

BEST BETS

2009

Reading for Children

The OLA's Canadian Materials Committee, which is under the umbrella of the OPLA Child and Youth Services 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's Beauty Contest.*

Illustrated by Bill Slavin. Kids Can Press

The loveable mutt is back. Bathed and primped, but in the confusion unfed, Stanley is off to the dog show. Discovering the prizes are delicious bones our hungry hero tries his heart out but fails to secure a single taste. But fear not, a romp ensues as the exuberant Stanley shows everyone that fun is more important than prizes.

Barclay, Jane. *Proud as a Peacock, Brave as a Lion.*

Illustrated by Renné Benoit. Tundra Books.

As they get ready for Remembrance Day ceremonies, Poppa shows his grandson a picture of himself in uniform and remembers feeling "proud as a peacock". The boy gets glimpses of his grandfather as a young man, going off to war, feeling proud and scared and brave. The illustrations in this touching book are lovely, muted and aptly depict the close relationship between grandfather and grandson. .

Côté, Geneviève *Me and You.*

Kids Can Press.

Rabbit and Pig are such close friends that each would like to be more like the other. Pig puts socks on his ears and Rabbit adds a curly tail. They both try to change their noses, their toes, and their colour. But when they are through, they realize they like each other as they truly are. This is a well told tale of friendship and differences.

Forler, Nan. *Bird Child.*

Illustrated by François Thisdale, Tundra Books.

Drawing, painting and photographs blend to beautifully enhance the tender tale of a little girl, who has been raised to believe in herself and her ability to "fly". When a new girl at school is bullied, Eliza at first just watches. But as she sees Lainey's spirit being crushed, Eliza's shame pushes her to stand up to the bullies.

Gay, Marie-Louise. *When Stella Was Very, Very Small.*

Groundwood Books.

Peek into the past when Stella was, "very, very small", and discover a big world full of fun and adventure! Through the eyes of tiny Stella, we see that tree branches can tickle clouds and drinking cups have a habit of jumping off tables. But as Stella gets a little older, we see how she takes on a new and "bigger" role... one where she can read books, feed her goldfish, and be a loving "big" sister.

Jocelyn, Marthe *Same Same*

Illustrated by Tom Slaughter. Tundra Books.

Birds and zebras and snakes are the same. Snakes and fences and trains are the same. Bright bold graphics illustrate how a snake (for instance) can be both striped and long at the same time. This is a simple book with a more complex idea than first meets the eye.

Johnston, Lynn & Beth Cruikshank. *Farley Follows His Nose.*

Harper Collins.

Farley has had enough! After another loathsome bath, he decides to run away from home. At first he has fun sniffing the wonderful odours of the neighbourhood, eating some treats, and even rescuing a lost boy, but then he begins to miss his family. Feeling lonely, Farley wonders if he'll ever find his home again. Rescue comes from an unexpected source when Farley follows his nose.

Silsbe, Brenda. *The Bears We Know.*

Illustrated by Vlasta van Kampen. Annick Press.

Just down the street there is a household of bears who live life exactly as any child would love to. They stay up late, they eat what they like, they never go to school. Van Kampen's funny, engaging pictures invite us into the bears' world of perfect bliss. A vicarious treat for reluctantly well-behaved children everywhere.

Sydor, Colleen. *Timmerman Was Here.*

Illustrated by Nicolas Debon. Tundra Books.

Timmerman is a new boarder who eventually wins over the little girl in this story with his quiet ways, and by including her in his odd jobs around their house. When the neighbours begin to gossip, the little girl defends her friend - even when she herself begins to have doubts. A well-told tale about the bonds and surprises of friendship.

Tankard, Jeremy. *Boo Hoo Bird.*

Scholastic Press.

He's back! Grumpy Bird has entered the world of scrapes and bruises. While every one of his friends is having fun playing ball, bird is the only one having accidents. He is not a happy bird! As usual his friends come to his rescue and turn his "boohoos" into chuckles and smiles. Another home run for Jeremy Tankard.

FICTION

Adderson, Caroline. *Bruno for Real.*

Orca Book Publishers.

Bruno is a busy 7 year old boy who can't stop his hiccups, enjoys being "bad" for a day and swaps his Mom for a funny hat. Great for young readers who enjoy short funny chapters with lots of humorous illustrations.

Anderson, R.J. *Faery Rebels: Spell Hunter.*

HarperCollins.

Faeries and humans? Impossible – but not to 'Knife', hunter fairy. Spunky and rebellious, Knife defies convention to fly beyond an aging faery world to the 'human' House. She and crippled 16 year-old Paul become friends – and more. Issues of loyalty and fading magic add depth to this compelling read.

Austen, Catherine. *Walking Backward.*

Orca Book Publishers.

After a tragic and somewhat mysterious accident, 12 year old Josh writes in his journal about how different life is without his mom, and chronicles how each of his family members deal with their own grief. For example, his little brother, Sammy, insists on walking backwards so that he can remember the faces of people as he leaves, in case they die. Josh's journal touches the heart of the reader with its humour, pain, and "what ifs". Will life ever feel normal again?

Hartry, Nancy. *Watching Jimmy.* **Tundra Books.**

11 year-old Carolyn cares for her brain-injured friend Jimmy with courage, loyalty and strength beyond her years. Set in Canada in the 1950's, a dark secret, a bullying adult and mounting health-care bills create almost insurmountable problems. Her feisty determination, dry sense of humour and golden voice bring this moving novel to a satisfying conclusion. Not to be missed.

Kerz, Anna. *The Mealworm Diaries.*

Orca Book Publishers.

Jeremy feels his life is a disaster when he moves to a new school. Not only does he have no friends, he is also keeping a secret about his father's death. When Jeremy is partnered to do a mealworm project with Aaron, who has behavioural problems, Jeremy feels he will never fit in at school. Told with humour and insight, readers will be cheering for Jeremy who finds friendship when he least expects it.

Kress, Adrienne. *Timothy and the Dragon's Gate.*

Scholastic Canada.

In this action-packed adventure, Timothy is stuck with an impossible mission. As the accidental keeper of a thousand-year-old dragon (trapped in an old Chinese man's body) he must escort Mr. Shen (the dragon) to China, find the dragon's gate, and release the dragon's true power. Timothy and Mr. Shen face many dangers along the way including ninjas and pirate battles on the high seas

Lawrence, Iain. *The Giant-Slayer.* **Delacorte Press**

This book is an imagination adventure! Laurie and her friend Dickie have a great time playing together, inventing stories and exploring their neighbourhood. But when Dickie contracts polio and is confined to an iron lung in hospital, Laurie finally faces her fears and finds several kids in hospital who need her particular brand of storytelling escape. Together, the kids create the story of the giant-slayer, who, against all odds, defeats the biggest challenge of his life.

Mordecai, Martin. *Blue Mountain Trouble.* **Scholastic**

Two 11 year olds twins, Jackson and Pollyread, live in rural Jamaica. They are taking an exam which will determine what their next step in education will be, their mother is mysteriously ill and the local bad boy has returned to the village after a stint in jail. And then there is a magical goat that appears and disappears. The realities of life such as illegitimate children, ganja and getting water are presented in a matter of fact way. This is such a beautifully written book that the Jamaican dialect used throughout presents little trouble to the reader.

Peacock, Shane. *The Vanishing Girl.* **Tundra Books.**

In the third instalment of Peacock's brilliant *The Boy Sherlock Holmes* series the detective faces his most complex case yet. A kidnapped girl is returned to her wealthy family but promptly disappears again. Following a clue deep into the countryside Holmes discovers a second girl is missing, and all signs are pointing him to the creepy house on the hill.

Vanderwal, Andrew H. *Battle for Duncragglin.* **Tundra Books.**

Alex Macpherson dreads the visit to his Aunt Fiona's home in far off Scotland, until he learns about the secret caves rumoured to exist under the ruins of Duncragglin Castle. Determined to find the caves, Alex and his new friends embark on a magical journey back in time to the era of knights, castles, and William Wallace. This first novel by Vanderwal is an exciting romp through Scottish history.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS:

Brown, Paul – *Wolf Pack of the Winisk River* - Lobster

Jennings, Sharon – *Home Free* – Second Story

Poon, Janice – *Claire and the Water Wish* (Graphic bk) – Kids Can

Non-Fiction

Becker, Helaine. *What's the Big Idea?: Inventions That Changed Life on Earth Forever.* **Owlkids Books (Maple Tree)**

The author begins by introducing the basic needs of human existence, such as food and security, showing how each led to inventions that satisfied these needs. She then illustrates how these early discoveries were developed over time into more sophisticated applications. A typically attractive, informative and highly readable new title from this popular author.

Butcher, Kristin. *Pharaohs and Foot Soldiers: One Hundred Ancient Egyptian Jobs You Might Have Desired or Dreaded.*

Illustrated by Martha Newbigging. **Annick Press**

This book has obvious appeal for the Grade 4 Ancient Civilizations curriculum. The table of contents is extensive as is the index at the back. But the combination of subject, writing and illustrations makes this more than just a book for school projects. The facts are presented in such a lively, even humorous fashion that it makes for great leisure reading as well.

Crossingham, John. *Learn to Speak Music: A Guide to Creating, Performing and Promoting Your Songs.*

Design and Illustrations by Jeff Kulak. **Owl Kids Books Inc.**

This is the coolest book ever! Crossingham shares his love of music with readers - from choosing an instrument, starting a band, to songwriting and recording. As an extra, the "playlist" feature

provides song suggestions to illustrate important points in the text! Packed with information, the book remains accessible and engaging!

Kulling, Monika. *It's a Snap! George Eastman's First Photograph.* **Illustrated by Bill Slavin.** **Tundra Books.**

Part of the **Great Ideas** series, Kulling's picture book biography of George Eastman will appeal to a younger audience who will be fascinated with how he developed the brownie camera and invented dry plates and film. The charming and detailed illustrations by Bill Slavin bring the life and times of George Eastman to life.

Luxbacher, Irene. *1 2 3 I Can Build! Kids Can Press.*

This eye-catching book in a series by Luxbacher will inspire kids to build the architectural showpieces that are presented. The striking yet simple illustrations complement the instructions and are even featured in the index. From birdhouses to castles, budding architects will be able to actually build each structure and have a lot of fun doing it.

Ruurs, Margriet. *My School in the Rain Forest: How Children Attend School Around the World.* **Boyd Mills Press**

School in a jungle, school on a ship and school by radio are just a few of the fascinating ways children go to school around the world. Lots of photos and personalized stories add interest and make this a book that will help foster an understanding of other cultures.

Swanson, Diane. *You are Weird: Your Body's Peculiar Parts and Funny Functions.* **Illustrated by Kathy Boake.** **Annick Press**

A science book well disguised as fun! There are numerous astounding facts and figures and useful comparisons to similar animal parts. Wacky information encourages the reader to explore further.

Swanson, Diane. *Animal Aha!: Thrilling Discoveries in Wildlife Science.* **Annick Press.**

There are lots of colour photos and lists of fun facts in this fascinating look at what recent research has shown us about how animals adapt and learn. Meet dolphins who count and elephants who recognize themselves in a mirror. Large print and short chapters make this book ideal for younger readers.

Thomas, Lyn. *100% Pure Fake: Gross Out Your Friends and Family With 25 Great Special Effects!*

Photographs by Cheryl Powers and Illustrations by Boris Zaytsev. **Kids Can Press**

Just as the title indicates, this book will help kids reach maximum gross out potential! Fun and simple recipes, with easy-to-follow instructions (including symbols for when to ask for adult help), are on offer for cool stuff like fake blood, blisters and scars, "S'not snot", veggie vomit and even "doo-doo"! (The author includes her apology, as households will no longer be the same!)

Ye, Ting-xing. *The Chinese Thought of It: Amazin Inventions and Innovations.* **Annick Press**

Who invented the folding umbrella? The fishing reel, playing cards, the compass and paddleboat? Packed with interesting information, this informative book discusses ancient as well as modern Chinese inventions. Chapters on transport, weapons, paper, food, health, games and more are well-illustrated with clear explanations. Index and bibliography.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS:

Boudreau, Helene – *Crimebusting and Detection* (& other titles in the Science Solves It Series) – Crabtree

Galloway, Priscilla with Dawn Hunter – *Adventures on the Ancient Silk Road* – Annick

MacLeod, Elizabeth – *Why Do Horses Have Manes?* – Kids Can

Thomas, Keltie & illus by Stephen MacEachern – *How Figure Skating Works* – Owlkids

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 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.

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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