

BEST BETS

2010

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 Little Sister.*

Illustrated by Bill Slavin. Kids Can Press

Stanley's world is turned upside down with the arrival of "Fluffy" the cat. Chaos and hilarity ensue with Stanley catching all the blame. But just when Stanley is about to give up, he realizes that having a little sister isn't so bad after all.

Becker, Helaine. *A Porcupine in a Pine Tree: a Canadian 12 Days of Christmas.*

Illustrated by Werner Zimmerman. North Winds Press *

A porcupine, caribou, beavers, moose, squirrels, Mounties, Stanley Cups and more rollick through the familiar carol. With tongue-in-cheek humour and bright illustrations, this distinctively Canadian version is a delight.

Edwards, Wallace. *The Cat's Pajamas.*

Kids Can Press.

Wallace Edwards makes understanding idioms fun and entertaining. His extraordinary illustrations are visual clues to 26 idioms. Readers are challenged to decipher each one. Edwards seems to be telling us "Use Your Noodle"! and It's a "Piece of Cake"! Check out the hidden cat on each page. Readers of all ages will find this book "more fun than a barrel of monkeys"!

Horrocks, Anita. *Silas' Seven Grandparents.*

Illustrated by Helen Flook. Orca Book Publishers

Modern family dynamics have left Silas with more than the usual quota of doting caregivers when his parents go away on a business trip. As one after another invites him to stay, Silas is in a quandary. How can he choose to stay with only one when all seven want him? Clever Silas finds a solution that pleases everyone. Colourful, lively illustrations make this book a special treat for readers, too.

Leonetti, Mike. *The Mighty Tim Horton;*

Illustrated by Greg Banning. North Winds Press*

Hockey fans and history buffs alike will enjoy this endearing story of a boy and his encounter with a hockey legend, the mighty Tim Horton. The thrill and excitement of the 1962 NHL playoffs is captured nicely as we join Tim Horton and the Toronto Maple Leafs on their successful quest to win the Stanley Cup.

Luxbacher, Irene. *Mattoo, Let's Play!*

Kids Can Press

Ruby LOVES to play with her pet cat, Mattoo. But why is Mattoo being such a sour puss? A delightful, beautifully illustrated story about considering the feelings of others and playing nicely.

Munsch, Robert. *Put Me in a Book!*

Illustrated by Michael Martchenko. North Winds Press*

An author sitting on a park bench tells Mrs. O'Dell's class that he can't complete his picture book until he finds a kid to be in it. Hailey enthusiastically volunteers and is shocked when she is suddenly folded into the book. Once she discovers that she can't escape, the other kids try to help with hilarious results. Kids will buy into the absurdity of Hailey's problem and will love the concluding twist.

Tsiang, Sarah. *A Flock of Shoes.*

Illustrated by Qin Leng. Annick.

Abby's sandals are pink and brown with lime green trim. They are perfect for running and jumping and making tracks in the sand. But when summer is over Mum says they are worn out and it's time for them to go. Abby disagrees but the sandals take matters into their own hands, flying away to the south like birds. Soon unhappy Abby learns to love her blue and white boots with purple trim. Until, one sunny spring day.... Young readers will delight in this nonsensical story about Abby and her faithful footwear.

Ward, David. *One Hockey Night.*

Illustrated by Brian Deines, Scholastic.

Owen and Holly have moved to Saskatchewan from Nova Scotia and miss playing hockey on a lake. However their father has a big surprise for them on Christmas Eve. Gorgeous artwork and a charming story celebrate one of Canada's favourite pastimes.

Wishinsky, Frieda. *The Queen's Secret.*

Illustrated by Loufane. North Winds Press*

There's a secret that both the Queen and Kay share – and it's up to the reader to find out! Delightfully teasing (the answer is at the end) this is also a rhyming book with bright, colourful illustrations.

***Note that North Winds Press is part of Scholastic Canada.**

FICTION

Brewster, Hugh *Prisoner Of Dieppe: World War II, Alistair Morrison, Occupied France, 1942 (I am Canada).* **Scholastic**

Alistair Morrison is talked into joining the war effort by his best friend, the slightly older "Mackie". After basic training they are sent overseas and end up being captured after the disastrous battle of Dieppe. This new series is promoted as being for ages 9-12 but the honest way in which Brewster treats the lives of the soldiers during WWII makes it suitable for older readers as well. Exciting and well written, this is a story that will engage boys in particular.

Charles, Rie. *No More Dragons.* **Napoleon Publishing.**

Alex keeps a diary in the form of letters to a friend. As we read each entry something disturbing is revealed. Thirteen year old Alex is not only lonely and insecure, he is also being abused. Nevertheless, his letters are filled with humour and hope, especially when he talks about trying out for the school play. We see his world slowly crumbling until he reaches a point where he knows he must stand up to his father. A believable and touching story.

Mack, Winnie. *After All, You're Callie Boone.* **Scholastic.**

12 year old Callie has been dumped by her best friend and has just belly flopped off the diving board at the pool. On top of that her Uncle has moved in with his ferrets and her grandma is cranky. Things change when a boy named Hoot moves to her neighbourhood. A great first novel about friendship.

MacLean, Jill. *The Present Tense of Prinnie Murphy.*

Fitzhenry & Whiteside

This shining novel reintroduces Grade 5 to 8 readers to characters from *The Nine Lives of Travis Keating*. Her mother's alcoholism, bullying classmates, and struggles with reading are making Prinnie's life in her small Newfoundland town a misery until a sympathetic teacher gives her a book which helps her find the strength and resilience to grow past her troubles.

Milway, Katie Smith. *The Good Garden: How One Family Went from Hunger to Having Enough.*

Illustrated by Sylvie Daigneault. Kids Can Press

Impoverished soil and greedy "coyotes" have driven Maria's Honduran family to desperation. A new teacher defies tradition and introduces practices which enable Maria's family to rehabilitate their land and become successful, independent farmers. A thoughtful introduction to the issue of global food shortages. For Grades 4 to 8 but Daigneault's charming illustrations will attract younger readers, too.

Nielsen, Susin. *Dear George Clooney, Please Marry My Mom.*

Tundra.

According to Violet, divorce sucks. Her mother dates losers and always seems depressed, while her father is never around since he

has remarried and moved. When she and her sister are invited to visit her TV-director dad in Los Angeles, Violet hatches a plan involving George Clooney to save her Mom and make her father crazy with jealousy. A hilarious look at the ups and downs of family life.

Peterson, Lois. *The Ballad of Knuckles McGraw*

Orca Book Publishers

When Kevin Mason is abandoned by his mother, he decides to escape by becoming Knuckles McGraw, a tough and brave cowboy. But with the support of his new foster family, and the reunion with his grandparents, Kevin re-finds not only himself, but the courage to face his future with new optimism. A touching story.

Sherrard, Valerie. *Tumbleweed Skies.*

Fitzhenry & Whiteside

Ellie is sent to live with her embittered and unwelcoming grandmother for the summer. While a sympathetic uncle and a wounded magpie help her cope, it is Ellie's maturity and inner strength which guide her growing understanding. This historical novel captures Ellie's thoughts and emotions with compassion and insight. The hopeful ending avoids a sentimental solution.

Skrypuch, Marsha. *Stolen Child.* **Scholastic**

After World War II, twelve year old Nadia is adjusting to life in Canada after years in a Displaced Persons camp in Europe. But her memories and her dreams are confused and contradictory. Gradually she comes to realize that as a young child she was stolen from her Ukrainian parents and raised to be a good Nazi German. This aspect of the war is not covered in children's books and this gives an added interest to an "adjusting to a new life in Canada" story.

Stevenson, Robin. *Liars and Fools.* **Orca Book Publishers.**

In the wake of her mother's tragic disappearance, Fiona's rational minded science teacher father falls for a new age spirit medium. Smelling a rat, Fiona and her overachieving friend Anna decide to expose "psychic phenomena" for their next science project.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS:

Fergus, Maureen – *Ortega* – Kids Can

Kerz, Anna – *Gnome's Eye* – Orca

Peacock, Shane – *Secret Fiend* – Tundra

Sylvester, Kevin – Neil Flambé and the Marco Polo Murders – H.B.

Fenn

NON-FICTION

Becker, Helaine. *Magic Up Your Sleeve: Amazing Illusions, Tricks, and Science Facts You'll Never Believe;*

Illustrated by Claudia Dávila. **Owlkids Books Inc.**

Magic and science unite with wondrous results in this clever and informative book about magic tricks. The easy to follow step by step instructions, and eye catching illustrations are sure to astound and amaze the curious minds of budding magicians!

Ellis, Deborah. *We Want You to Know: Kids Talk About Bullying.*

Coteau Books.

Deborah Ellis' latest book is meaningful not only to kids who have been bullied, but also to educators and parents. The interviews are poignant and thoughtful and the kids have their own ideas, advice and solutions to share. A section called "What Do You Think" has great topics for further discussion. The "Resources" section provides helpful websites and addresses.

Kelsey, Elin.

Not Your Typical Book About the Environment.

Illustrated by Clayton Hamner. **Owlkids**

Catchy titles and fun illustrations offering empowering advice without preaching or sentimentalizing make this book a winner. The

book is packed with interesting information and readers are encouraged to connect with the environment proactively. The author's sincerity, thoughtfulness and ability to connect with kids shines through in this highly- readable book.

Kyi, Tanya Lloyd. *50 Burning Question: a Sizzling History of Fire.*

Illustrated by Ross Kinnaid. **Annick Press**

Entertaining headings ("Who was the first hairy potter?") and brightly-coloured pages with wacky illustrations introduce the reader to the subject of fire. Well-researched (there's a bibliography) with a wealth of interesting detail, this book is fun and informative. Chapters include both scientific and social aspects of fire in a question and answer format.

McAllister, Ian & Read, Nicholas. *Sea Wolves- Living Wild in the Great Bear Rainforest.* **Orca Book Publishers.**

Beautifully illustrated with almost 100 photos by McAllister, this stunning book covers the lives and habits of these creatures who are genetically different from other wolves. Details on how they differ (they fish!) and how they are similar to other wolves is contrasted with how similarly they live to the First Nations who share the same space.

McAllister, Ian & Read, Nicholas. *Salmon Bears: Giants of the Great Bear Rainforest..* **Orca Book Publishers.**

This is another amazing book by this author and photographer. We hope they continue with this series. Incredible photos and informative text make this a must for any collection. Both titles by this author and photographer deserve to be on the Best Bets list

Patterson, Heather. *Canada From Above: A Photo Journey.* **Scholastic Canada**

This photographic book features breathtaking images of 30 Canadian natural and man-made landmarks, all shot from above. Each picture covers a two page spread with interesting information about the location included. Subject matter ranges from the Alberta Pond Hockey championships, to a beluga migration in Nunavut, to salmon farms on the East coast, to an old-growth forest in B.C.

Read, Tracy C. *Exploring the World of Eagles.* **Firefly Books**

Get up close and personal with some of nature's most fascinating creatures. Beautiful colour photographs coupled with interesting facts and trivia make this and the other books in the Exploring the World of... series a must see!

Webb, Jonathan. *Canada's Wars: An illustrated History.*

Scholastic Canada

A thorough and up to date, richly illustrated book covering Canada's official and unofficial involvement in conflicts around the globe. Starting with the Boer War and covering a surprising range of lesser known material, this book closes with Canada's role in Afghanistan. Includes maps and an index.

Willett, Mindy & Jumbo, Sheyenne. *Come and Learn with Me.*

Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

The "Land is our Storybook" series continues to be a respectful way to introduce children to the life of First Nations children. Through photos and a personal text, we are introduced to 9 year old Sheyenne of Trout Lake in the Northwest Territories.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS:

Coulter, Laurie – *Kings and Carpenters: One Hundred Bible Land Jobs You Might Have Praised or Panned* - Annick

Goldner, John – *Hockey Talk* – Fitzhenry & Whiteside

Lightfoot, Gordon – *Canadian Railroad Trilogy* – Groundwood (for the illustrations by Ian Wallace).

Weaver, Janice – *Hudson.* Tundra

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, www.sbbooks.com, 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.

OLA's Canadian Materials Committee Members:

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