

# Best Bets

## 2018 List

### Picture Books

Atkinson, Cale. Off and Away. Disney Hyperion.

Jo's sailor father delivers all the messages in bottles that wind up on their small island. Much as she would like to, Jo never joins him because she is afraid of what might be out there. But when he becomes sick & the bottles start to pile up, Jo must confront her imagination and her fears and go off and away to sea. A rollicking tale about imagination gone wild and facing one's fears.

Black, Michael Ian. I'm Sad. Illustrated by Debbie Ridpath Ohi. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Flamingo is feeling sad today. His friends, Potato and a young girl, try to cheer him up, but nothing seems to work. The three friends learn that sometimes people can feel sad and that is okay because Flamingo won't always feel sad and his friends will always be at his side. A wonderful simple take on sadness and how friends can help each other through it.

Dubuc, Marianne. Up the Mountain Path. Princeton Architectural Press.

Every week Mrs. Badger hikes up to the top of Sugarloaf Peak, greeting her friends and enjoying the nature around her. One day she meets a young cat, Lulu, who decides to join her on her walk. As their friendship develops, Mrs. Badger shares her understanding of the world and imparts her values on young Lulu on the importance of taking care of the natural world, helping those in need, and learning to listen to her own intuition. A gentle introduction to life lessons, growing older, and the world around us.

Fergus, Maureen. The Reptile Club. Illustrated by Elina Ellis. Kids Can Press.

When Rory is unable to find a school club that suits him, he takes his parents suggestion and starts a club about something he loves instead. Reptiles! There must be other kids who love reptiles and Rory can't wait to meet them! To Rory's great surprise, his first members aren't his classmates but an anaconda, a crocodile and an eyeball licking gecko. This funny and charming picture book is sure to become a storytime favourite.

Hutchins, Hazel, and Gail Herbert. Anna at the Art Museum. Illustrated by Lil Crump. Annick Press.

None of the things Anna wants to do at the art museum are allowed! Anna and her mother have had a talk in advance, but "perhaps Anna had not listened quite as closely as she should have." There's no yelling, no climbing, and no snacking...but there's lots of humour! Anna is a charming and vibrant character, and Lil Crump's illustrations bring out Anna's energy, as well as re-creating stunning artwork.

Doody, Lori. Mallard, Mallard, Duck. Running the Goat Books & Broadsides.

Early one morning, a moose walks into St. John's, trying to find a home for the 2 mallards following him. He trots through most of the town, trying to leave the ducks in the park, or by the harbour or downtown, but they won't leave his side until he finds the perfect companion for them. Full of visual and verbal puns, and with a simple art style, this is sure to delight those who have been to St. John's or those who will now hope to go.

Gay, Marie-Louise. Mustafa. Groundwood Books.

*Mustafa* tells the story of a young boy who leaves a war-torn country and travels a long way to reach his new home. At a nearby park, he discovers beautiful flowers that remind him of his grandmother's teacups, fall leaves, bugs that look like jewels, and eventually, a new friend. He is timid at first with the red-headed girl, but they bond over feeding the fish and enjoying the swings even though they don't speak the same language. *Mustafa* is a beautifully written and heartwarming tale, which will appeal to children and adults and especially anyone who has felt like an outsider. Gay perfectly captures the world view of a child adapting to a new place to call home.

Goldstyn, Jacques. The Eleventh Hour. Owl Books.

Jules and Jim had been friends their whole lives. They were born 2 minutes apart and somehow Jules remains 2 minutes behind Jim all the time. When WWI starts they both join and fight. Jim gets decorated for always being first over the top of the trench, Jules gets stuck doing chores. On Nov. 11, 1911, the armistice is signed, scheduled to take effect at 11:00 am. But the soldiers in the trenches don't know that. And at 10:58, Jim climbs out of the trenches to attack the Germans one more time. Written for older children, the graphic illustrations are lightened by their cartoon style, making this story more accessible in delivering its content.

O'Leary, Sara. Owls Are Good At Keeping Secrets: An Unusual Alphabet. Illustrated by Jacob Grant. Tundra Books.

This delightful book presents little-known facts about animals – one for each alphabet letter. Kids will love seeing their own qualities reflected in these adorably-rendered creatures, like the chipmunks who love staying up past their bedtime and the elephants who love baths. Humorous and touching, it gives animals human characteristics and contains a message about always loving yourself for who you are.

Smith, Heather. Angus All Aglow. Illustrated by Alice Carter. Orca Book Publishers.

Angus *loves* things that sparkle; he loves them so much that he can hear them as they crackle, buzz, and whirl as they glitter. His colourful and musical world goes silent, however, when he wears the sparkly beaded necklace from his Grandmother to school and the other children laugh and tease him for wearing it. Touching on acceptance, friendship, and kindness, this story reminds us all how to glow from the inside out.

## Honourable Mentions

Fan Brothers, The. Ocean Meets Sky. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Hampson, Sarah. Dr. Coo and the Pigeon Protest. Illustrated by Kass Reich. Kids Can Press.

Spiro, Ruth. Made by Maxine. Illustrated by Holly Hatam. Dial Books.

Tsiang, Sarah. Sugar and Snails. Illustrated by Sonja Wimmer. Annick Press.

Quan, Betty. Grandmother's Visit. Illustrated by Carmen Mok. Groundwood Books.

## Junior Fiction

Ahn, Angela. Krista Kim-Bap. Second Story Press.

Until Grade 5, Krista was always sure who she was. Korean of course, but best friends with red-haired Jason who loves Korean food as much as she does and fears her fierce grandmother who doesn't approve of their friendship. But when she gets a chance to associate with the girls in her class and get on her grandmother's good side, her friendship with Jason suffers as a result.

Auxier, Jonathan. Sweep: The Story of a Girl and Her Monster. Puffin Canada.

Chimney sweeps don't live long. If a fall doesn't kill them, fire or damaged lungs will. So Nan Sparrow, age 11, is not surprised when it looks as though her time has finally come. Instead, a small piece of char, given to her by her father years ago, saves her from certain death, becoming a golem in the process. A beautiful story of pain and friendship.

Boothby, Ian. Sparks! Illustrated by Nina Matsumoto with Colour by David Dedrick. Scholastic.

August and Charlie are the best of friends. They also happen to be cats. Together they operate a superhero dog suit to save their community from sudden danger, which also happens to include an alien from outer space trying to take over the world. Will our heroes save the day, free the animals, and stop the alien? A graphic novel that punches above its weight in story and artwork!

Delaney, Rachelle. Clara Voyant. Puffin Canada.

After her grandmother's move to Florida, Clara is easily annoyed by her Mom who runs a herbal remedy shop in Kensington Market, believes in mysticism, and "follows her bliss". Clara aspires to be an investigative journalist and decides to go out for her school paper. To her dismay, she is assigned to write the horoscope column. When Clara's horoscopes start to come true, everyone at school believes her to be a fortune teller, her worst nightmare. When a mystery unfolds at her school, Clara sets out to solve it to prove that she can be an investigative journalist. A lighthearted mystery and enjoyable read, Clara is a character that kids will root for.

Fagan, Cary. The Hollow Under the Tree. Groundwood Books.

As a circus train makes its way through Toronto on the way to Montreal, the back of the train breaks off, coming to rest in pieces right near High Park. In that last coach is a friendly but not quite tame young lion who proceeds to move into the park and hide from everyone, but a young girl named Sadie who lives nearby. As she feeds the animal, she also makes friends with a lonely but very rich boy who can afford all the meat the lion needs. 1925 Toronto has never seemed so close.

Green, Shari. Missing Mike. Pajama Press.

Missing one eye and being a mix of a little bit of this and a little bit of that, Mike is not exactly a pretty dog, but eleven-year-old Caera loves him absolutely. When their home town is in the path of a raging wildfire and everyone is ordered to evacuate, Mike runs off - scared of the smell of smoke in the air. With no time to search for Mike, the family is forced to him behind. Just devastated by her whole world being set aflame, Caera reflects on if she still has a home if they have nothing left. Determined, Caera decides that while her house may be gone, she refuses to lose Mike, and sets out on a journey to find her missing dog.

King, Wesley. A World Below. Simon & Schuster.

An eighth-grade field trip to the Carlsbad Caverns turns horribly wrong when an earthquake hits, trapping the class underground. Faced with separation from their teacher, braving harsh elements and the discovery of a lost civilization, the class is forced to overcome personal challenges in order to survive. This fast-paced adventure story, full of cliffhangers, will keep readers in suspense, enticing them to keep reading "one more chapter".

Kuipers, Alice. Polly Diamond and the Magic Book. Illustrated by Diana Toledano. Chronicle Books.

Polly loves reading, books and making lists so what better present could she have gotten but a magic book in which she lists all the ways she wishes her life would change. From a bigger house to turning her annoying little sister into a banana, if she writes it, it happens! But she learns that the consequences are not always what she expects. A book devoted to the love of words and their meanings.

Latimer, E. The Strange and Deadly Portraits of Bryony Gray. Tundra Books.

Bryony Gray is kept locked away in her aunt and uncle's attic, forced to paint portraits for London's high society. Things take a strange turn when her clients start to disappear and her latest portrait takes on a life of its own, causing chaos in the streets of the city. Afraid she has unleashed the Gray family curse, Bryony and her friends are determined to solve the mystery even if it means facing deadly portraits and her evil uncle along the way.

Nielsen, Susin. No Fixed Address. Tundra Books.

Felix Knuttson, aged 12, loves trivia, his gerbil, and his mom - who insists he call her Astrid. Seeming very much a regular kid, Felix has a secret he hides from the world; with Astrid not being able to keep a

steady job, she and Felix are living out of a camper van. Felix holds his secret close, giving fake addresses so he can be enrolled at school, and keeping his new friends at arms-length to hide the fact that he's homeless. In this enthralling book, Nielsen explores the unseen homeless that are all around us, helping readers appreciate and respect basic human rights that are often overlooked, while still delivering an engaging story about friendship and family.

## **Honourable Mentions**

Hicks, Faith Erin. [The Nameless City \(Series\)](#). Illustrated by Jordie Bellaire. First Second.

Hughes, Alison. [Kasey & Ivy](#). Orca Book Publishers.

Hughes, Susan. [What Happens Next](#). Illustrated by Carey Sookocheff. Owlkids Books.

Tamaki, Mariko. [LumbersJanes \(Series\)](#). Illustrated by Brooke Allen. Amulet Books.

## **Junior Non-Fiction**

Becker, Helaine. [Counting on Katherine: How Katherine Johnson Saved Apollo 13](#). Illustrated by Dow Phumiruk. Henry Holt and Co.

Counting on Katherine gives kids a wonderful introduction to the life and accomplishments of Katherine Johnson. A lover of mathematics since a child, she wanted to learn more about the world and the universe, but faced discrimination being a woman of colour. From gifted student to NASA mathematician, the book illustrates, in a heartwarming way, her many achievements, including being the person who calculated a safe return for the crippled Apollo 13 craft.

Curtis, Andrea. [Eat This! How Fast Food Marketing Gets You to Buy Junk \(and how to fight back\)](#). Illustrated by Peggy Collins. Red Deer Press.

Is the food and drinks we are exposed to on TV actually good for us? This book exposes readers to the world of marketing and how companies use product placement, lovable characters and appealing photos to get us to buy products that aren't healthy for our bodies or our environment. A must read that teaches us what we can do to fight back and make healthier choices.

Eamer, Claire. [Out of the Ice: How Climate Change is Revealing the Past](#). Illustrated by Drew Shannon. Kids Can Press.

Hidden in the earth's glaciers are ancient artifacts that have been frozen in time for thousands of years. As global warming is heating up the earth, these secrets of the past are being revealed. A simple and fascinating read, giving us a glimpse to what life was like a long time ago.

Gillingham, Sara. Seeing Stars: A Complete Guide to the 88 Constellations. Phaidon Press.

Absolutely stunning artwork highlights this volume of the constellations. With information from both the northern and southern hemispheres, readers will be shown how ancient civilizations named their stars and the reasons why they did so. Readers will also be introduced to the modern constellations along with useful tools to learn the night sky and additional resources.

Kinew, Wab. Go Show the World: A Celebration of Indigenous Heroes. Illustrated by Joe Morse. Tundra Books.

This rhyming look at Indigenous heroes from across (what some call) Turtle Island has put Wab Kinew's lyrical talents to marvelous use. In a variety of times and fields, these people distinguished themselves, showing a path forward for all of us that calls upon the strength and creativity of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Short biographies at the end of the book give more detail, and Joe Morse's vivid illustrations bring the whole thing to life.

Keating, Jess. Cute as an Axolotl. Illustrated by David DeGrand. Knopf Books For Young Readers.

Cute as a what?! The latest book in the World of Weird Animals series introduces us to 17 adorable, mostly unknown critters who use their cuteness to survive in the wild. Filled with fun facts, colourful photographs and humour, this is sure to keep young readers engaged and learning at the same time.

MacLeod, Elizabeth. Scholastic Canada Biography Series. Illustrated by Mike Deas. Scholastic.

A current look at some great Canadians. The series starts off with Chris Hadfield and Viola Desmond and continues with Tom Longboat, with future titles still to come. Realistic illustrations and an easy to read format allows readers of all ages to familiarize themselves with some inspiring Canadians and perhaps be inspired themselves.

McAllister, Ian, and Nicholas Read. The Seal Garden. Orca Book Publishers.

The fourth in the *Great Bear Rainforest* series, the beautiful photographs and moving narrative in The Seal Garden make this one of our favourites. Far from a traditional animal book, it offers an introduction to a unique ecosystem in an engaging and empathetic way. The seals and other harbour animals take shelter from an ocean storm in a kelp forest, called the seal garden. But when the storm ends and the seals start to leave, they see the orcas that are their predators. Luckily, the seals have their haven in the Great Bear Sea.

Messner, Kate. The Brilliant Deep: Rebuilding the World's Coral Reefs. Illustrated by Matthew Forsythe. Chronicle Books.

In this true story of coral reef restoration pioneer, Ken Nedimyer, we look at how one person really can make a difference; how one idea can really change the world. Understanding how essential the world's coral reefs are to our planet's survival, this book examines the hidden world under the sea and discusses how and why we need to start turning our attention to the brilliant deep in the oceans around us. With

incredible illustrations, this impactful book brings attention to the importance of the environment and the cause and effect we have on our Earth.

Wilcox, Merrie-Ellen. After Life: Ways We Think About Death. Orca Book Publishers.

After Life is an honest look at death, what happens when we die according to different viewpoints and how death is honoured in different cultures. This book also talks about healing by managing our grief and how to help our friends who may be dealing with loss. A compassionate but comforting read about a topic that is often avoided.

## Honourable Mentions

Gladstone, James. Earthrise: Apollo 8 and the Photo that Changed the World. Illustrated by Christy Lundy. Owlkids.

Moyer, Namoi M. Black Women Who Dared. Second Story Press.

Roberts, Jillian. On the News: Our First Talk About Tragedy. Illustrated by Jane Heinrichs. Orca Book Publishers.

Thomas, Keltie. Rising Sees: Flooding, Climate Change and Our New World. Illustrated by Belle Wuthrich. Firefly Books.

## Young Adult

Anderson, Laurie Halse. Speak: The Graphic Novel. Artwork by Emily Carroll. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Melinda, new to grade nine at Merryweather High comes to school with a secret: she was raped by a senior at a summer party. Melinda calls 911 but can't say anything on the phone and then is falsely outed as calling the police to stop the party. She is shunned by her classmates and loses her friends, unable to talk about what happened to her. It is fitting that Speak, the breakout book of the late 90s, is now reimagined in graphic novel form, as Melinda herself seeks solace in art class, the only place she feels comfortable and safe. Stunning pictures illustrate the pain and fear Melinda goes through, muted by her rapist, friends, parents, and even herself.

Bhathena, Tanaz. A Girl Like That. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Who is Zarin Wadia? Daughter of a single mother; orphan, victim of abuse, lawbreaker? A Girl Like That is just as much a book about identity, how personal history, religious and state sanctioned structures, being a woman and an object of gossip shape perceptions of yourself, as it is a tale of a modern-day romance set in modern day Saudi Arabia. Zarin, just sixteen years old, living with her volatile aunt and submissive uncle in Jeddah, faces scrutiny above what most young woman do: she smokes, she pursues boys and rebels against a system that is set to work against her. But all this changes when she meets Porus, a young boy from her home in India, now working in Jeddah. The two begin an unlikely friendship that sets them down a fateful, and disastrous path.

Dyer, Hadley. Here So Far Away. HarperCollins Canada.

Frances “George” Warren is the town’s enforcer - she’s sarcastic and tough and these are the reasons here friends love her so much: they know she’ll always have their back. Typical to many teen stories Frances wants to leave her town and go to university, but readers know from the narrative that her life is far more complex. During a tumultuous time, she meets 29-year-old Francis. It’s clear their pull towards each other is genuine, but there’s the age gap of over a decade, only made worse by Frances initially saying she’s 20. The lie doesn’t last long, but it also doesn’t deter the relationship. Set in the early 90s, Here So Far Away elicits strong feelings in the reader during the #metoo movement.

Gardner, Whitney. Chaotic Good. Knopf Books For Young Readers.

Cameron, an artistic teen, loves creating cosplay costumes, but has always faced scrutiny being a young woman in a male dominated scene. It doesn’t help that she’s recently won a prestigious award, setting off an online tirade of negative commentary. When Cameron’s family moves to a much smaller town, she thinks she’ll be able to work on her college portfolio in peace and quiet, but work takes her to a comic book store run by a guy who is horribly sexist and condescending. In a very Shakespearean turn, Cameron decides to dress like a boy, and is surprised by the unfettered and uncontested access she has to this community. Chaotic Good manages to be both a light read, and an insightful examination of misogyny and the impact of male dominated spaces on women’s interests.

Jones, Adam Garnet. Fire Song. Annick Press.

Shane, an Anishinaabe teen living on a reserve in Ontario, is struggling. His sister has committed suicide and as a result his mother has just shut down. On top of that he’s gay, living a closeted life with a secret boyfriend, until one day they are accidentally outed. Left with a difficult choice, they must decide if they will leave for a bigger city, where their relationship can be accepted, or remain in their small town. Fire Song has received reverse treatment - originally a movie now adapted to a book. The reader sees and experiences the complexities of being Indigenous in Canada, where people continue to experience murder, suicide and poverty, face a lack of housing and question their identity when the old ways are confronted with the new.

McDonell, Regan. Black Chuck. Orca.

Réal Dufresne is devastated when his best friend Shaun is brutally murdered. Always with something to hide, “Psycho Ré” is riddled with secrets, including his belief that, as a mythical beast called the Wendigo, he is the one responsible for Shaun’s death. Ré makes an unusual friend in Shaun’s girlfriend Evie, and the narrative of Black Chuck alternates between the two characters and their coming to terms with the real person who was their friend and partner. Surprising and disturbing at times, Black Chuck is more than just a twisted tale: it is also a coming of age story and a tender romance that is deeply deserved.

Oelke, Lianne. Nice Try Jane Sinner. Clarion Books.

Expelled from her high school after a suicide attempt, Jane Sinner tries to regain her life earning credits at a local community college. While there, she is accepted into a reality show, where other college



students are filmed living together in a Big Brother-esque show. What results is a tête-à-tête competition of wits, with witty and relatable dialogue fitting for teens.

Slade, Arthur. Crimson. HarperCollins Canada.

Fen knows the power of Queen Servilia, who's served the magical country of Illium for well over a thousand years, by using magic, fear and enslavement - her right hand was cut off for theft as an example of Servilia's exact rule, and she's been living in fear since. But what worries Fen most is wild magic, an unpredictable magic that is illegal because Servilia cannot control it. One day she wakes up with red hair, a sure sign that wild magic has taken hold. With a few supplies from her family Fen runs away to save herself. With a deft blend of political and social commentary, Crimson sets out to be different from your typical fantasy.

### **Honourable Mentions**

Gulland, Sandra. The Game of Hope. Penguin Teen.

Somersby, Jennifer. Sleight. HarperCollins Canada.

Treggiari, Jo. Blood Will Out. Penguin Teen.