BEST BOOKS 2019

Los MEJORES LIBROS 2019

III Raul the Third

elaine
Each fall, the SLJ reviews editors embark on the labor of love that is the Best Books selection process, with the goal of curating a diverse list of the most distinguished titles published in that given year. For the first time, we invited select reviewers and experts to serve on subcommittees, each chaired by an in-house editor, thereby broadening the scope of books considered and culminating in an outstanding collection of 92 titles spanning picture books, transitional chapter books, middle grade, young adult, nonfiction, and graphic novels.

Across our list, readers will find tender and joyful celebrations of families and intergenerational friendships, delightfully goofy series installments, deft and poignant coming-of-age narratives, wildly original speculative fiction, and revelatory informational works that shatter false mythologies. Among the exemplary works is our cover artist’s, Raúl the Third’s, effervescent romp through a bustling mercado—both a stellar read-aloud and an apt metaphor for our 2019 list: a marketplace of ideas, stories, and artistry, with something for every kind of reader. Vamos, dig in, and enjoy!

**Picture Books**

Joy Fleishhacker, Daryl Grabarek, Ruth Guerrier-Pierre, Kiera Parrott, Luann Toth


PreS-Gr 2—From Alexander’s sumptuous poetry, comparing reading to peeling the skin of a clementine, digging in to its juiciness, enjoying it “piece by piece, part by part,” to Sweet’s ingeniously detailed mixed-media collage artwork, children are encouraged to slow down, “get cozy between the covers,” and spend time enjoying and exploring every morsel of word and image in this glorious homage to the magic of reading.


PreS-Gr 2—A cohort of acorn-size beings, the Little Guys, explore the possibilities of collective action, discovering that they can move mountains when they work together. Whether they wield their awesome power for good or ill remains to
be seen in this clever comic-style cautionary tale about forest domination by the witty and inventive Brosgol.


PreS-Gr 2—In this modern retelling of a classic tale of unlikely friends, readers go deeper into the friendship of the Lion and the Mouse beyond the notion of favors and experience how true relationships develop and grow. The engaging mixed-media illustrations add a layer of whimsy and warmth that make this version of the story so distinct.


PreS-Gr 2—A boy hopes that his family’s end-of-summer camping trip will never end so that he will not have to start first grade. Things change when a tiger appears at their campsite, and the young narrator finds himself taking on challenges he never would have thought possible. Imagination and realism flawlessly flicker and blend in this strikingly illustrated story about growing up and gaining independence.


PreS-Gr 3—Season after season, a stalwart scarecrow guards his domain, keeping the woodland creatures at bay, until a fledgling crow lands at his feet and touches his heart. He tucks the injured bird into his overalls, cares for him until he can fly, and opens his arms when the crow and his mate return to build a nest. The Fan Brothers have spun straw into gold in their lovely, expansive, and richly textured artwork.


K-Gr 2—Forced to move from her home by the sea, a young Cree girl, a budding artist and nature lover, befriends her elderly new neighbor who is an avid gardener and a potter. This tender and deeply resonant book explores the cycle of seasons and the cycle of life and celebrates an intergenerational friendship par excellence. With spare text and warm pastel and pencil art, this evocative selection is a poem for the heart.


PreS-Gr 2—On a lunar outing, a spacesuit-garbed student wanders off into the monochromatic landscape, pulls out a sketchbook, and begins to draw, only to discover (after an unintended nap) that her teacher and classmates have left her behind. Five one-eyed, gray creatures, skittishly watching from afar, are intrigued by her multicolored crayons and together have their own field day with the art supplies. An irresistible, wordless wonder, brimming with wit and humor.


PreS-Gr 3—Larkin spins a buoyant monologue to his young sons about why bees are so important and how they are analogous to rambunctious children; the narrative is threaded with unconditional love for both subjects. Hand lettering, bold coloring, and textural, mixed-media artwork add energy while evocative language makes for a spirited and joy-filled read-aloud.


PreS-Gr 2—When Aidan was born, everyone thought he was a girl, but as he grew older, he knew that he was “really another kind of boy.” He and his parents have worked together to make his life feel right, but now he worries about providing a perfect welcome for his soon-to-be-born sibling.
Pairing effervescent artwork with a child-centered perspective, this satisfying family tale sweetly conveys Aidan’s heartfelt journey.

Gr 2-5--Lil Alan worries about what he can share when called upon to present at his great-grandmother’s anniversary celebration. Centered in a loving family, enriched by their memories, and on the land they have farmed for generations, the child is provided with his answer. Evocative, layered acrylic wash artwork in vibrant colors illuminates this moving tribute to family and history.

PreS-Gr 2--This poetic homage to a food with origins in the diaspora of Native peoples in the United States takes a sensorial approach to its subject, exploring the meaning and excitement of a family tradition. Superb back matter, a recipe, and soft, mixed-media illustrations that are both playful and poignant complete this stunning, important title.

PreS-Gr 2--A trip to the library, a picnic, and a one-night-only puppet show are some of the activities Ava and her mother have planned for their day together. But when Saturday arrives, the two are met with disappointment after disappointment until the day ends on an absolutely “splendid” note thanks to the resourceful and imaginative child. Imbued with a storyteller’s cadence and illustrated with brilliant collage images bursting with color, this is a book that begs to be shared again and again.

K-Gr 4--Young Faizah tells the story of her big sister Asiya’s first day of sixth grade and first day of wearing hijab. Faizah’s enthusiasm and the girls’ mother’s words of strength shine a light on this important cultural milestone. Aly’s warm, rich, child-friendly images express pride and sisterly love.

K-Gr 2--When Daisy’s tired papi arrives home from work, they strap on helmets and take off on his shiny blue motorcycle for a sunset tour of their Corona, CA, community. They zigzag and zoom through busy streets, savoring familiar sights and sounds, and cherishing time spent together. Motion-packed artwork and lyrical text portray the incandescent affection shared by father and daughter while offering a heartfelt homage to a vibrant city, built by immigrants and faced with constant change.

PreK--Instead of getting the puppy he’s been longing for, young Carter receives a toy truck for his birthday and transforms it into his pet. Pinkney’s bright and energetic acrylic and India ink artwork holds enormous appeal for a young audience, who’ll eagerly “vroom,” “beep,” and “bark” along with Carter.
K-Gr 2—Readers travel along as Little Lobo and his pooch deliver a wagonload of supplies to a bustling Mexican mercado, stopping along the way to watch street performers, sample tasty treats, and chat with friendly shopkeepers. Featuring endearing anthropomorphic animals, the vivacious cartoon artwork and simple text are jam-packed with Spanish words and cultural references, inviting youngsters to explore and discover while diving into the details of this delightful seek-and-find story.

PreS-Gr 1—When his person, Sarah, puts on a backpack and heads out the door, Truman gets worried and decides to venture out of his comfortable aquarium to find her. Journeying across furniture and the “endless rug,” the intrepid little reptile valiantly struggles his way, oh-so-slowly, to the front door...just as Sarah returns home from her first day at school. Turtle’s-eye view compositions, dramatic framing, and Truman’s hilariously earnest expressions will inspire giggles and repeated readings.

PreS-Gr 2—In this cinematic, wordless picture book, a little girl and her cat go on a surreal journey into a parallel dimension. An identical black cat (wearing a blue collar instead of a red one) leads the pair through a mysterious portal to a topsy-turvy place where he meets new friends and encounters her own friendly doppelganger. Robinson’s vibrant shapes, inventive compositions, and careful use of color and white space evoke mid-century modern masters. An adventure, an invitation, and a thought-provoking exploration of perspective.

PreS-Gr 1—Traversing a wintry cityscape can make anyone feel small and vulnerable, especially a young child or a lost pet. Smith’s brilliant, high-contrast pen and watercolor panels, pages, and panoramas provide the backdrop and capture the very real drama as a boy canvases his neighborhood, hangs signs, and offers his missing cat tips, shortcuts, and encouragement to make its way home.
Transitional Chapter Books

Travis Jonker, Ashleigh Williams

PreS-Gr 3—Geisel medalist Bell returns to the early reader world with a delightfully silly story about an unlikely duo. Brain is overconfident. Chick is unfailingly courteous. Brain wants Chick to smell his foot, which Chick staunchly refuses to do until Brain says the magic word. But when Chick is in danger of being eaten, will Brain come to the rescue? This playful title is a masterwork of miscommunication, a comedy of manners, and an ode to bad odor.

Gr 2-4—The Geisel Award–winning creators return with a lost dog mystery. Fred can sit. Fred can lie down. Fred can shake. But Fred can’t find his family. King and his human, Kayla, are on the case. They gather clues and hit the water in search of Fred’s family. Perfect for young mystery fans and dog lovers alike.

K-Gr 2—Solving life’s problems with creativity and a can-do attitude is Yasmin’s M.O. In this collection of four short stories, Yasmin gets solvin’ at school, in the kitchen, at the zoo, and in her neighborhood. Whether she’s crafting a new recipe or rescuing a friend’s toy from peril, ingenuity is the name of her game. A Renaissance girl for contemporary times who young readers will love.

Gr 1-4—There’s nothing that draws in a reader quite like well-written dialogue. Humor doesn’t hurt, either. This third book in the series thrives on the back-and-forth of the titular duo. The effervescent themes of friendship, community, and empathy contained in these three tales will leave young readers amused and satisfied.

Gr 2-4—Juana lives happily in Bogotá, Colombia, with her dog, Lucas, but struggles to orient herself when her widowed mother marries Luis. The gentle text with playful illustrations includes Spanish words and many details of Juana’s daily life, including her favorite foods, games, and family members. Children will enjoy a peek into Bogotá life while relating to Juana’s joys and fears, all depicted with honesty and humor.

Pres-K—With a wave of his wand, Zip produces a little robot. Zip orders the bot to make him some mint tea, but gets a pie in the face instead. Can Zip zap this problem? Milgrim takes an intriguing premise and adds humor, surprise, and heart. With no more than 100 words of text, this addition to the “Ready To Go! Ready To Read” collection includes a note for parents, ample word repetition, and reading comprehension questions to build literacy skills.

PreS-Gr 3—This entry in the “Elephant & Piggie Like Reading” series centers pretending and emulating someone you admire. Odd-couple pals Harold and Hog decide to engage in some Elephant and Piggie cosplay. But the fun turns to concern when the friends realize that they are not quite like their famous heroes. Not since We Are in a Book! has the “Elephant & Piggie” universe been so delightfully meta.
Gr 1-4—No other series captures the humor, beauty, and quirkiness of everyday family life better than Snyder’s “Charlie & Mouse.” With these endearing brothers, something as simple as making pancakes becomes a moment of comedy. This time around, the boys are preparing for Mom’s birthday. Lucky for readers, things do not go as planned, and hijinks ensue.

Gr 1-3—Zoom Squirrel is testing out some new superpowers with the help of an enigmatic masked reader—but will the squirrel team, and the reader, ever figure out who it is? This second book in the “Unlimited Squirrels” series bounces between stories, jokes, and facts—it’s a variety show in book form that will please squirrel-short attention spans everywhere.

Middle Grade
Lisa Goldstein, Lindsay Persohn, Ashleigh Williams, Taylor Worley

Gr 5-8—Lucy’s mother, a shark expert, died five years ago, and now Lucy has also lost her best friend Fred. She emerges from her grief with a project that fuses her artistic talent with a new interest in sharks. Allen pens a sensitive depiction of a transitional time where friends become romantic prospects, hobbies become professional aspirations, and loss can upend but also focus.

Gr 5-8—Coyote Sunrise and her father, Roden, have traversed the country in a school bus for five years since the death of Coyote’s mother and sisters, collecting a quirky ensemble of companions. The imminent destruction of a park in her old neighborhood sends her on a mission to return in time to collect treasured mementos. Coyote is a unique character whose authentic voice shines.

Gr 5-8—When her mother falls critically ill and her island is devastated by unstoppable rain after extended drought, Lalani travels to the fabled island of Isa to find help. Dozens of men have sailed toward it, but none return. Lalani’s story is woven with that of other islanders’ as they rise together and prove that success isn’t rooted in brute force. This is a lyrical, engrossing, and timely commentary on power, faith, and love.

Gr 3-7—Makeda, 12, is a transracial adoptee who’s having trouble adjusting to life in a new town. She endures racist microaggressions from classmates, teachers, and even her own white adopted into a white family, but never knew the details. Readers follow Edie on her path of discovery and heartache as she learns both her mother’s and grandmother’s stories, all while navigating changing friendships. Day illuminates a story rarely depicted in middle grade literature with insight and grace.

Gr 5-8—When her mother falls critically ill and her island is devastated by unstoppable rain after extended drought, Lalani travels to the fabled island of Isa to find help. Dozens of men have sailed toward it, but none return. Lalani’s story is woven with that of other islanders’ as they rise together and prove that success isn’t rooted in brute force. This is a lyrical, engrossing, and timely commentary on power, faith, and love.

Gr 3-7—Makeda, 12, is a transracial adoptee who’s having trouble adjusting to life in a new town. She endures racist microaggressions from classmates, teachers, and even her own white
parents. Her mom might be on the brink of another bipolar episode while dad is away on tour. In hauntingly beautiful prose and verse, Lockington offers an unflinching look at racism and the experiences of having a parent with a mental illness.

PARRY, Rosanne. *A Wolf Called Wander*. illus. by Mónica Armiño. HarperCollins/Greenwillow. ISBN 9780062895936. Gr 4-6—Swift, a yearling wolf, travels alone across the Pacific Northwest in search of a home and new pack after an attack on his family’s territory. Without anthropomorphizing, Parry filters the world through Swift’s sensory perceptions. The copious black-and-white illustrations are expressive and detailed. Based on a real wolf that made a similar journey, this is ideal for readers with an interest in animals, nature, and survival stories.

PARSONS, Karyn. *How High the Moon*. Little, Brown. ISBN 9780316484008. Gr 4-6—Ella learns about her mother, the father she never knew, and the stark realities of race relations in 1944 America when she spends Christmas with her mother in Boston. Ella returns home to learn a boy in her small South Carolina community is charged with killing two white girls. This historical coming-of-age novel tackles racism, sexuality, and family secrets as it deftly handles Ella’s difficult life lessons.

RAMÉE, Lisa Moore. *A Good Kind of Trouble*. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray. ISBN 9780062836687. Gr 4-8—Middle schooler Shayla finds her voice and shares in the power of peaceful political protest in her school. Ramée explores issues of racial identity, racial violence, Black Lives Matter, and shows what it’s like to navigate the harrowing experience of seventh grade. An important contemporary book about what young people can do to stand up for what they believe is right, even when it’s not easy.

REYNOLDS, Jason. *Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks*. Atheneum/Caitlin Dlouhy Bks. ISBN 9781481438285. Gr 5-8—Raconteur Reynolds weaves together the disparate voices of 10 young people as they walk home from the same school. Through the students’ physical proximity to one another and their overlapping lives, each tale provides an imaginative and moving look at the joys and sorrows shaping their personal journeys.

SALAZAR, Aida. *The Moon Within*. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine Bks. ISBN 9781338283372. Gr 4-8—Celi Rivera, 11, is struggling with puberty and the onset of her period. Her mother is pushing her to celebrate with a “moon ceremony” as part of their Mexican heritage. Meanwhile, Celi’s best friend Marco is transitioning as middle school rages around them. This lightly illustrated novel in verse is an honest and empowering story, perfect for readers on the cusp of adolescence, exploring gender identity, or looking to better understand their peers.

WARGA, Jasmine. *Other Words for Home*. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray. ISBN 9780062747808. Gr 4-8—Jude must leave half of her family behind in Syria for relative safety in America with her pregnant mother. Though she dreams of being an actress, Jude isn’t expecting the type of attention she receives in her new school, including the label of “Middle Eastern” and the stigma it can bring. Warga’s gorgeous novel in verse explores prejudice, xenophobia, and the effects of war alongside emerging friendships and questions of belonging.

WILLIAMS, Alicia D. *Genesis Begins Again*. Atheneum/Caitlin Dlouhy Bks. ISBN 9781481465809. Gr 5-8—When her family is evicted, again, Genesis’s father scores them a too-good-to-be-true home in a largely white neighborhood where he swears things will be different. Things aren’t different. Genesis hates many things about herself, including the darkness of her skin, a sentiment echoed by her father in his worst moments. Williams deftly explores the realities of colorism and alcoholism in this evocative narrative. Not a comfortable read, but a relevant and necessary one.
Young Adult

Kristin Anderson, Katy Hershberger, Janet Hilbun, Amanda MacGregor, Desiree Thomas

Gr 9 Up—Aro-Latinx teen Emoni is a gifted chef and mother whose determination allows her to find success through hard work and help from supportive friends and family. The focus on trade schooling and teen parenting will both empower readers and be a welcome addition to the YA canon.

Gr 8 Up—Adam Chen and Zayneb Malik, who for very different reasons feel alone and frustrated, meet in Qatar and discover the transformative power of convictions and connections. Centering the Muslim experience, this beautiful, complex, and important book examines love, family, justice, activism, and the changes and challenges life throws at us.

Gr 9 Up—Arrah is the daughter of two powerful witchdoctors. Her father continues to practice the old magic, while her mother renounced her tribe to serve as Ka-Priestess to the ruler of the Kingdom. Shamefully, Arrah’s abilities haven’t appeared, but when children start disappearing and her mother turns to darkness, she is the only one who can save the world. This exhilarating fantasy debut, rooted in West African lore, boasts vivid action and delicious family intrigue.

Gr 7 Up—In a town where all monsters and evil deeds are thought to have been eliminated, Jam, a selectively mute transgender teen, accidentally lets loose a creature from one of her mother’s paintings and together they hunt a particularly insidious monster—one who hasn’t yet been discovered. Unique and tightly written, without a word out of place, this slim fable forces readers to consider what is truly monstrous in our world.

Gr 8 Up—Fed up with their school’s problematic staff and lukewarm commitment to social justice, poet Chelsea and actress Jasmine start a blog to showcase their own progressive writing. With heartfelt friendship and family dynamics, this relevant novel explores body-shaming, racial stereotypes, and gender inequality and shows what artistry and activism can look like.

Gr 9 Up—Five cousins with no prior connection to one another find themselves living near their wealthy grandparents. The stark realism of the five teens’ lives touches on issues of abuse, prejudice, white privilege, and loneliness as the teens struggle to make sense of themselves, their family, and their relationships. The delightful surrealism and masterful storytelling make this an unforgettable read that will linger long.
Gr 7 Up–Frustrated by the inequality she sees as a Chinese woman in 1890 Atlanta, Jo Kuan begins writing an anonymous advice column in the newspaper. The mostly untold history of the Chinese experience in the South sets the tone for Jo’s story, the secrets kept by those in power, and her drive and talent. The superb writing, deliberate pacing, and slow reveal of secrets make this a believable and enjoyable read.

Gr 9 Up–One prescription is all it takes to kick-start softball phenom Mickey Catalan’s frightening descent into opioid addiction. From the horrific first line to the hopeful yet devastating conclusion, this powerful, harrowing, and compassionate story humanizes addiction and will challenge readers to rethink what they may believe about addicts.

Gr 9 Up–A police officer fatally shoots an unarmed 13-year-old African American girl and sends an already grieving community into an emotional tailspin. Magoon examines how law enforcement policies, the threat of police violence, and the 24-hour news cycle affect different parts of a community in profound ways.

Gr 8 Up–In a Latinx-inspired dystopian setting, young women are trained to be paired as sister wives to a single husband. When Dani is paired with Carmen, her school rival, to one of the most powerful men in Media, she is surprised to find herself falling in love with her former enemy. The queer themes and tough characters make this novel rise above other dystopian offerings.

Gr 9 Up–Two teens from very different backgrounds journey to Kolkata with a church group to help those who have escaped from sex trafficking. While they help others, they are surprised to find healing from their own traumas. Through alternating perspectives, the author crafts a powerful message about global trafficking, activism, and cultural bias.

Gr 9 Up–In 1972, Missippi and Sue are sent to live with other pregnant girls in Chicago until they deliver while Ola relies on her younger sister Izella to help hide her pregnancy from their mother in rural Georgia. Pink highlights the innocence and strength of her indelible characters in gut-wrenching scenes, depicting a tight-knit community of women and exploring a highly relevant issue.

Gr 8 Up–A uniquely twisted love story involving time travel, death, and friendship. Sparks fly when Jack and Kate meet at a party, but their love affair ends unexpectedly when Kate dies suddenly. Jack uses his newfound time-traveling ability to save her. This “meet cute” blends elements of classic rom-coms *Say Anything*, *Groundhog Day*, and *When Harry Met Sally* to great effect.

Gr 9 Up–In World War II–era Chicago, Frankie Mazza and her siblings are left at an orphanage. Frankie dreams of a more hopeful future, while her every movement is observed by Pearl, a ghost working through her own disappointments and grief. This stunning story of loss, tragedy, forgiveness, and survival explores all the ways girls are locked up, controlled, punished, and yet persevere.

Gr 7 Up–This elegantly written verse novel tells the story of real-life activist Sophie Scholl, her siblings, and friends, as they work together to resist and bring down the Nazi regime. The dangers they face and the brutal punishment they endure result in a compelling read that resonates today.

Gr 9 Up–After Frank Li’s Korean parents disown his sister for marrying a black man, he fakes a relationship with Joy, a
family friend, so they won’t find out that he’s actually dating a white girl. This is a nuanced look at culture, identity, and racism, with well-drawn characters, an incredibly strong narrative voice, and warm humor that doesn’t detract from its deep themes.

Gr 9 Up—The beauty and complexity of being black and young in America is brilliantly encapsulated in 17 multifaceted short stories from authors across the black diaspora, providing a vehicle for readers to make connections across different societal barriers. Each entry is accessible and deftly woven with humanity.

---

**Nonfiction**

Miriam DesHarnais, Heidi Grange, Kacy Helwick, Elizabeth Lovsin, Vanessa Willoughby

Gr 3 Up—Alexander and Nelson celebrate the perseverance and achievements of both current and past figures in black history, known and unknown, while also issuing a call to action for the present and the future. Alexander’s poignant poetry and Nelson’s evocative illustrations combine perfectly to create an inspiring, outstanding ode to the complexities of the black American experience.

Gr 8 Up—Anderson’s memoir in free verse addresses her history of trauma and the sexual assault that inspired *Speak* and also features the fans, contemporaries, and survivors she has met and been impacted by in the last 20 years as an author and advocate. This unflinching work is an engrossing, haunting, and essential read.

Gr 1-5—Margaret Wise Brown’s life and illustrious literary career are spotlighted in this unique picture book. Barnett and Jacoby experiment with the conventions of form, resulting in a wonderfully weird and lively biography that is worthy of its groundbreaking subject.

Gr 9 Up—Bausum’s comprehensive account of the AIDS crisis in America charts the social and medical conditions that led to the terrifyingly fast spread of the disease and relays the reactions from various parts of society. The devastating loss of life is honored, the efforts of activists are recognized, and the inaction of the government is roundly criticized.

Gr 7 Up—This young readers adaptation of the author’s 2012 title illuminates contributions to American history by a wide variety of queer individuals and groups, from Indigenous tribes who have long embraced two-spirit people to poets, musicians, politicians, and activists. Bronski’s writing displays a considerable level of sensitivity. This content-rich work fills a clear curriculum need for a history that has long been ignored.
DENISE, Anika Aldamuy. Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré. illus. by Paola Escobar. HarperCollins/Harper. ISBN 9780062748683. K-Gr 3–Pura Belpré was the first Puerto Rican librarian in New York City. She went on to transform library services through culturally diverse storytelling, published books, and targeted outreach. Denise’s inviting text and Escobar’s warm illustrations work harmoniously, resulting in a reading experience that is as joyful as Belpré’s infectious and altruistic spirit.

DUNBAR, Erica Armstrong & Kathleen van Cleeve. Never Caught, the Story of Ona Judge: George and Martha Washington’s Courageous Slave Who Dared To Run Away. S. & S./Aladdin. ISBN 9781534416178. Gr 5 Up–Ona Judge was born into slavery at Mount Vernon and became Martha Washington’s personal attendant. When Judge ran away, the Washingtons attempted to recapture her without success. Vivid and engaging, this book provides an honest account of the harsh realities of life as an enslaved person while critically examining the beliefs and actions of the Washington family and other slaveholders.


ENGLE, Margarita. Soaring Earth: A Companion Memoir to Enchanted Air. S. & S./Atheneum. ISBN 9781534429536. Gr 7 Up–Engle’s companion to her 2015 memoir takes place in the tumultuous late 1960s and early 1970s. Sticking to poems that are mostly written in free verse and an occasional sprinkling of haiku and tanka, the Young People’s Poet Laureate masterfully captures the political and social unrest that undoubtedly shaped her coming-of-age journey. Her struggles and anxieties are timeless markers of youth and will resonate with teen readers.

HOUTMAN, Jacqueline & others. Troublemaker for Justice: The Story of Bayard Rustin, the Man Behind the March on Washington. City Lights. ISBN 9780872867659. Gr 7 Up–When people think of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X may come to mind, but the contributions of LGBTQ activist Bayard Rustin, marginalized for his sexuality, have gone unstung. While King became the face of the March on Washington, Rustin was the man behind the scenes. This excellent biography brings Rustin out of King’s shadow and firmly into the foreground, chronicling how his upbringing and Quaker roots acted as a catalyst for his lifetime commitment to nonviolent activism and equal treatment for all.

PORTIS, Antoinette. Hey, Water! illus. by author. Holiday House/Neal Porter Bks. ISBN 9780823441556 PreS-Gr 2–This ode to the necessity of water is a perfect read-aloud for budding scientists. The young protagonist celebrates the multiple ways that water touches life on Earth (flowing from a faucet, the ocean, rain, and snow). The gorgeous combination of words and illustrations honors and illuminates the importance of the water cycle.

SHEINKIN, Steve. Born To Fly: The First Women’s Air Race Across America. illus. by Bijou Karman. Roaring Brook. ISBN 9781626721302. Gr 5-8–Using a collected biographical approach, Sheinkin describes how a trailblazing group of women aviators, including Amelia Earhart, Marvel Crosson, and Ruth Elder, came together to compete in the 1929 Air Derby. The courage and determination of these women shine through in
Sheinkin’s compelling account of the dangerous and controversial event.

Gr 7 Up—Stevenson’s unflinching guide successfully destigmatizes abortion. The history of reproductive health care and the fight for abortion rights in North America and across the globe are covered. Stevenson doesn’t whitewash the history of this social issue and explains how systemic racism, sexism, and patriarchal attitudes have dramatically influenced the discourse. Readers will appreciate the eclectic selection of supporting materials, including colorful illustrations, photographs, and comics, paired with accessible research.

PreS-Gr 1—The peppered moth has two variations: dark and light with speckled marks. Thomas explains how the effects of pollution during the Industrial Revolution led to physical changes in the peppered moth population and describes later efforts to improve air quality. The poetic text and enchanting illustrations expertly portray the concept of evolution and will spark further reading and study.

K-Gr 2—Thorn clearly defines cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary by introducing a cast of diverse characters and naming their gender identities. This is a valuable resource, complete with accessible language and vibrant art, which will be effective for facilitating discussions with a very young audience.

Gr 5–8—When he was nine years old, Congressman Norman Mineta was imprisoned with his family at the Heart Mountain internment camp in Wyoming during World War II. Warren’s resource-rich biography successfully shows how the political and cultural climate led to the internment of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans and also paints a detailed and empathetic picture of the bleak realities of life in the camps.

Gr 2–5—Wittenstein focuses on how Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech came to be. The narrative follows King and his associates sharing ideas in a hotel lobby to the hours of mental strain King endured as he tried to put those ideas into words. The compelling text and captivating art exemplify the way King’s unparalleled oratory skills truly connected people across divisions.

Gr 7 Up—Nobel Peace Prize winner Yousafzai shares her experiences with forced relocation. The heartbreaking stories of the girls she’s met around the world emphasize the mental, emotional, and physical challenges of leaving behind one’s community and loved ones. These powerful narratives highlight the importance of kindness and compassion.
Graphic Novels

Mahnaz Dar, Kelley Gil, Matisse Mozer, Alea Perez

AKIWENZIE-DAMM, Kateri & others. This Place: 150 Years Retold. illus. by various. Highwater Pr. ISBN 9781553797586.
Gr 9 Up—History isn’t written by the victors, argue the creators of this compelling anthology. Despite the Canadian government’s attempts to wipe out Indigenous cultures, First Nations people still have a keen sense of their own history, as these 10 pieces make clear. With a blend of fiction and nonfiction, and with styles ranging from graceful watercolors to scratchy minimalism, this is both a profound meditation on Native history and a joyful look toward the future.

ANDREWS, Ryan. This Was Our Pact. illus. by author. First Second. ISBN 9781250196958.
Gr 4-7—An agreement to follow the journey of the lanterns released on the day of the Autumn Equinox Festival results in indescribable adventures for the two bravest boys who don’t turn back to the safety of home. Andrews’s enchanting flights of fancy, coupled with the ethereal warmth of the inky blue art, create a wondrous escapist fantasy.

Gr 1-4—When a hurricane destroys their tree, a group of sloths led by anxiety-ridden Peter and adventurous Ernesto journey through the jungle in search of a new home. Though this story is simple enough for the youngest graphic novel fans, Annable’s exaggerated, pop-eyed cartoons brim with emotion, heightening the stakes and making the happy ending all the more satisfying.

Gr 4-7—At his prestigious new middle school, Jordan is learning plenty: to put up with white teachers who confuse him with other black students, to avoid the patronizing lib-

brarian who hands African American students gritty tales of inner city woe, and, finally, to take a stand against ignorance and injustice. Craft’s inspired visual metaphors and gentle cartoons render this exploration of racism and micro-aggressions deeply relatable to a young audience.

Gr 7 Up—Gharib, the U.S.-born child of divorced Egyptian and Filipina immigrants, loved both her cultures but grew up deeply confused about her place in the world. Full of chaotic doodles, lists, and asides, this intimate graphic memoir mirrors Gharib’s uncertainty—about her complex relationship with whiteness, her attempts to belong in high school and in college—and her joy at her rich cultural identity.

Gr 4-7—Hale’s sequel to her first graphic memoir, Real Friends, is a nuanced, realistic glimpse at the author’s middle school years: first experiences with boys, the challenges of keeping a circle of friends, and the anxiety of standing up to bullies. Pham’s rounded character designs set an upbeat tone while Hale’s narrative explores how she discovered her love of writing and found her place in the world.

Gr 9 Up—An art class assignment about confronting demons drove Kobabe, who now uses the pronouns e/em/eir, to grapple with eir horror at breasts, periods, and other symbols of femininity—and to realize e identified as genderqueer. Fea-
turing realistic, earth-toned cartoons, this forthright memoir earnestly examines everything from pap smears gone wrong to experiments with sex toys. Kobabe is the reassuring older sibling that many LGBTQ teens will wish they’d had.

Gr 5-9—The fates of a deposed queen and a lowly orphan raised by nuns intertwine in this lush tale loosely inspired by Tudor England and the life of Elizabeth I. Meconis’s illustrations are delicate and sumptuous, and her blend of political intrigue and quotidian details makes for a vivid reimagining of 16th-century British history.

Gr 4-8—Awkward outcast Moth Hush feels less alone when she discovers she is descended from a long line of witches who were persecuted generations ago. But the prejudice against witches still lingers. Rich dialogue, deeply saturated artwork, and achingly heartfelt characterizations combine for a spellbinding testament to the power of community—and a warning against allowing bigotry to take hold.

TAKEI, George, Justin Eisinger, & Steven Scott. They Called Us Enemy. illus. by Harmony Becker. Top Shelf. ISBN 9781603094504.
Gr 7 Up—In this evocative memoir, actor and activist Takei revisits his childhood, when he, his family, and thousands of other Japanese Americans were imprisoned in internment camps by the U.S. government during World War II. Becker’s clean-lined, grayscale art pulls back the curtains on our dark history and shines a light on recent events—Trump’s “travel ban” and the separation of parents and children at the U.S.-Mexico border—that have chilling parallels with Takei’s experiences.

Gr 9 Up—This mesmerizing supervillain origin story reimagines the Joker’s hell-raising sidekick as a wayward 15-year-old determined to protect her newfound community from encroaching gentrification. Tamaki’s pitch-perfect narration and Pugh’s chaotic, superrealistic illustrations bring to life a Harley Quinn who’s a volatile mix of vulnerability and impulsivity, tempered by her growing social consciousness.

Gr 9 Up—Francesca “Freddy” Riley flakes on her friends to chase after her dream girl, flighty Laura Dean, who sends mixed signal after mixed signal. Spot-on dialogue; stunning, fluid art; and a panel structure that captures the awkwardness of adolescence create a tender portrait of first love, set in a world where LGBTQ relationships are refreshingly normalized.

Gr 3-6—Following meditations on braces and sisterhood, Telgemeier contemplates her childhood anxiety, which took hold after a bout with stomach flu led to fears of vomiting in public. Her comedic timing is top-notch, balancing Simpsons-style asides and punch lines with more juvenile humor, and her younger self’s exaggerated, anime-esque reactions adeptly capture her turmoil and uncertainty. Few children’s books explore the mind-body connection, making Telgemeier’s sensitive work all the more necessary.

Gr 3-6—Friendship blossoms between scholarly, diligent Christine and quirky but troubled Moon, two vastly different girls living in a suburban Chinese American community. With a subdued palette and minimalist art, Wang deftly captures the rich emotional lives of characters attempting to reconcile their sense of identity with how others see them.