

2009 Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

Every year, a committee appointed by the Children's Literature Assembly selects 30 titles for the Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts. This committee is made up of seven book lovers who look forward to receiving boxes of books from

publishers and entrenching themselves in reading hundreds of titles. Books designated as notable deal explicitly with language, such as plays on words, word origins or the history of language. They demonstrate uniqueness in the use of language or in style and invite child response or participation. Notable books also have an appealing format, are of enduring content, and generally meet accepted criteria of quality for their specific genres.

In face-to-face meetings and email communications throughout the year, current committee members discussed books and looked for those that best met one or more of the above criteria. One underlying theme of this year's Notable Books is their use as mentor texts to teach writing in K-8 classrooms. For example, with *Minji's Salon* and *Artie and Julie*, a teacher could show how these books use parallel plot structure and invite students to try this in their own writing. Both *The Secret History of Giants* and *Ways to Live Forever* are told in multiple genres. Students could create genres such as lists, recipes, invoices, or letters. Art could be the starting point for some young writers after they listen to and view *Side by Side* or *Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad*. The mentor text *Knucklehead* could inspire upper elementary or middle school students to craft their own autobiographies. The intertextual format of *There's a Wolf at the Door*—part graphic novel, part picture book, part comic book—make it a unique model for creative writing. Poetry titles, *The Blacker the Berry* and *Pizza, Pigs, and Poetry: How to Write a Poem* could be read aloud to motivate students to write poems of their own. *Ain't Nothing but a Man* would be a fabulous

model for how to investigate a research topic. After reading *Lincoln Shot: A President's Life Remembered*, students might want to create their own newspaper about a historical figure. *Peeled*, *The Boy Who Dared* and *Yours for Justice*, *Ida B. Wells: The Daring Life of a Crusading Journalist* could encourage older readers to use their writing skills to make a difference in our world. Lastly, two alphabet picture books *Just In Case: A Trickster Tale and Spanish Alphabet Book* and *A is for Art: An Abstract Alphabet* could stimulate students to make their own ABC books.

The 2008-2009 committee included: Deanna Day, Washington State University, chair (DD); Mary Lee Hahn, Dublin City Schools (MH); Mary Napoli, Penn State University (MN); Janelle B. Mathis, University of North Texas (JM); Jonda C. McNair, Clemson University (JCM); Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona (KS), and Edward T. Sullivan, Rogue Librarian (ES). We are pleased to share the winning titles published in 2008 and hope that teachers, librarians, and children in grades K-8 will enjoy reading these books.

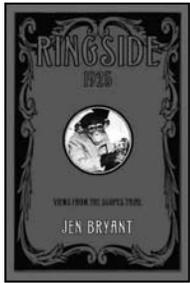
For more information about the Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts, check out the Children's Literature Assembly's Web site at <http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/>.

POETRY

Bryant, J. (2008). *Ringside 1925: Views from the Scopes trial*. New York: Knopf. 228 pages.

Bryant uses a series of well-honed, free-verse poems to chronicle events in this fictionalized account of the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee.

The poems represent distinctively individual voices which offer diverse perspectives of events as they



unfold. The large cast of characters is both fictitious and real. Historical characters include J.T. Scopes, the teacher prosecuted for teaching evolution; Clarence Darrow, the legendary defense attorney; and William Jennings Bryan, the equally famous presidential candidate and preacher.

In addition to the faith versus science conflict that dominates the trial, Bryant also touches upon other historical issues. An author's note provides historical context, a bibliography of books, articles, and web sites. This colorful, skillfully executed novel, which lends itself to adaptation for readers' theatre, presents issues and arguments that will resonate with contemporary readers. (ES)

Suggested Ages: 12-14

Related Literature:

Bryant, J. (2004). *The trial*. New York: Knopf.

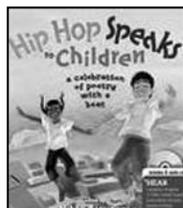
Kidd, R. (2006). *Monkey town: The summer of the Scopes trial*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lawrence, J., & Lee, R. E. (1960). *Inherit the wind*. New York: Bantam.



Giovanni, N. (Ed.) (2008). *Hip hop speaks to children: A celebration of poetry with a beat*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks. 72 pages.

This striking poetry anthology honors African American heritage, culture, civil rights and hip-hop. Poetry lovers will enjoy this collection of 51 selections from over 42 poets and performers such as Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Hope Anita Smith, Eloise Greenfield, Walter Dean Myers, Queen Latifah, Jill Scott, and Aesop Rock. The inclusion of an audio CD will evoke a magical experience of sharing poetry aloud. Teachers will be able to use the collection in a multitude of ways – for interdisciplinary connections, reading aloud, readers' theatre, and for sparking budding writers to compose their own poems, raps and rhymes. Poignant and moving, innovative and insightful, diverse and dynamic are just a few ways to describe this masterful and ambitious collection edited by activist and award-winning poet Nikki Giovanni. (MN)



Suggested Ages: 6-12

Related Literature:

Paschen, E. (2005). *Poetry speaks to children*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.

Rochelle, B. (2001). *Words with wings: A treasury of African-American poetry and art*. New York: HarperCollins.

Weatherford, C. B. (2002). *Remember the bridge: Poems of a people*. New York: Philomel.



Greenberg, J. (Ed.) (2008). *Side by side: New poems inspired by art from around the world*. New York: Abrams. 88 pages.

A cultural treasure of hope, inspiration and courage, this collection of poems and their translations joins countries across the world through "ekphrasis" poetry. At a time when knowledge of the global community is fleeting, this book reflects the communicative arts as a potential mediator. Greenberg speaks of its organization into four sections of stories, voices, expressions and impressions. Readers can feel the energy of these art forms and realize the power of language to express universal as well as unique impressions. Visual representation as a communicative form is powerfully portrayed through traditional and contemporary art depicting people, animals, historical events and nature scenes. The artists are identified at the end and a map shows the homeland of each contributor. (JM)



Suggested Ages: 12 and above

Related Literature:

Greenberg, J. (2001). *Heart to heart: New poems inspired by twentieth century American art*. New York: Abrams.

Rochelle, B. (2000). *Words with wings: A treasury of African-American poetry and art*. New York: HarperCollins.

Rowden, J. (2005). *Paint me a poem: Poems inspired by masterpieces in art*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.



Thomas, J. C. (2008). *The Blacker the berry*. Illus. F. Cooper. New York: Amistad/Joanna Cotler/HarperCollins. Unpaged.

This collection of 13 poems celebrates and affirms the wide range of skin colors among African American children. Some of the poems included are "Raspberry

Black" and "Cranberry Red." Part of the poem "Snowberries" reads, "I look white / I am as light / as snowberries in fall / "I walk that walk / I talk that talk" / Yet / Still some say / "You're not really Black!" / The words cut deep down / Beyond the bone / Beneath my snowy skin / Deep down where no one can see / I bleed the "one drop of blood" / That makes Black me / . . . "Still I'm thankful / For all the blood drops I got / In my mind / Even one drop's a lot." Thomas' use of language is masterful as she utilizes berries as a literary motif throughout all of the poems. (JCM)

Suggested Ages: 9-13

Related Literature:

Hughes, L. (2009). *My people*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Pinkney, S. (2000). *Shades of black: A celebration of our children*. New York: Scholastic.

Thomas, J. C. (2002). *Crowning glory*. New York: Joanna Cotler.



Weston, P. (2008). *Zorgamazoo*. Illus. V. R. Villa. New York: Razorbill/Penguin. 281 pages.

Zorgamazoo is a novel in verse, but not at all like the ones you've previously encountered. Zorgamazoo is one poem—one 283 page-long poem in rhyming couplets that might remind readers of a combination of Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl. The book design features fonts of varying sizes and styles to enhance and illustrate, but keep things moving along briskly. The main character, Katrina Katrell, is a spunky little girl who has been abandoned by her rich and disinterested parents to the care of an evil guardian who wants to have her lobotomized. Katrina's fate intertwines with that of Mortimer Yorgle, a Zorgle, who has been charged with finding the missing Zorgles of Zorgamazoo. The story becomes more and more convoluted as the characters find themselves trapped on the moon, and as the struggle of good versus evil takes the form of enchantment and imagination versus boredom and tedium. (MH)

Suggested Ages: 10 and up



Related Literature:

Dahl, R. (1982). *The B.F.G.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

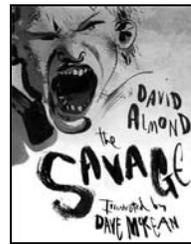
Seuss, Dr. (1957). *How the Grinch stole Christmas*. New York: Random House.

Snickett, L. (1999). *A series of unfortunate events*. New York: HarperCollins.

HISTORICAL AND REALISTIC FICTION

Almond, D. (2008). *The savage*. Illus. D. McKean. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. 79 pages.

Where does the story end and "real" life begin? Blue Bruce is writing a story called "The Savage." It isn't the writing his counselor recommended as he and his family deal with the sudden death of his loving father, but it is a story in which he lives through the emotions of loss and dealing with a heartless bully named Hopper. Narrated by an older and wiser Blue, "The Savage" is written in phonetic spelling and illustrated through graphic images. This primitive boy who carries a knife and lives off of wild animals is aware of those around him through his senses. As the Savage learns about both good and bad people, the lives of both the Savage and Blue become more intricately woven as the revenge on Hopper steps out of the story into real life. The power of authentic story is experienced at many levels in this masterfully told novel. (JM)



Suggested Ages: 10-14

Related Literature:

Funke, C. (2003). *Inkheart*. New York: Scholastic.

Jung, R. (2002). *Bambert's book of missing stories*. New York: Knopf.

Murphey, P. (2007). *Wild girls*. New York: Viking.



Bartoletti, S. C. (2008). *The boy who dared*. New York: Scholastic. 202 pages.

Revisiting material she uncovered while researching *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow* (2005), Bartoletti offers a fictionalized biography of Helmuth Hubener, a teenager who, in February 1942, is arrested for writing and distributing leaflets denouncing Hitler and the Nazi regime. On October 27, 17-year-old Hubener is executed for treason. Bartoletti opens on Hubener's last day, framing it in third-person flash-

backs. Effectively casting a terrible sense of doom over the narrative even as she escalates the tension, Bartoletti conveys the political climate surrounding Hitler's ascent to power, and seamlessly integrates a complex range of socioeconomic conditions into this gripping drama of Helmuth and his fatherless family. The author also convincingly shows how Helmuth initially embraces Hitler. Bartoletti includes an insightful afterword, chronology, bibliography and black-and-white photographs of Hubener and his family. This compelling work of historical fiction will challenge readers to reflect deeply on their own preconceptions about faith, heroism and survival. (ES)



Suggested Ages: 11-14

Related Literature:

Chotjewitz, D. (2004). *Daniel half human and the good Nazi*. Trans. Doris Orgel. New York: Atheneum/Richard Jackson.

Orgel, D. (1978). *The devil in Vienna*. New York: Dial.

Tunnel, M. O. (2001). *Brothers in valor: A story of resistance*. New York: Holiday House.

Bauer, J. (2008). *Peeled*. New York: Penguin. 248 pages.

This novel has it all—a provocative mystery, an irritable editor, and a spirited heroine—to entice middle grade readers. The apple orchard community, Baneseville, New York, is stricken with hysteria and fear after a series of ghost sightings occur at an abandoned house. Spooky signs appear, “Danger to all ye who enter the domicile of doom” (p. 10). The local newspaper editor publishes fear-mongering headlines and stories, but high-school reporter Hildy unpeels the real story. Many details about journalism and writing for a school newspaper are shared, including writing tips such as, “Less is more. Less description, more facts” (p. 84) and “If you’re not organized, it’ll kill you” (p. 92). The most powerful aspect of this realistic book is that it demonstrates to young adolescents that they can unearth the truth, fight for what they believe and write about it. (DD)



Suggested Ages: 10 and up

Related Literature:

Bauer, J. (2005). *Best foot forward*. New York: Putnam.

Bauer, J. (2000). *Hope was here*. New York: Putnam.

Bauer, J. (1998). *Rules of the road*. New York: Putnam.



Giff, P. R. (2008). *Eleven*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books/Random House. 164 pages.

What could possibly motivate an 11-year-old, who doesn't yet read, to become a reader? Not the resource



room at school or the nightly read-alouds by his neighbor. Not even his grandfather, teaching him that his abilities to “read” wood, to repair wood, and to build with wood are rare and valuable talents. Then comes Sam's eleventh birthday. He's looked everywhere for hidden

presents and doesn't find any. Instead he finds a newspaper clipping that shows a picture of him as a three-year-old. The only word he can decipher is “missing.” What does this mean? Who is his family? What do the dreams and memories that have begun to haunt him mean? Who can he befriend at school to help him solve this mystery, who will read for him, who will help him unlock the mystery of reading? *Eleven* is a beautifully woven story of family, friendship, dreams and longing. (MH)

Suggested Ages: 10 and up

Related Literature:

Hesse, K. (1998). *Just juice*. New York: Scholastic.

Mass, W. (2006). *Jeremy Fink and the meaning of life*. New York: Little, Brown.

Mass, W. (2009). *Eleven birthdays*. New York: Scholastic.



Lowry, L. (2008). *The Willoughbys*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. 174 pages.

“Once upon a time there was a family named Willoughby: an old-fashioned type of family, with four children” (p. 1) is the first seemingly innocent sentence of this novel. Readers will soon be lured by the language and satirical circumstances that involve four Willoughby children who want to be rid of their parents and in turn, their parents want to be rid of their

children. Woven throughout the pages are simple, yet brilliant illustrations done by Lowry which add to the nefarious tales, snippets and spoofs of many classic stories such as Hansel and Gretel and Mary Poppins. This tongue-in-cheek parody will appeal to both boys and girls with its sophisticated language and literary references. The glossary at the end includes definitions for words such as “nefarious” and “ignominious” which are peppered throughout the novel. Teachers, librarians and parents will find great enjoyment in this humorous and clever read-aloud. (MN)

Suggested Ages: 7-12

Related Literature:

Dahl, R. (1998). *Matilda*. New York: Viking.

Dahl, R. (2001). *James and the giant peach*. New York: Puffin.

Snicket, L. (1999). *A series of unfortunate events*. New York: HarperCollins.



Nicholls, S. (2008). *Ways to live forever*. New York: Arthur A. Levine/Scholastic. 212 pages.

“My name is Sam. I am eleven years old. I collect stories and fantastic facts. By the time you read this, I will probably be dead” (p. 4). Thus begins this emotionally moving first-person narrative of a young boy, terminally ill with leukemia. His teacher gives him the idea of keeping a notebook that includes drawings and lists of fascinating facts, what to do when someone dies, ways to live forever, and things he would like to do before he dies. For example, “Go up and down escalators. Be a teenager. Do teenage things like drink and smoke and have a girlfriend” (p. 22). With the help of his friend, Felix, he begins to cross things off his list. Well researched and beautifully composed, the story does end as promised, yet readers will be reminded of Sam’s courage and resiliency and help them better deal with questions about death and dying. (MN)

Suggested Ages: 9-13

Related Literature:

Grimes, N. (2004). *What is goodbye?* New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion.



Kadohata, C. (2004). *Kira-Kira*. New York: Atheneum/Simon & Schuster.

Wiles, D. (2006). *Each little bird that sings*. New York: Harcourt.

FANTASY/FOLKLORE

Alley, Z. B. (2008). *There's a wolf at the door*. Illus. R.W. Alley. New York: Roaring Brook. 34 pages.

In this innovative, oversized, and cleverly designed picture book, readers will meet familiar characters in five distinctive fairy tales interconnected by the charming and cunning wolf. When the wolf’s attempts to persuade the three little pigs to let him into their house fail, he declares that he is moving on to greener pastures: “No more pig for me! Now, sheep...there’s an idea” (p. 6). The wolf finds that the sheep are more experienced than he bargained for, so he moves along to the forest and encounters Little Red Riding Hood. No match for her sense of fashion and wit, he soon finds himself unsuccessfully trying to blend in with a flock of sheep. Worn out and weary from being outsmarted again, he spots a sign to Mr. McGregor’s Garden and contemplates becoming a vegetarian. The humorous story coupled with brilliant illustrations makes this an absolutely wonderful children’s book full of puns, witticisms, alliterations, and rhymes. (MN)



Suggested Ages: 4-10

Related Literature

Hartman, B. (2002). *The wolf who cried boy*. New York: Putnam.

Hawkins, C., & Hawkins, J. (2004). *Fairy tale news*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.

Hoberman, M. A. (2004). *Very short fairy tales to read together*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.



Berk, A. (2008). *The secret history of giants, or the codex giganticum*. Illus. W. Anderson, D. Carrel, C. Chalk, K. Levell and L. MacDougall. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. Unpagged.

A collection of information supposedly gathered by the “Order of the Golden Quills,” this book uncovers the secret history of giants. The heavy sepia-toned pages provide evidence that giants once lived everywhere and answer mysteries such as: what is found

in the great sacks carried by giants; why they wear particular clothing and accessories; and where they are found in the world. The book is modeled after other "history of a civilization" nonfiction, covering the various categories of food, fashion, games, work and lifestyle. Drawn from folktales and myths around the world, the multi-genre text uses intricate illustrations and foldouts along with maps, charts and sketches to provide an air of authenticity. An elegant tasseled bookmark dangles from the spine while the cover illustration of a giant's face leering from a tangle of hair and beard invite readers to come and stay awhile. (KS)



Suggested Ages: 9-12

Related Literature:

Tagholm, S. (2002). *Everyday life in the ancient world*. New York: Kingfisher.

Williams, M. (2007). *Archie's war*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.

Williams, M. (2008). *My secret war diary*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.



Morales, Y. (2008). *Just in case: A trickster tale and Spanish alphabet book*. New York: Roaring Brook. Unpaged.

Señor Calavera has been invited to attend Grandma Beetle's birthday party where he encounters Zelmiro the Ghost who tells him he forgot to bring a birthday present. He chooses, "Un Acordeón. An accordion for her to dance to. Bigotes. A mustache because she had none. Cosquillas. Tickle to make her laugh." Señor Calavera is pleased with his gifts until Zelmiro says "But, I wonder are they what Grandma Beetle would love the most? Why don't you look again, my friend? Just in case." Señor Calavera then chooses "Dientes. Teeth for a good bite. Una Escalera. A ladder to reach past the sky. Una Flauta. A flute he made from a branch." Señor Calavera and Zelmiro continue in this manner until objects beginning with each letter of the Spanish alphabet have been chosen. Morales' illustrations are rich with small details and offer readers much to explore. (JCM)



Suggested Ages: 5-9

Related Literature:

Lopez, L. (1997). *The birthday swap*. New York: Lee & Low.

Morales, Y. (2003). *Just a minute: A trickster tale and counting book*. San Francisco: Chronicle.

Ryan, P. M. (2001). *Mice and beans*. New York: Scholastic.



Prineas, S. (2008). *The magic thief*. New York: HarperCollins. 419 pages.

"A thief is a lot like a wizard. I have quick hands. And I can make things disappear. But then I stole the wizard's locus magicalicus and nearly disappeared myself forever" (p. 1). And so begins this story, told from the viewpoint of Conn, of a young boy who survives on the streets of Wellmet as a pickpocket until he encounters Nevery, the powerful wizard, one fateful night. Nevery has returned to the city of Wellmet in order to investigate its suspiciously low levels of magic, and decides to take Conn as his apprentice. One unique aspect of this book is the journal entries written by Nevery that are included at the end of most chapters. In the process of training to become a magician, Conn learns to read, finds his own magicalicus, and aids Nevery in saving the city of Wellmet. The writing in this middle-grade novel is engaging and will have readers eagerly anticipating the sequel. (JCM)



Suggested Ages: 9-13

Related Literature:

Fleischman, S. (2006). *Escape: The story of the great Houdini*. New York: Greenwillow.

Haskins, J. (2001). *Conjure times: Black magicians in America*. New York: Walker.

Selznick, B. (2008). *The Houdini box*. New York: Simon & Schuster.



Reeve, P. (2008). *Here lies Arthur*. New York: Scholastic. 339 pages.

This thought-provoking retelling of the legend of King Arthur provides a fresh perspective by focusing on storytelling as the real source of Arthur's power. Gywnaa, the narrator, is a young girl who is taken under the wing of the king's personal storyteller and advisor, Myddrin. Arthur, an unintelligent brute with

no more noble cause than wealth, is transformed into a legend by Myrddin's tales of his mystical feats, which are shown to be illusions, such as having Gwynaa dis-



guise herself as the Lady of the Lake to hand Arthur his sword. Gwynaa learns a great deal about the power of story and her observations uncover new dimensions of famous characters, revealing them as flawed and human. This highly inventive novel encourages readers to ques-

tion the versions of history handed down across time and the ways in which myths are made. (KS)

Suggested Ages: 12 and up

Related Literature:

Crossley-Holland, K. (1999). *The world of King Arthur and his court: People, places, legend, and lore*. New York: Dutton.

Hodges, M. (2004). *Merlin and the making of the king*. New York: Holiday House.

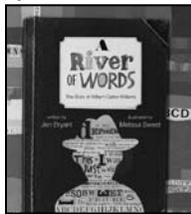
Yolen, J. (2003). *Sword of the rightful king: A novel of King Arthur*. San Diego: Harcourt.

INFORMATION/BIOGRAPHY

Bryant, J. (2008). *A river of words: The story of William Carlos Williams*. Illus. M. Sweet. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. Unpaged.

The term picture book biography doesn't do this book justice. Bryant's telling of the story of Willie Williams' life is itself poetic. Her use of the literal Passaic River of his childhood and the metaphoric flow of his words and poems dovetails perfectly with Melissa Sweet's multimedia interpretations of Williams' poems. This book also has important endpapers—all of the poems that are mentioned or excerpted in the text or the illustrations are found there. There is potential for use in the classroom—as a mentor text for students writing biographies; in an art class to explore the visual interpretation of poetry; and in writer's workshop to reinforce the ways writers use their notebooks to capture small moments they can go back to and write about later. Besides being *used*, it needs to be *pored over*. This is a beautiful book that will introduce young readers to an important American poet. (MH)

Suggested Ages: 10 and up



Related Literature:

Bryant, J. (2006). *Call me Marianne*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.

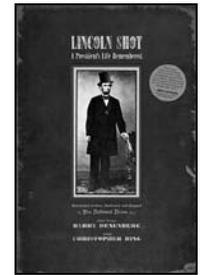
Creech, S. (2001). *Love that dog*. New York: HarperCollins.

Kerley, B. (2004). *Walt Whitman: Words for America*. Illus. B. Selznick. New York: Scholastic.



Denenberg, B. (2008). *Lincoln shot: A president's life remembered*. Illus. C. Bing. New York: Feiwel and Friends/MacMillan. 40 pages.

Measuring 12 x 18 inches, this stunning, oversized tome marks the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth. Conceived as a commemorative edition of *The National News*, published one year after Lincoln's death, this remarkable collaboration between author Denenberg and artist Bing brilliantly replicates the design and layout of an 1860s-era newspaper. Old-style typeface, yellowed pages, woodcut engravings, period advertisements and photographs all contribute to the antique appeal. Details of the president's death are followed by information about the assassin and his accomplices. Following these facts is the history of Lincoln's life, starting with his boyhood, moving through his early years in Illinois, family life with Mary Todd and political career, his rise to the presidency and finally the Civil War. Readers will find this unique visual approach to history appealing and compelling. (ES)



Suggested Ages: 9 and up

Related Literature:

Fleming, C. (2008). *The Lincolns: A scrapbook look at Abraham and Mary*. New York: Schwartz & Wade.

Giblin, J. C. (2005). *Good brother, bad brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth*. New York: Clarion.

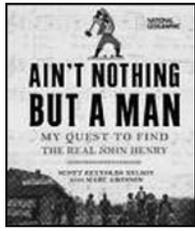
Sandler, M. W. (2008). *Lincoln through the lens: How photography revealed and shaped an extraordinary life*. New York: Walker.



Nelson, S. R. with Aronson, M. (2008). *Ain't nothing but a man: My quest to find the real John Henry*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic. 64 pages.

This book opens with the author sitting at his computer surrounded by his research on the topic of John

Henry. He is intrigued with discovering just who the real John Henry was when the clue for which he has



been searching is right before his eyes. Without disclosing the clue, the author takes readers through his search—the intrigue that compelled him, his collection of primary source artifacts and historical data, and how he followed each clue.

The role of song as a resource that reflects history is significant here. In this case it gave voice to the 40,000 African American men, many of them prisoners, who built railroads after the Civil War. The author's exploration into old railroad sites, pictures, and the many versions of this story set to music is an adventure just as fascinating as any detective story. (JM)

Suggested Ages: 10 and up

Related Literature:

Lester, J. (1994). *John Henry*. New York: Dial.

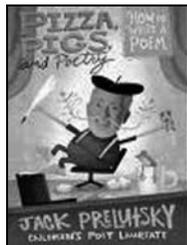
Meltzer, M. (2004). *Hear that train whistle blow! How the railroad changed the world*. New York: Random House.

Nelson, S. R. (2008). *Steel drivin' man: John Henry, the untold story of an American legend*. New York: Oxford University Press.



Prelutsky, J. (2008). *Pizza, pigs, and poetry: How to write a poem*. New York: Greenwillow Books/HarperCollins. 191 pages.

In easy-to-follow tips, the reigning Children's Poet Laureate, Jack Prelutsky, shares his insight for creating verse, haiku, and concrete poetry. He shows readers how to turn their own experiences and stories about family, pets and friends into poems. For example, in writing tip #2 he asks, "Does your mother have little quirks?" (p. 24). He shares his mother's idiosyncrasies in two poems that he created and then invites children to jot down their mother's quirks and write a poem. Prelutsky suggests that if you don't want people to know that you're writing about your mother, then change her name, or pretend it's someone else's mother. Learning the inside scoop of how he has created some of his poetry and the amount of revision he completes will encourage young poets. (DD)



Suggested Ages: 7-13

Related Literature:

Prelutsky, J. (2008). *Be glad your nose is on your face: And other poems: Some of the best of Jack Prelutsky*. Illus. B. Dorman. New York: HarperCollins.

Prelutsky, J. (2008). *My dog may be a genius*. Illus. J. Stevenson. New York: HarperCollins.

Prelutsky, J. (2006). *What a day it was at school!* Illus. D. Cushman. New York: Greenwillow.



Scieszka, J. (2008). *Knucklehead: Tall tales & mostly true stories about growing up Scieszka*. New York: Viking/Penguin. 106 pages.

If there was ever any doubt that Jon Scieszka never grew up, this entertaining memoir is evidence. The be-



loved author of *The Time Warp Trio* series and classic fractured fairy tale picture books like *The Stinky Cheese Man* (1992) and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (1989) tells of growing up as the second of six sons in Flint, Michigan. Scieszka adopts the highly accessible, conversational

style of the class clown as he regales readers with hilarious anecdotes involving dog poop, small explosions, peeing on stuff, and assorted vulgar but innocent pranks. Perfect for reluctant readers, especially boys, this slim book is divided into 38 very brief chapters littered with images of hokey birthday cards, Cub Scout memorabilia, and baseball cards. This memoir is indispensable for students required to complete the dreaded autobiography assignment. (ES)

Suggested Ages: 8-12

Related Literature:

Myers, W. D. (2001). *Bad boy: A memoir*. New York: HarperCollins.

Paulsen, G. (2003). *How Angel Peterson got his name*. New York: Wendy Lamb/Random House.

Spinelli, J. (1998). *Knots in my yo-yo strings: The autobiography of a kid*. New York: Knopf.



Dray, P. (2008). *Yours for justice, Ida B. Wells: The daring life of a crusading journalist*. Illus. S. Alcorn. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree. Unpaged.

This compelling picture book biography highlights how the pen can be used to challenge injustice. Ida B. Wells was born into slavery and yet became a teacher, journalist, editor and crusader for justice. She wrote

articles that spoke out against Jim Crow laws. After one of her friends is cruelly lynched and no one is punished for the murder, she goes on a crusade to learn about lynching. In numerous newspaper articles and speeches, she shares the horrors of lynching and how people lose their freedom. Wells' quest for justice even helped the Civil Rights movement.



The subdued watercolor and ink illustrations flow from page to page, causing the reader to understand this historical time period. In the afterword more information is shared including a timeline, bibliography and information about lynching. This text will inspire middle grade readers to stand up for injustices in the world. (DD)

Suggested Ages: 9 and up

Related Literature:

Haskins, J., & Benson, K. (2006). *John Lewis in the lead: A story of the civil rights movement*. Illus. B. Andrews. New York: Lee & Low.

Stokes, J.A. (2008). *Students on strike: Jim Crow, civil rights, Brown, and me*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic.

Nelson, M. (2005). *A wreath for Emmett Till*. Illus. P. Lardy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

PICTURE BOOKS

Chen, C. (2008). *Artie and Julie*. Alhambra, CA: Heryin Books. Unpaged.

A skillful combination of form and content conveys the story of an unexpected friendship between a lion and a rabbit. Their stories begin individually on parallel split pages as each are instructed by their elders about the ways of the world. Artie is to become ferocious so that he can hunt delicious rabbits, while Julie is to be clever to avoid ending up as lunch for a lion. As they venture out into the grasslands, they both take shelter from a storm in the same cave and become fast friends. Their shared play of hopping and roaring is captured on full-page spreads that again split into parallel narratives upon their return home. Julie's red pumps create a bright visual note in the soft hues of the cartoon-style illustrations. The movement between split and full pages to follow the parallel and intersect-



ing stories of two delightful characters effectively expresses the theme of making friends in unlikely places. (KS)

Suggested Ages: 4-8

Related Literature:

Browne, A. (2008). *Little beauty*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.

Chen, C. (2004). *Guji guji*. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.

Chen, C. (2006). *The featherless chicken*. Alhambra, CA: Heryin.



Choung, E. (2008). *Minji's Salon*. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller. Unpaged.

When Minji's mother goes to the salon to get her hair done, Minji uses her imagination to create her own



beauty salon at home – with her dog as the pretend client. The images show parallel stories taking place with accompanying text that speaks to both. One page shows Minji's mother's stylist mixing colors to dye her hair while Minji is shown mixing flavors of ice cream. The text on this page speaks to both images and reads, "The color must be mixed carefully. (No tasting allowed.)" The parallel stories will allow for interesting responses as children comprehend both simultaneously. With colorful splashes of paint on many of the pages, the illustrations complement the text by expressing Minji's sense of creativity and playfulness. (JCM)

Suggested Ages: 5-9

Related Literature:

Krosocska, J. (2002). *Baghead*. New York: Knopf.

Saltzberg, B. (2003). *Crazy hair day*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.

Tarpley, A. (1997). *I love my hair*. New York: Little, Brown.



Cottin, M. (2008). *The black book of colors*. Trans. E. Amda. Illus. R. Farla. Toronto, ON: Groundwood. Unpaged.

This hands-on book conveys a blind person's perception of colors using matte black pages with embossed representations of objects and simple descriptive statements. Each color is explored non-visually, evoked through taste, smell, feel or sound, never appearance – "Thomas says that yellow tastes like mustard, but is as

soft as a baby chick's feathers." Red is the sting of a skinned knee and the tartness of an unripe strawberry, while brown is the crunch of fall leaves and the smell of chocolate. Each all-black double-paged spread is devoted to one color, with the simple sensuous text rendered in a clear white typeface and in raised Braille letters on the left while the right illustrates the objects with raised lines that invite tactile explorations by readers. This visually and tactilely stunning picture book provides a unique and innovative reading experience as well as serving as an educational resource for discussing difference, perspective and experiencing the world in new ways. (KS)



Suggested Ages: 5-10

Related Literature:

Condra, E. (2006). *See the ocean*. Nashville: Inclusive Books.

Parker, R. A. (2008). *Piano starts here: The young Art Tatum*. New York: Schwartz & Wade.

Yolen, J. (2009). *The seeing stick*. Illus. D. Terrazzini. Philadelphia: Running Press Kids.



Gravett, E. (2008). *Little mouse's big book of fears*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Unpaged.

What are the fears that haunt you daily? Join Little Mouse as she shares through drawing, collage, photographs, and artifacts her fear of going to bed (clinophobia), her fear of bathing (ablutophobia), and her fear of water (hydrophobia). Readers will find that mouse has many of the same fears they do and some more specific to mice as they are reminded of perilous "mice" situations from familiar stories. Empathy with Little Mouse will abound in reading about her extremely creative ways to share her fears while discovering very sophisticated names for these fears. Readers are invited to record their own phobias in words and art as they are humorously reminded that everyone is fearful of something – dogs, cats, shadows and even mice! As Little Mouse declares, "A Fear Faced is a Fear Defeated!" (JM)



Suggested Ages: 5-8

Related Literature:

Baker, K. (2001). *Brave little monster*. New York: HarperCollins.

Jenkins, E. (2008). *The little bit scary people*. New York: Hyperion.

Kelley, M. (2008). *Twelve terrible things*. New York: Tricycle Press.



Johnson, S. T. (2008). *A is for art: An abstract alphabet*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Unpaged.

In this sophisticated alphabet book, playful, poetic and alliterative language fuse together with innova-



tive art to challenge the intellect and ignite the senses. The abstract, mixed-media images pay homage to 20th century artistic styles. Each page lends itself to a wonderful discovery to find the hidden letter which is prefaced by a witty title and a collec-

tion of words. On the Q page the multimedia artwork is entitled "Quiet Time Quilt: Queen-size quilt quartered by quadrants, with quadrilaterals, quotation marks, and question marks invites queries as to queens, quilt, and quietude" (p. 22). Readers will be mesmerized by the unique interplay of language and words and by how everyday objects cleverly arranged in vivid colors, shapes and textures can spark new ways of viewing the world. The technical details about each painting, including the location of the hidden letter, appear in the appendix. (MN)

Suggested Ages: 5-12

Related Literature:

Bataille, M. (2008). *ABC3D*. New York: Roaring Brook.

Demarest, C. (2008). *All aboard: A traveling alphabet*. Illus. B. Mayer. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books.

Robb, D. (2007). *Ox, house, stick: The history of our alphabet*. Illus. A. Smith. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.



Reibstein, M. (2008). *Wabi Sabi*. Illus. E. Young. Boston: Little, Brown. Unpaged.

In this story, Wabi Sabi is the name of a brown cat, but in Japanese culture, it is a concept centered on finding beauty and harmony in the simple, imperfect, natural, modest and mysterious. When Wabi Sabi overhears her owner explain to visitors that the meaning of her name is hard to explain, she sets off on a journey to find the answer. Each animal she visits gives a piece of the complicated puzzle. As Wabi Sabi comes to realize that she is

ordinary yet beautiful, her new affinity for the simplicity of nature and the elegance of what is, brings to her a sense of poetry and understanding. Reibstein's lyrical text is brilliantly complemented with Young's stunning, lifelike collages. *Wabi Sabi* is a story meant to be contemplated and savored so that readers of any age able may grasp its subtle meanings. (ES)



Suggested Ages: 7-10

Related Literature:

Myers, T. (2002). *Tanuki's gift: A Japanese tale*. Illus. R. Roth. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish.

Uehashi, N. (2008). *Moribito: Guardian of the spirit*. Illus. Y. Shimizu. Trans. C. Hirano. New York: Arthur Levine/Scholastic.

Young, E. (1992). *Seven blind mice*. New York: Philomel.



Rumford, J. (2008). *Silent music: A story of Baghdad*. New York: Roaring Brook. Unpaged.

A young Iraqi boy describes his favorite things—playing soccer with his friends, loud “parent-rattling” music, dancing and most of all, Arabic calligraphy. Ali shuts out the horror of war and the sounds of bombing by filling his room and mind with the peace and beauty of calligraphy, following the model of his hero, Yakut, a 13th-century calligrapher. The quiet text does not dwell on politics or conflict, but on one boy's use of calligraphy as a vehicle for blocking out fear. Beautifully written and designed, this picture book is grounded in the small details of Ali's everyday life as well as the larger themes of war and peace. Rumford incorporates patterned papers, multimedia collages and the Arabic words themselves in the pencil and charcoal illustrations that highlight the



warm browns, golds, and blues of Arabic decorative art and the desert. (KS)

Suggested Ages: 6-10

Related Literature:

Louis, C. (2006). *Liu and the bird: A journey in Chinese calligraphy*. Calligraphy F. X. Min.

Trans. S. Kazeroid. New York: North-South.

Rumford, J. (2003). *Calabash cat, and his amazing journey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Sellier, M. (2008). *Legend of the Chinese dragon*. Illus. C. Louis. Calligraphy W. Fei.

Trans. S. Kazeroid. New York: North-South.



Seeger, L. V. (2008). *One boy*. New York: Roaring Brook. Unpaged.

One Boy alternates between being a counting book and a book that explores how words can be found within other words. The text begins with, “One boy.” On the right, the reader sees a die-cut window with a boy seated next to his painting supplies. When the page is turned, the die-cut outlines the word “one” and shows that “one” is a part of a new word “alone.” The second spread reads “All alone” and on the right we see the boy sitting alone in the middle of rows of chairs. The story continues with “Two seals at the sea” and “Three apes” who make a “big escape.” In the end, the “one boy” is “all done” as he walks past a gallery of pictures he has painted—the ten illustrations from this clever book! (MH)



Suggested Ages: 4-8

Related Literature: Seeger, L. V. (2007). *First the egg*. New York: Roaring Brook. Seeger, L. V. (2004). *Lemons are not red*. New York: Roaring Brook.

Tayback, S. (1999). *Joseph had a little overcoat*. New York: Viking/Penguin.