



SAIL AWAY ON A GOOD READ

Which books are you going to read this summer?

How will you ever choose?

Breath a sigh of relief, because IRW has scoured the stacks for you! A dozen volunteers read over 100 books and selected their favorites for readers in Grades PreK-8. Get ready for a wicked good ride—little monsters, major league baseball, great auks, heroic stands, sticky-note wars, hilarious antics, and much more are waiting to fill the sails of your imagination!



PICTURE BOOKS

Also an Octopus, by Maggie Tokuda-Hall and illustrated by Benji Davies. Grades PreK - 3.

Here's a little known secret - every story starts the same way - and with the help of a character or two (maybe an octopus? or a girl? or an adorable bunny?), stories can take off like an exploding rocket! This book, essentially a how-to on creating stories, is a perfect distillation of story elements, presented through the journey of a ukulele-playing octopus and his desire to ride a rocket into space. Will he ever get there? What's the next part of the octopus's story? And who is going to write it?



The Tragic Tale of the Great Auk, by Jan Thornhill. Grades 2 - 5.

A species once 400,000 members strong is now extinct. How did that happen? Human impact? Evolutionary adaptations? Climate change? How about a tragic combination of all of the above? The Great Auk, a large flightless seabird, once ruled the North Atlantic, but the last two birds in the entire species were killed over 150 years ago. This picture book tells the story of a species' demise, and illustrates the interconnectedness of all things (even Vikings and volcanoes!).



Short Stories for Little Monsters, by Marie-Louise Gay. Grades K - 3.

This unique collection comprises nearly twenty illustrated short stories formatted in dual-page graphic spreads (similar to Calvin and Hobbes), and includes such gems as, "Snail Nightmares," "What Do Trees Talk About?" and "The Secret Life of Rabbits." In "When I Close My Eyes," a young girl tries to describe to a boy what she sees behind her eyelids, and he doesn't believe one bit of it. "The Secret Life of Snails" reveals just what's inside one spirally, purple snail shell (one hint: there's a chandelier!). By turns funny and philosophical, *Short Stories* will inspire wild, creative thinking in little and big monsters alike.



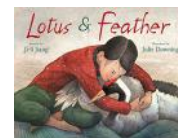
When Green Becomes Tomatoes: Poems for All Seasons, by Julie Fogliano and illustrated by Julie Morstad. Grades K - 4.

Just to give you a taste: "if you could take a bite/ out of the middle of this morning/ it would be sweet/ and dripping/ like peaches/ and you would need a river/ to jump in/ before a bee comes along/ and calls you/ a flower." This poetry collection, presented as journal entries across a year, is deep, reflective, and fully delights the senses, exploring through concise, perfect language the richness of the natural world throughout the seasons. Here's one more clue that this book is chock-full of relatable wisdom, from the poem dated 'march 13:': "politely/ but tired of mittens/ I asked the winter to please tell the snow/ thank you very much, but no."



Lotus and Feather, by Ji-li Jiang and illustrated by Julie Downing. Grades K - 2.

Lotus, a young girl who has lost her voice (and thus many of her friends), finds an odd cure for her loneliness after rescuing a beautiful crane that has been shot by a hunter. While Lotus nurses the crane, who she named Feather, back to health, she plays a reed whistle for him, and eventually he is able to dance to her tunes! As Feather grows stronger, he starts eyeing the skies, especially when other cranes begin their migratory journeys. Once Feather learns again how to fly, Lotus struggles in her heart with fear, and is worried of the loneliness she'll feel if Lotus leaves. Only after she learns to let go, though, will she ever discover the miracles possible on the other side of pain.



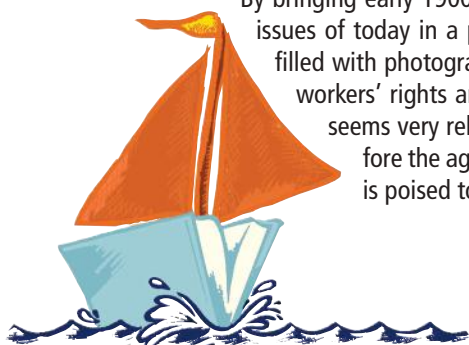
Ada Lovelace, Poet of Science: The First Computer Programmer, by Diane Stanley and illustrated by Jessie Hartland. Grades PreK - 4.

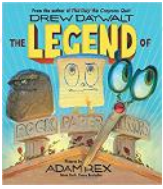
Ada's story may in fact seem more like a fairy tale than a biography for modern children who might have a hard time imagining the world before computers or electricity. While Ada lived in the shadow of her father's reputation (the famously flamboyant poet Lord Byron), her mother encouraged analytical and rational thinking, which in turn prepared Ada to understand the potential of Charles Babbage's calculating machine, the Difference Engine. Diane Stanley explores Ada's life in a way that one can clearly follow Ada's progression from a tenacious youngster to an intelligent, creative, and persistent woman who literally helped to change our world as we know it.



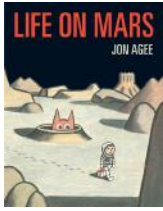
Fannie Never Flinched: One Woman's Courage in the Struggle for American Labor Union Rights, by Mary Cronk Farrell. Grades 4 - 6.

By bringing early 1900's labor activist Fannie Sellins to life, this book puts many of the income inequality issues of today in a proper historical context. Interweaving her life with nationwide events, the book is filled with photographs, newspaper clippings, and other documents that amplify the text. The fight for workers' rights and the exploitation and disdain for immigrants that fueled the dynamic of the time seems very relevant today, and readers can see how hard it was to communicate and organize before the age of the internet (What is a *postcard*??). This quick and thought-provoking biography is poised to engage young minds.



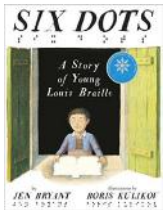


***The Legend of Rock Paper Scissors*, by Drew Daywalt and illustrated by Adam Rex. Grades PreK - 3.**
This beautifully illustrated and fanciful tale follows the antics of three great warriors (rock, paper, and scissors) who “vanquish all” in their neighborhood - only to meet in a garage to determine who is the ultimate champion. Their epic battle is, as we all know, perpetually unwinnable, but they have so much fun they cannot stop. We dare you - try reading this wonderful story aloud *without* creating different voices for the characters!



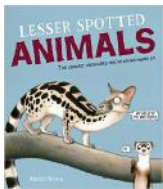
***Life on Mars*, by Jon Agee. Grades K - 3.**

This is a whimsical story about an astronaut searching for the life forms that he knows *must* be on Mars. He’s even brought a present—a box of chocolate cupcakes. The search seems to show the red planet as simply cold, dark, and covered by miles and miles of rocks and dirt. The astronaut decides that it is time to return to earth, but he discovers evidence of life on Mars just before he leaves, and finds even more evidence when he retrieves the box of cupcakes just before leaving. Unknown to the astronaut, what appears to be a very friendly Martian giant has been near him all along!



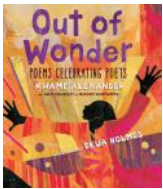
***Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille*, by Jen Bryant and illustrated by Boris Kulikov. Grades PreK - 4.**

It’s hard to imagine a better biography of Louis Braille! A master of the form, Jen Bryant, working together with illustrator Boris Kulikov, makes readers *feel*. First they feel the independence of a growing boy, then the pain of his accident, the frustration toward the confines of his medical treatment, and the world finally becoming completely black, which is masterfully shown to the readers as blackboard-like pages with colorless chalk drawings. From there the story shows the loving helpfulness of his family and Louis’s steadfast determination to educate himself. Once he realizes the lack of books to make this happen, he spends years working on a method to make a system for blind people to read. Finally, readers are able to feel the alphabet he created, changing the world for blind readers forever.



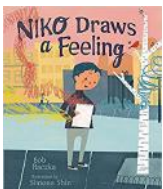
***Lesser Spotted Animals: The Coolest Creatures You’ve Never Heard Of*, by Martin Brown. Grades 2 - 6.**

Some creatures seem to get all the attention, like they’re celebrities of the animal kingdom or something! You know the animals I mean: the lion, the panda, the giraffe. People around the world can identify these animals without a moment’s hesitation, even if they’ve never seen them in person before. But what about all those cool creatures that haven’t “made it big?” Have you ever heard of a Cuban Solenodon (insectivore with a groovy, toxic tooth), lesser fairy armadillo (look it up – it’s pink!), or a sand cat (a little bit bigger than a house cat, and it lives in the desert)? Explore this intriguing collection of critters, and learn more about those creatures that are lesser known but just as awesome!



***Out of Wonder: Poems Celebrating Poets*, by Kwame Alexander, Chris Colderly, and Marjory Wentworth with illustrations by Ekua Holmes. Grades 3 - 7.**

In this profound collection of poems honoring beloved poets, Kwame Alexander opens the reader’s heart by writing in his Preface, “A poem is a small but powerful thing...It has the power to reach inside you, to ignite something in you, and to change you in ways you never imagined.” The poems in this book, written by three masters of poetry, are alive and vibrant with gratitude for those poets that have inspired them in their own journey, such “greats” as Basho, Walter Dean Myers, Mary Oliver, Gwendolyn Brooks, and many more. Ekua Holmes’s mixed media collages breathe further life into the homages, confirming this book as a ‘must-have.’



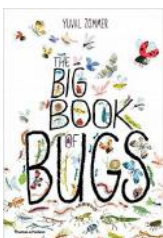
***Niko Draws A Feeling*, by Bob Raczka and illustrated by Simone Shin. Grades K - 3.**

Niko loves to draw, and he finds inspiration everywhere he looks. Most times, though, the people he shows his drawings to don’t quite understand what it is he’s trying to draw. He tells them, “It’s the warm of the sun on my face.” They don’t think it looks like the sun, but he wasn’t *trying* to draw the sun! He was drawing the warm! Niko is saddened that his pictures aren’t communicating. When a new neighbor named Iris shows interest in his drawings, he is nervous and afraid that she won’t like them, but doesn’t want to be rude. What will she think? Will she understand what he means? Will she see what he sees?



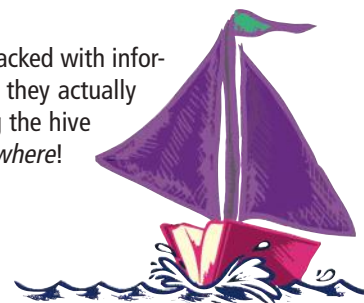
***Teacup*, by Rebecca Young and illustrated by Matt Ottley. Grades PreK - 3.**

“Once there was a boy who had to leave his home ...and find another” - so begins the story of a boy alone in a rowboat with only the four items he has brought with him. One of the more difficult real world situations to explain to young children at the moment is the movement of thousands of people across the globe as they search for new, safe homes. *Teacup* makes this story abstract enough to be understood by children on their own level, leading them to ask questions when they are ready, or guiding an adult reader to ask questions of the listener. Unlike some wonderful, older immigration picture books like *Molly’s Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen, readers have much less of an idea where this boy comes from or why he must leave his homeland. The gentle colors of the pictures soothe scenes of danger and the emptiness experienced by the child in his search for a new place where he will feel at home. Will he find it?



***The Big Book of Bugs*, by Yuval Zommer. Grades PreK - 3.**

Learn all about squirmy, wiggly, jittery bugs in this charmingly illustrated picture book that’s packed with information about all kinds of creepy-crawlies, from pond bugs to stick insects to dragonflies. (Do they actually breathe fire?!) The book also doubles as a finding game - Can *you* find the two wasps among the hive of bees? How about the old crumpled skin of a centipede? Look closely - there are bugs *everywhere*!



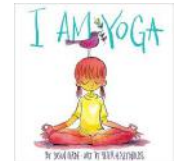
The Uncorker of Ocean Bottles, by Michelle Cuevas and illustrated by Erin E. Stead. Grades PreK - 2.

The Uncorker of Ocean Bottles has a very unique and important job; he must open any bottles he finds at sea and make sure they are properly delivered, no matter *where* it takes him. The Uncorker wishes sometimes that the messages in the bottle would be addressed to him, but he never has any luck with that at all. One day, he finds an invitation inside a bottle, but it's not addressed to anyone! He asks his neighbors and other locals for clues, but they aren't able to help. All they seem to say is what a nice invitation it is, and how they wish they'd been invited to that party, too. Without success, the Uncorker resolves to attend the party and apologize for not being able to deliver the invitation to its rightful recipient. What he finds at the party is unlike anything he ever imagined!



I Am Yoga, by Susan Verde and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds. Grades PreK - 2.

"When I feel small in a world so big, I calm my mind, my body, my breath. I can create and imagine. I am Yoga." Adults and children alike can benefit from this sweet reminder of how yoga can reconnect us to our inner being, help relieve stress, and open our hearts. Peter H. Reynolds has created wonderful images of yoga poses that, along with the text, provide a holistic and easy-to-grasp concept of the power of self and the benefits of yoga. There's a kid-friendly guide to the poses in the back of the book as well!



The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet!, by Carmen Agra Deedy and illustrated by Eugene Yelchin. (Spanish edition available.) Grades K - 2.

What do you do when your village is too noisy? In La Paz, you fire the mayor. But a new mayor does not mean less noise! He enforces new rules, and the town does indeed get quieter...until a merry gallito arrives and does what all roosters do. "Kee-kee-ree-KEE," he sings! And so a battle of wits ensues between the newly elected, determined-to-have-quiet mayor and the wildly and wonderfully keeing gallito. With hilarious illustrations and plenty of ways to engage young readers, this book makes for a fantastic read aloud.



CHAPTER BOOKS AND MIDDLE GRADE NOVELS

Princess Cora and the Crocodile, by Laura Amy Schlitz and illustrated by Brian Floca. Grades 1 - 2.

This crossover chapter book includes numerous illustrations and short chapters, ideal for extended reading aloud periods or as a tantalizing challenge for early readers. Princess Cora is an over-scheduled princess who feels like she has no control over her own life and that she doesn't ever get to do what she wants to do! When she asks her fairy godmother for help, she receives an unexpected answer to her request - in the form of a fabulously funny and confident crocodile! Wanting to help Cora, the crocodile offers to dress up as her and take over all her lessons (and her typical three baths per day) - that way Cora can finally have some free time to do what she wants! Surely nothing could go wrong?



Snow Summer, by Kit Peel. Grades 6 - 8.

Climate change has greatly impacted the planet, and humanity must now deal with a winter that won't thaw. In this delightful and enlightening fantasy story, Wyn is a rather introverted and confused teenager who doesn't fully realize that she has special powers which can potentially save the world from freezing over completely. Only if she accepts her true self will she be able to bring about positive change. A beautiful, lyrical look at the inner world of a preteen, this book also serves as a gorgeous portrayal of nature when seen within a spiritual realm.



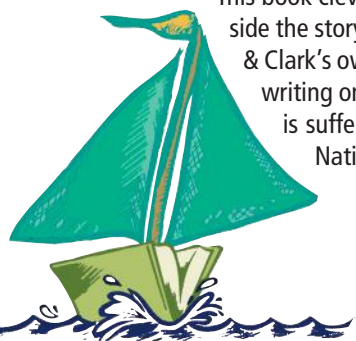
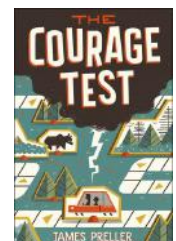
Cleared for Takeoff: The Ultimate Book of Flight, by Rowland White. Grades 4 - 8.

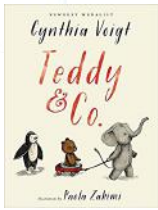
Instructions for making origami helicopters and bottle rockets? Check. Photos, diagrams, blueprints? Check. This non-fiction overview of the history of flying is quite comprehensive, but keeps each segment short and sweet, truly focusing on the most important and interesting contributions and contributors to the field of aviation. Perfect for budding pilots, flying enthusiasts, and curious knowledge hounds.



The Courage Test, by James Preller. Grades 4 - 7.

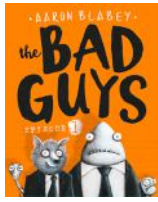
This book cleverly weaves old and new narratives, highlighting Lewis & Clark's famous river expedition alongside the story of a divorced father taking his very reluctant 11 year old son on a canoe trip that follows Lewis & Clark's own path. The father wants to teach his son about these historical explorers because of a book he is writing on the subject, and uses their excursion to protect his son from sad medical issues that the mother is suffering at home. The back-and-forth movement between current day family struggles and ancient Native American truths and historical facts makes for a captivating story for preteens.





***Teddy & Co.*, by Cynthia Voigt and illustrated by Paola Zakimi. Grades 1 - 3.**

This charming book is an instant classic, and would find itself on a library shelf near *Winnie the Pooh* or *Frog and Toad*. A group of animal friends – a thoughtful bear who rides in a red wagon, an elephant who loves to bake, a snake that loves to eat all the baked goods all the time, and a couple of playful pigs – all live together by the sea in harmony. One day, however, new animals start coming around, and the group must learn how to integrate them into their peaceful animal community. Simple yet thought-provoking, this story will linger, and you won't be able to see a red wagon without thinking of a certain little bear and his big, wonderful thoughts.



***The Bad Guys: Episode 1*, by Aaron Blabey (first in a hilarious series). Grades 2 - 5.**

Some creatures have bad reputations that they might not even have earned! Take sharks. Or wolves. Or snakes. There might be a bad shark, and a bad wolf, and a bad snake – but surely there are good ones, too! Right? Well – *The Bad Guys* series is about just those kind, the good kind. How will these animals change how others perceive of them? Can they go from Bad Guys to Good Guys in public opinion? Surely breaking two hundred dogs out of the pound would help!



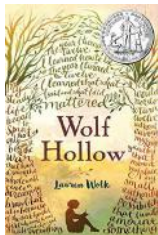
***Braced*, by Alyson Gerber. Grades 3 - 7.**

Rachel has scoliosis – a serious, progressive curvature of the spine - just like this book's author had, along with her editor, and seven million other people in the United States. Not only does Rachel experience the usual daunting issues of adolescence, she has to do so with a bulky, uncomfortable brace that covers her entire upper body. How is she going to fit in when she so obviously stands out? Will she ever be able to look at herself the same way again? Rachel's story is downright inspiring – a journey of perseverance, growth, understanding, and triumph.



***A Season of Daring Greatly*, by Ellen Emerson White. Grades 8 & up.**

Jill is 6' 2", has a 93 mph fastball, has just graduated from high school, and is the first woman ever drafted by a major league baseball team. The pressure on her is tremendous. In addition to athletic demands, she also feels responsible for being a role model for young women, and is being constantly barraged by different attitudes and obligations. Her story is fascinating, not only for how she copes in the male-dominated world of baseball, but for what it reveals about the major league life, and the intricacies of the game itself.



***Wolf Hollow*, by Lauren Wolk. Grades 5 - 8.**

Set deep in the Pennsylvania countryside in 1943, with WWII raging overseas, this debut novel tells the tale of a bully named Betty, and a naïve (yet clever and morally grounded) young girl named Annabelle. "I didn't know a word that described Betty," Annabelle says, "or what to call the thing that set her apart from the other children in that school." Though shocked and somewhat terrified by Betty's cruel behavior, Annabelle is unflinching in her confrontations of injustice and learns that sometimes lies are necessary to stave off the incorrigible gossip that threatens to destroy a traumatized but kind wandering soldier. Written in a timeless and clear voice, Wolk develops both flawed and complex characters through struggles where judgment and bravery go head to head. A fantastic read aloud for rich discussions that examine our history and the challenges of our human flaws.



***Loving vs. Virginia: A Documentary Novel of the Landmark Civil Rights Case*, by Patricia Hruby Powell with artwork by Shadra Strickland. Grades 8 & up.**

This is an eloquent and moving book about a very ugly time in American history, when 24 states still had laws banning interracial marriage. It is brilliantly constructed, using alternating, poetic, diary-like entries, from Mildred and Richard, the "Lovings" of the book's title (which is the name of a US Supreme court case). In blank verse, Mildred and Richard paint a picture of all aspects of rural southern culture in the 1960's—family-centered, striving for education and upward mobility, yet held back by racial traditions and laws. The lengthy, personal saga of Mildred and Richard is punctuated by illustrations, photographs, very short snippets of historical documents, important quotes, facts, and ultimately, a description of legal processes—just the right amount to give the reader a clear understanding - and a bibliography to enable further learning. (Did you know Alabama maintained its anti-miscegenation law until the year 2000?) The final Supreme Court verdict will give every reader the proper thrill! (Note: Mildred does give birth while in high school, out of wedlock, but there are no sexual situations described other than kissing.)



***The Ethan I Was Before*, by Ali Standish. Grades 3 - 7.**

Ethan, who has just played a central role in the loss of his best friend, Kacy, moves from Boston to Palm Knot, Georgia. During his first few days of school, Ethan meets some other students his age: the rich girl, her bullying friends, and the irrepressible Coralee, who is hiding nearly as much personal grief as Ethan. The intricate interactions of the schoolmates and staff with Ethan, his family, Coralee, and Mack (who runs the local hardware store) bring to life a rich story of family, growing up, dealing with grief and guilt, and even our relationship with local nature. There is much to learn about the lives of early teens, and much to enjoy, in this book.



***Bronze and Sunflower*, by Cao Wenzuan, illustrated by Meilo So, and translated by Helen Wang. Grades 4 - 7.**

When a famous Chinese artist and sculptor is sent to work as a manual laborer in a rural area during the Chinese cultural revolution, he takes his daughter, seven year old Sunflower, with him. The Compound where they live is across a river from a poor farming village where farmers try to earn a living. When her father dies in a freak accident, there are no relatives to care for Sunflower, but an impoverished farm family decides to take her to live with them. Their son, Bronze, has lost his ability to speak because of a frightening event, but he befriends Sunflower and acts as her protector. This very gentle novel portrays life in China during the 1960s and 1970s, a time of great political and cultural change.



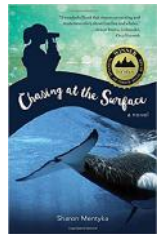
***The Someday Birds*, by Sally J. Pla and illustrated by Julie McLaughlin. Grades 3 - 7.**

Charlie is fascinated by birds, an interest he shares with his war journalist father. Together, Charlie and his father had made a list of "someday birds" they had hoped to see one day. When the father is injured in Afghanistan, and sent to Virginia for further treatment, Charlie must reluctantly join his older boy-crazy sister, Davis, and 10 year old twin brothers, Joel and Jake, on a cross-country trip to visit him. Joining the children on this journey is Ludmila, a young caregiver and chaperone from Sarajevo. How does this mysterious woman seem to know and care about their father? Charlie insists that, as they travel, they must search for the birds on the list. He feels that locating as many of the birds as possible will please their father and speed his recovery. By observing the behaviors of birds, Charlie is better able to understand and relate to human relationships, and learns to grow and thrive inside a family overcoming crisis.



***Chasing the Surface*, by Sharon Mentyka. Grades 3 - 7.**

In a small town outside of Seattle, Washington, in 1997, a group of mother Orca whales and their calves mysteriously swam into a river inlet and seemed unable to return to the open ocean. This novel is based off this occurrence, and intertwines the whale family's story with the story of twelve-year-old Marissa Gage. Marissa's mother had left Marissa and her father, with no explanation, tearing their lives apart. Previously, she had shared her love and respect of whales with her daughter, which made Marissa feel a close kinship with the stranded animals. Marissa has made every attempt to ignore the pain caused by her mother's departure, instead throwing herself into trying to help the magnificent mammals. In doing so, will she finally be able to confront her own issues of abandonment?



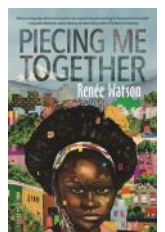
***The Best Man*, by Richard Peck. Grades 4 - 7.**

Richard Peck has once again perfectly captured the voice and world view of a pre-teen boy in middle America - Archer Magill. There are a lot of changes going on in Archer's life - a new school, the death of a grandparent, a wedding, and the realization that a favorite family member is gay - and Archer manages all these events simply and believably. There are painfully accurate descriptions of the angst of those years, and some laugh-out-loud humor. The defining message of acceptance and love is heartwarming without being preachy or sappy. Peck's word choice and use of language is highly entertaining, and just as you think the story is coming to an end, he inserts a new character into the structure that adds a wacky, fun element that every middle school kid will relish and envy. There are some strong and interesting female characters, and both girls and boys will enjoy this relatively quick read.



***Piecing Me Together*, by Renee Watson. Grades 8 & up.**

Jade wants to do whatever she can to get out of her poor neighborhood, including going to a private school where none of her friends attend. At school, she works hard and takes every opportunity that comes her way. She feels stuck in the middle, an outsider in both worlds (private school, her neighborhood). She reflects on her own journey by creating collage art, and she also practices Spanish in hopes of participating in a study abroad program. Jade's latest opportunity is a mentorship program called Women to Women. Jade chooses to participate, but is reluctant, especially after she is paired with Maxine, a woman with connections to Jade's own neighborhood, who seems more interested in talking to her ex-boyfriend on her cellphone than spending quality time with Jade. What can Jade even learn from Maxine? How can Maxine help Jade succeed when she seems to have so many problems herself?



***Posted*, by John David Anderson. Grades 3 - 7.**

After cell phones are banned at his middle school, a boy named Frost and his friends develop a new system of messaging: posting sticky notes around the school. The system works well, and quickly spreads, gaining "users" every day. It doesn't take long, either, for nasty messages to pop up, and it quickly escalates into a sticky-note war. How is Frost going to handle all this? And how does his friendship with a new girl named Rose impact everything? This novel masterfully navigates plot, complex characters (especially Rose - she is magnificent), ubiquitous and right-on insights from numerous sources, just-right references to past and present culture, intellectually and philosophically challenging topics, bullying, the world of junior high, the power of words, and - believe it! - even more than that. A must-read for middle schoolers!



***Flying Lessons & Other Stories*, edited by Ellen Oh, co-founder of We Need Diverse Books. Grades 4 - 6.**

What a treasure trove! This anthology includes stories from ten children's literature masters: Kwame Alexander, Kelly J. Baptist, Soman Chainani, Matt de la Pena, Tim Federle, Grace Lin, Meg Medina, Walter Dean Myers, Tim Tingle, and Jacqueline Woodson. From intense pickup games in Balboa Park to pirate ships at the Infinite Stream Temple, and from 'Seventy-Six Dollars and Forty-Nine Cents: A Story-in-Verse' to "Choctaw Bigfoot, Midnight in the Mountains," every short story contains a world both unique and familiar, a hearty dose of diverse perspectives.

