

# **BEST BETS**

## **2008**

### **Reading for Children**

**The OLA's Canadian Materials  
Committee picks this annual list.**

**Books are selected on the basis of their  
literary/artistic merit as well as their  
appeal for children.**

**Text and illustrations are of equal  
importance in picture books and  
information books.**

## PICTURE BOOKS

**Bailey, Linda.** *Stanley at Sea.*

**Illustrated by Bill Slavin. Kids Can Press.**

Stanley and his friends embark on another wild adventure to the unknown. While “his people” enjoy a picnic in the park, ever hungry Stanley leads his friends in search of food and unwittingly stumbles on the open seas. Animated illustrations complete this humorous story.

**Beck, Caroline.** *Buttercup’s Lovely Day.*

**Illustrated by Andrea Beck. Orca Book Publishers.**

A dairy cow celebrates the many delights of her happy life, from the juicy grass and bubbling creek in her meadow to the evening ritual of the friendly farmer coming to walk her home to the barn.

**Hickman, Pamela.** *It’s Moving Day.*

**Illustrated by Geraldo Valério. Kids Can Press.**

In this non-fiction picture book, a cozy burrow is used by many different woodland animals throughout the seasons. As woodchucks and cottontails, salamanders and snakes move in and out of the burrow, children learn about concepts such as life cycles, hibernation and survival. Endearing illustrations and the informative text that reads like a story make this work a delight!

**Hutchins, Hazel and Herbert, Gail.** *Matland.*

**Illustrated by Dušan Petričić. Annick Press.**

A lonely boy creates a landscape in the mud while children draw closer. When rain threatens disaster, onlookers become friends. Darker colors become bright in this thoughtful, unusual book.

**Lafonta, Isabelle.** *Mikissuk’s Secret.*

**Illustrated by Barroux. Scholastic.**

Mikissuk is determined to go on a hunting trip with her brother, Sorqaq, and comes up with a plan to change his mind. When she begins working on a special project, Mikissuk will tell no one what she is making. Everyone, especially Sorqaq, wants to know.... “What is Mikissuk’s secret?” The spare yet striking illustrations complement this heart-warming tale.

**Liwska, Renata.** *Little Panda.*

**Houghton Mifflin.**

A silly, charming gem of a story. Secure and confident, young Bao Bao would rather play than attend to his mother’s lessons about survival until an encounter with a hungry tiger shows him the wisdom of her words.

**Nedwidek, John.** *Ducks Don’t Wear Socks.*

**Illustrated by Lee White. Viking**

Emily is serious. Duck is not serious. Duck is silly and does silly things. Emily is not amused. Just how far does Duck have to go to make Emily laugh? Can Duck bring out Emily’s inner silly girl?

**Ohi, Ruth.** *Chicken, Pig, Cow.*

**Annick Press.**

Problem-solving, friendship and exploring limits are portrayed with gentle humour and economy. Oh’s soft watercolors show small clay animals and a big dog becoming friends. Not to be missed.

**Thomson, Sarah L.** *Imagine a Place.*

**Illustrated by Rob Gonsalves. Atheneum Books for Young Readers**

If you can imagine it, you can experience it. This beautifully illustrated picture book invites readers to imagine and dream. Celebrate the power of imagination.

**Watt, Mélanie.** *Scaredy Squirrel at the Beach.*

**Kids Can Press.**

Our favourite neurotic squirrel is back again, and this time he’s taking the plunge and going to the beach!

## HONOURABLE MENTIONS:

Gurth, Per-Henrik – *Canada in Colours* – Kids Can

Jacobson, Rick – *The Master’s Apprentice* – Tundra

James, Elizabeth – *The Woman Who Married a Bear* – Simply Read

Porter, Pamela – *Yellow Moon, Apple Moon* – Groundwood

Watt, Melanie – *Chester’s Back* – Kids Can

## FICTION

**Bush, Maureen.** *Feather Brain.*

**Orca Book Publishers.**

Lucas gets more than he bargained for with his new dinosaur-making kit. What at first seems like a fun adventure soon becomes a big problem, but when Lucas shifts his own problem onto someone else, he learns the error of his ways and makes a new friend where he didn’t expect to find one!

**Cumyn, Alan.** *Dear Sylvia.*

**Groundwood Books.**

The third instalment in the series about the life of Owen Skye is another winner. We find our hero writing letter after letter to his beloved Sylvia, describing the many hilarious episodes that plague his life. Who can forget the camping disaster or the head stuck in the banister? The big question of course is will Owen actually send any of the letters?

**Gay, Marie Louise and Hormel, David.** *On the Road Again!:*

***More Travels with My Family.* Groundwood Books**

Charlie, his brother Max and their parents move from Canada to France and while Charlie initially wants to live in Paris, he soon changes his mind. With tenderness and a great deal of humour, Gay and husband Hormel look at the joys of living in a small village in France.

**Lanthier, Jennifer.** *Legend of the Lost Jewels.*

**HarperTrophy Canada.**

This sequel to the *Mystery of the Martello Tower* is another spine tingling mystery. As before, the children are left almost on their own as they encounter adventure, danger and just a hint of the paranormal. Adults come in only when they are most needed.

**Lemna, Don.** *When the Sergeant Came Marching Home.*

**Holiday House.**

In this light-hearted comedic tale, Donald’s elation at his father’s return from war quickly turns to horror when he learns of the sergeant’s plans to relocate the family to a farm in the boonies! What could be worse? Donald vows to run away as soon as he’s saved enough. In the meantime, and despite his best intentions, he enjoys many adventures while exploring his new surroundings during the summer.

**Lyon, Annabel.** *All-Season Edie.*

**Orca Book Publishers.**

Edie wonders what she can do to make her grandpa better after he has had two strokes. When she reads a book about spells she is sure she can find one to cure him. Being a novice spell maker, she realizes that she needs a lot of practise and decides to start with her “perfect” older sister, Dexter. Readers will fall in love with the ever-resourceful Edie Jasmine Snow.

**Nielsen, Susin.** *Word Nerd.*

**Tundra Books**

Ambrose is unique. He is a twelve year old nerd who loves his purple cords, and he doesn't really care what other people think. Until he joins the local Scrabble club, with his ex-con neighbour, and discovers that there is more to life than the basement apartment he shares with his overprotective mother.

**Oppel, Kenneth.** *Starclimber.*

**Harper Collins.**

Fans won't be disappointed with Matt and Kate's latest adventure. It's an exciting read with astralnauts, a space ship attached to an astralwire, saboteurs, space creatures, drama, humour and romance.

**Peacock, Shane.** *Death in the Air.*

**Tundra Books.**

The second of the author's well-realized stories about the early years of literature's most famous detective. A huge sum has been stolen from a closely guarded and apparently impregnable safe. The teenaged Sherlock Holmes is determined to establish his credentials as a crime fighter by bringing the thieves to justice. But how can he solve the case when his only clue is two painfully whispered words from the lips of a trapeze artist who has just plummeted from the airy reaches of London's famed Crystal Palace to land at the horrified boy's feet?

**Slade, Arthur.** *Jolted: Newton Starker's Rules for Survival.*

**Harper Trophy Canada.**

Newton Starker has a shocking family history; everyone on his mother's side has been killed by lightning, with the exception of his Great-Grandmother. Newton is determined to break the curse. He enrolls in survival school and quickly learns that there is more to life than simply living.

## HONOURABLE MENTIONS:

Bracegirdle, P.J. – *Fiendish Deeds* – Simon & Schuster  
Cohen, Tish – *The One and Only Zoë Lama* – Harper Collins  
Cullen, Sean – *Hamish X Goes to Providence, R. I.* – Penguin  
Horvath, Polly – *My One Hundred Adventures* – Random House  
Nodelman, P. & Matas, Carol – *Proof That Ghosts Exist* – Key Porter  
Staunton, Ted – *Great Play Morgan & others in series* – Formac  
Wilson, Budge – *Before Green Gables* – Penguin

## Non-Fiction

**Becker, Helaine.** *Science on the Loose: Amazing Activities and Science Facts You'll Never Believe..*

**Maple Tree Press.**

This is a dynamic fusion of well researched information, witty commentary and amusing illustrations. Readers will enjoy the balance of scientific data, silly facts and exciting experiments. The energetic format and easy to follow instructions will engage inquisitive minds and awaken the scientists in any reader.

**Eamer, Claire.** *Super Crocs and Monster Wings: Modern Animals' Ancient Past.*

**Annick Press.**

Eamer takes our fascination with prehistoric beasts to the next level by connecting some amazing ancients to their more modern relatives living today. From colossal dragonflies five times the size of those we know, to humongous sloths as long as pickup trucks, eating from the very tops of trees, fascinating facts and comparisons abound! This book is a must-have for curious kids!

**Granfield, Linda.** *The Unknown Soldier.*

**North Winds Press**

Monuments to nameless young men who have lost their lives in war are found around the world. Granfield provides information and

photographs of memorials to the Unknown Soldier in fifteen countries. Moving and informative.

**Hughes, Susan.** *No Girls Allowed: Tales of Daring Women Dressed as Men for Love, Freedom and Adventure.* **Illustrated by Willow Dawson.** **Kids Can Press**

There have been books before which cover daring woman in history. What gives this book an unusual edge is two fold. Their stories are told in a graphic novel format and some lesser know women are covered in a blend of humour and wit.

**MacLeod, Elizabeth.** *Royal Murder: the Deadly Intrigue of Ten Sovereigns.* **Annick Press**

From Cleopatra to the Romanovs, MacLeod looks at some of the more famous monarchs who have fought to keep their throne. The history is accurate yet told simply enough to engage young readers. The subject is enhanced with an excellent design.

**MacLeod, Elizabeth.** *Why Do Cats Have Whiskers?*

**Kids Can Press.**

In the "blink of an eye", Elizabeth MacLeod takes us on a whirlwind tour of the mystical and mysterious world of the cat. (Apparently, we can talk to cats by blinking!) MacLeod continues to deliver entertaining and challenging topics that excite readers and as usual she does not disappoint. Combining interesting photographs with amazing cat facts, MacLeod has created another must read.

**Milway, Katie Smith.** *One Hen: How One Small Loan Made a Big Difference.*

**Illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes.** **Kids Can Press.**

In this story about the success of non-profit microfinancing initiatives in underdeveloped countries, a poor boy in a Ghanaian village gets a tiny loan. Over time he educates himself and builds a hugely successful business, bringing employment and prosperity to many people. Milway's gentle story, enriched by Fernandes's engaging drawings, has much to say to young Canadian readers about the power of dreams and the value of learning.

**Willett, Mindy and McLeod, Tom.** *The Delta is my Home* **Photographs by Tessa Macintosh.** **Fifth House Publishing**

A new series, The Land is Our Storybooks, has children telling the stories of their lives in the Northwest Territories. In this one, eleven year old Tom discusses living in the Mackenzie Delta. A storyteller who has appeared on the CBC, Tom reveals a life which will seem exotic to those who live further south.

**Wilson, John.** *Desperate Glory: The Story of World War I.* **Napoleon Publishers.**

Part of the series, Stories of Canada, "Desperate Glory" not only gives readers an outline of WWI from a Canadian perspective, but also provides a glimpse into the harrowing experiences of our troops. Dotted with photographs, maps & brief asides, the book highlights the horror of this long and bitter war.

**Yes Magazine Editors.** *Robots.*

**Kids Can Press.**

A lively, well-illustrated, informative look at the past, present and future of robots. Sure to inspire.

## HONOURABLE MENTIONS:

Bourgeois, Paulette – *The Dirt on Dirt* – Kids Can  
Eamer, Claire – *Traitor's Gate* – Annick  
Laidlaw, Rob – *Wild Animals in Captivity* – Fitzhenry & Whiteside  
Oakley, Mark – *The Seventh Expert* – Annick (Good for schools)  
Owl Magazine – *Try This At Home* – Owlkids Publications  
Penn, Briony – *The Kids Book of Canadian Geography* – Kids Can  
Renaud, Anne – *Pier 21: Stories from Near and Far* – Lobster Press  
Thomas, Keltie – *Inside Hockey* – Maple Tree Press

The OLA's annual Best Bets evolved from a list put out by the Canadian Material's Committee of the Children's Services Guild. This Canadian Materials Committee is now under the wing of the OPLA Children and Youth Committee.

The OLA's Canadian Materials Committee selects books on the basis of their literary/artistic merit as well as their appeal for children and young adults. Text and illustrations are of equal importance in picture books and information books.

### OLA'S CANADIAN MATERIALS COMMITTEE

We are a long standing committee with a strong voice in promoting Canadian literature for children and young adults. Our goal is to highlight excellence in literature for children and young adults for the OLA membership and others with an interest.

The Committee thanks S & B Books for their ongoing support with providing a place to meet and copies of books to review.

Meetings are held a minimum of four times a year at S & B Books (3086 Universal Dr., Mississauga). Members discuss and evaluate recent publications by Canadian authors and illustrators. The books evaluated are suitable for children and young adults from birth to nineteen years old. From these discussions, the Committee produces "Best Bets" lists, annual annotated lists of recommended titles. These lists are released each year at the OLA Super Conference.

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