much needed positive changes in our community and society. This is one of my ways of honouring and paying forward the kindness I received. As well, I have donated proceeds from sales of my books to charity to further pay forward the kindness.

Tell me about the Kemosa Scholarships, your involvement in it, and how it fits in with your outlook in life?

As refugees from the Vietnam War, my family was sponsored to Edmonton, Alberta by a church group in the Enoch Cree Nation, Treaty 6 Territory. Because of my sponsors' close connection to the Indigenous community there, I was introduced to pow-wows and shared meals with my Indigenous sisters and brothers. My sponsors were strong advocates for Indigenous rights, but I don't think growing up I fully appreciated the issues... it was not until the *Truth and Reconciliation* and the stories being told that I developed a deeper understanding, empathy and compassion for the suffering and struggles of all these men and women.

And so, three years ago, when I visited with renowned Indigenous author Richard Van Camp and he described how Indigenous mothers struggle, as they balance between financial constraints, work, children, and their passion to write, I was very moved. As a mother of three, I felt their struggle, but at the same time, I appreciated how fortunate I am to have the financial security as a physician to follow my passion. I felt compelled, as part of the *Truth and Reconciliation* call to action, to found the Kemosa Scholarship for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Mothers Who Write (a title suggested by Richard, while "Kemosa" stands for the first two letters of my three children's names – Kenya, Monet, Sage – because I want my children, the youth, to be a part of the effort), to help give voice to these mothers because I know their stories have the power to effect much needed positive changes in our relations and understandings of ourselves and the Indigenous community.

Many of your stories are based in Vietnam, your birthplace. Yet you write for a Canadian audience. What are you hoping Canadian kids will take away from your stories?

Yes, so far, many of my stories have centred around Vietnam because of my family's journey as refugees. I cannot forget the fact that I come from war and poverty, and I don't want my children to forget that either because I know we often can lose our way in life if we don't know from whence we come. So, I put my thoughts, reflections and memories into words, into stories with the hopes that the future generations will know a part of our history. I want them to know the horrors of war and atrocities to humanity. It is the only way humanity can grow.

As well, I know books have an amazing ability to take us places we've never been. I want Canadian kids to appreciate the lives of children in Vietnam and elsewhere in the world. My picture book *Ten Cents a Pound*, for example, is about the struggles a child goes through in deciding if she should go to school or stay home to help her mom and family make a living. These are struggles not often faced by children here where education is so often taken for granted. I believe these stories will help Canadian children appreciate how fortunate

they are and be grateful for what they have. Though these stories are set in Vietnam, I do feel the message is universal.

You are a family physician with hundreds of patients under your care. What inspires you to spend precious time away from your practice writing picture books?

I love being a family doctor, as I am grateful to have the privilege to be in the lives of my patients and hear their stories. I have much to learn from them and their stories inspire me. From listening to them, I know that everyone has their own struggles, and in order for us to understand one another, we need to hear one another's stories. Because I feel books and stories have the power to create compassion and empathy, I write. And as you know, children inspire me because of the potential they hold to do so much good for our world.

When you're doing what you love, finding time to do so just comes naturally. For me, it seems natural to balance between medicine and writing because I love both the sciences and the arts, and being able to do both gives me the balance and nourishment I need. And when you have a passion to write, you just write regardless of what other things are going on in your life. Writing also allows me to tame restless thoughts and to make more concrete my imagination and creativity. Of course, a lot of this writing comes late at night, in the midnight hours when all the kids are snug in bed.

Thank you, Nhung!

Current Faves

Canadian: *A Boy Asked the Wind* by Barbara Nickel, illustrated by Gillian Newland.

International: *The Fantastic Flying Books of Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce, illustrated by William Joyce and Joe Blumh.

Recommended for my local school board: *Ten Cents a Pound*, by Nhung Tran Davies, illustrated by Josée Bisaillon.



What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

I can remember being overwhelmed with emotions. It was surreal that my words and ideas reflected in print and in pictures. Just to see how the illustrators interpreted my words into images was very neat to see, as these are what my words meant to them. To know that my story would be out there in the world to be read by others is just an amazing yet humbling feeling.

Nhung Tran Davies Picture Books

2022: *Green Papayas*, illustrated by Gillian Newland, Red Deer Press

2021: *The Doll*, illustrated by Ravi Puth, Second Story Press

2018: *Ten Cents a Pound*, illustrated by Josée Bisailon, Second Story Press

2012: *Daddy is a Conundrum*, illustrated by Stephanie Parker, Friesen Press

Find more on Nhung Tran Davies at www.nhungtrandavies.com

12 Interview: Spotlight on Jane Whittingham

Jane Whittingham's love of story is apparent in everything she does, from her spirited posts about books for young people to her passionate support of Canadian literature in her role as a Children's Librarian in Vancouver, BC. Known as the "Raincity Librarian," Jane's love of story is even more evident in her own critically acclaimed picture books written with Toronto's Pajama Press.

Jane's three titles to date are exquisite read-a-louds, perfect for intergenerational sharing. Vivid characters and simple text produce memorable characters that express sheer joy in discovering the natural world around them.

We had the good fortune to spend some time with Jane to discuss the world of Canadian picture books:

From the perspective of a children's librarian, what roles do you think picture books play in our various communities?

Picture books are so powerful because they can play many important roles simultaneously. They encourage vocabulary building and language acquisition, while also supporting social-emotional growth and development. Picture books can encourage physical literacy and engage kinesthetic learners through

movement and active participation, provide comfort during tough times, and help caregivers support children through challenging life experiences. And to paraphrase educator and professor Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, picture books can serve as windows, mirrors and sliding doors, allowing children and families to see reflections of their own lived experiences, while also providing opportunities to engage with people whose own stories might be very different. Oh, and let's not forget that picture books can bring us real joy, which is a gift that should never be overlooked!

And is this why you find such pleasure in discovering your books in local libraries across North America?

Absolutely! I am deeply moved and incredibly honoured to know that families across North America and in countries around the world are finding value in something I created. It's so important to me that my books be accessible, and accessibility is at the very core of what libraries stand for. Let's face it, picture books can be prohibitively expensive, and libraries help ensure that more families can have access to quality children's materials. I have very fond childhood memories of my local library, and libraries will always hold a very precious place in my heart.

In all your books to date the reader finds a main character expressing their curiosity – outdoors. Why is that important to you?

Growing up I spent a lot of time outdoors, whether with my family, my friends, or just by myself, wandering and exploring and imagining. There is so much wonder and beauty to be found in our natural world, if only we'd get out there and experience it. I was a shy, awkward kid, and going for nature walks was a wonderful way for me to de-stress and centre myself, and I still get most of my best ideas when I'm outside walking! Unfortunately it seems that children are spending more time indoors at screens and desks, and less time soaking in everything that our environment has to offer us. I hope my books can encourage families to get outside just a little bit more often – you don't have to live on the edge of a big park or go for a hike in the mountains if you don't want to, some puddle-jumping down the street or bounding through the grass can do the trick!

Your first book – Wild One – is presented in rhyming couplets, a technique that has fallen out of fashion lately. Yet Wild One works perfectly as proven by all the critical attention. Why did you choose to present the story this way?

I have to confess that I'm a bit out of fashion in most aspects of my life (my fashion choices can be described as "granny-chic"), so it seems fitting that I chose to write my first book in a bit of an old-fashioned style. Some of my favourite story time books use rhyming couplets to great effect (*I Went Walking* by Sue Machin, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?* by Bill Martin Jr., for example), so I knew how well the technique could work when read aloud. *Wild One* was envisioned from the very beginning as a story time book for a young, wiggly audience, so I wanted to create a story with a great rhythm that would grab and hold children's attention, while being brief enough to keep that attention right to the very end!

What inspired you to get involved with Canadian children's picture books and how did you get your first start?

Before I began working as a children's librarian I knew very little about Canadian children's literature, and the majority of the books I grew up with were British or American. As I developed my own library collection I realised just how much incredible talent we have right here in Canada, and as I started to work with publishers I grew to understand how difficult it can be for Canadian publishers to compete on the international stage. I knew I wanted to help spread the word about Canadian children's literature and encourage more families to explore some of the many incredible picture books that Canada has to offer.

Thanks, Jane!

Childhood Faves

Canadian: *The Paperbag Princess* written by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko.

International: the works of Beatrix Potter.

Recommended for my local school board: *Birdsong* by Julie Flett.

What was your reaction on seeing a finished copy of your first picture book?

I cried! It was such a dream come true for me to see my name on the cover. It hardly felt real, and I still feel so incredibly thankful that my Pajama Press was willing to take a chance on me.

Jane Whittingham Picture Books

2022: *Untitled Picture Book*, illustrated by Cinyee Chiu, Kids Can Press

2022: *Wild About Camping*, Illustrator TBD, Nimbus Publishing

2019: *Queenie Quail Can't Keep Up*, illustrated by Emma Pedersen, Pajama Press

2018: *A Good Day for Ducks*, illustrated by Noel Tuazon, Pajama Press

2017: *Wild One*, illustrated by Noel Tuazon, Pajama Press

Find more on Jane Whittingham at www.raincitylibrarian.ca



Epilogue

As we conclude this guide to contemporary Canadian picture books, we celebrate the many, many exemplary titles we have read, and the joy and information they bring to readers young and old.

We are also conscious of roads left unexplored. We haven't tapped the growing number of picture books produced by self-publishing routes, or small start-up presses we've yet to hear about. Authors and illustrators who live and write in Canada but published between 2017–2019 with companies outside the country are also not included in our thematic chapters, and thus we haven't been able to share some truly masterful works by The Fan Brothers, Rob Gonsalves, Jon Klassen, Alice Kuipers, George Littlechild, Jeremy Tankard, and more. French language books published in Canada were also not explored in our work, leaving out many noteworthy titles, and this avenue would be fascinating to explore and connect with a comparative analysis of English titles. And a separate study that includes counting books and alphabet books would definitely be a worthy endeavor, not to mention the wonderful board books being produced, as these texts were not included in our project.

Additional research projects are suggested in terms of depictions of Canadian identity in targeted samples of these picture books. For example, explorations of text and images might identify what messages we are giving young audiences about culture, and examine where – in text, illustrations, or both – these messages appear. Other questions might take a research team into examining notions of place, or the intertextuality that appears in postmodern picture books, following previous research by Johnson and Bainbridge (2013) or Sipe and Pantaleo (2008). In our explorations, we sometimes found it difficult to locate information about the media used by illustrators, especially in reviews, and we suggest that more attention should be given to the illustrator's visual craft alongside the author's written text – both modes of communication are important.

We also encourage future research that will expand understandings of wider, culturally representative content in Canadian picture books. In terms of Indigenous content, we have noted in general the titles where Indigenous authors or illustrators are connected, but a more responsive study to understand Indigenous knowledge and perspectives more deeply is suggested in order to explore patterns and themes that appear from various distinct Indigenous groups across Canada.

Classic works from around the world have no doubt influenced our own creative content in Canada, and we think about John Burningham, Eric Carle,

Mem Fox, Leo Lionni, Arnold Lobel, Helen Oxenbury, Beatrix Potter, Michael Rosen, Shaun Tan, Rosemary Wells, Brian Wildsmith, Audrey Wood, Jane Yolen... the list of inspirational writers and artists goes on and on.

And then there's the contemporary content from outside Canada that continues to push the envelope: *Dear Mr. President* by New Zealand author Sophie Siers (illustrated by Anne Villeneuve), about a child who hears of a president building a wall and starts writing him letters; New York author Esmé Shapiro's *Alma and the Beast*, about celebrating human differences; *Out*, the story of a young girl and her mother who are refugees making the journey to a new home, by Australian author and illustrator team Angela May George and Owen Swan; new bilingual work by Jill Daniels, a Ritharrnu and Madarrpa artist in Australia; and of course the wonderful books of Peter H. Reynolds, especially *Ish* – which champions the bravery of artists and other creators everywhere. Again, the list extends off the page, around the corner, and into the distance.

There are a few books that were slated for publication in time for our scrutiny but delays due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have prevented us from reading them on schedule. One of these is Kathy Stinson's *The Girl Who Loved Giraffes and became the world's first giraffologist* (illustrated by François Thisdale, and designed by Kong Njo), a true story about Anne Innis Dagg. We are reminded that new books are entering the field all the time, and we want to encourage you to keep reading!

We could continue! But we'll stop here. We hope our work has interested, challenged, and amazed you, and supported more Canadian picture books than ever before in reaching the hands of readers... where they belong!

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