

WINTER 2023

34 RECOMMENDED TITLES
FOR DARK NIGHT READING

IRW Booklist

Est. 2014



IRW staff members are always reading new books for children, which we stack like cairns on each of our desks. That's how I like to think of them—guideposts beckoning us toward curiosity, imagination, wonder. And while the Maine State Library's Interlibrary Loan (ILL) service may circulate the state, there's a miniature library ecosystem happening among our staff members. When we get our hands on something wonderful, we're eager to share it.

We're very grateful to the ILL program, and would like to thank the many librarians across Maine who ensure there's a steady stream of books flowing through our office, especially our friends at Southwest Harbor Public Library.

If you're not borrowing but purchasing books, one way you can support the Booklist is by using IRW's affiliate link on [BOOKSHOP.ORG](https://www.bookshop.org) to purchase any of the books on the Booklist—10% of your purchase will support our programming! Bookshop.org is an online bookseller that supports independent bookstores and nonprofits.

HAPPY READING!

Kelsey E. Moore Buckley, Director of Communications & Engagement

PICTURE BOOKS

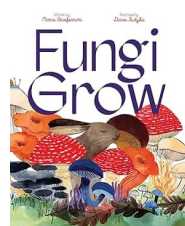


**Big by Vashti Harrison

Big is the story of a girl who is big in so many ways—she has a big heart, a big laugh, and big dreams. But what happens when being “big” is no longer seen as a positive attribute and instead becomes the source of ridicule and shame? Harrison brings us a tearjerker of a story about a young black girl who learns to push back

against body shaming and bullying so she can be her big, beautiful self. Illustrations swell to fill the pages and spill beyond them, emphasizing the idea that a big heart can't be contained.

**Fungi Grow by Maria Ganferrari,

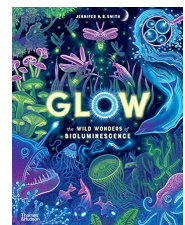


illustrated by Diana Sudyka

A delightful picture book that pairs poetry and nonfiction prose to explore the fascinating world of fungi. Punchy verbs describe the many ways that fungi grow and spread, harm and heal. Vivid illustrations depict a wide variety of fungi and mushrooms, with whimsical forest animals (spot the winking frog!) scattered throughout. This is a

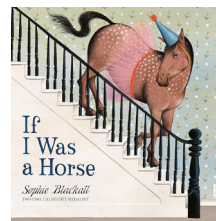
great choice for anyone who wants to learn more about the natural world, and classrooms will find a treasure trove of additional reading in the backmatter.

Glow by Jennifer N.R. Smith



Are you a fan of fireflies? Maybe you're familiar with the glow-in-the-dark phytoplankton that makes local waters glow at night. *Glow: The Wild Wonders of Bioluminescence* illuminates the history and science behind this phenomenon. The book features an array of glowing plants, fungi and animals, covering the science and history of bioluminescence. The glowing creatures are beautifully illustrated

in neon colors on a dark background, making the book shine.



* If I was a Horse

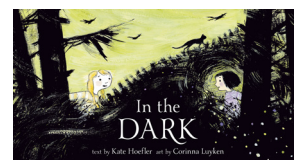
by Sophie Blackall

If I Was a Horse takes a deep dive into the imagination of one child pondering life as a horse. From frolics through the field to sparkly, tutu-filled horse parades, the creativity flows in this child's exploration of what it might be like to be a horse. As with all of Sophie

Blackall's books, the gorgeous, detailed illustrations pair brilliantly with the story, adding to the reading experience. Horse-loving children (and adult equestrians alike), will revel in this imaginative new book.

**In the Dark by Kate Hoefler & Corinna Luyken

There are two voices in this picture book—the townsfolk and the so-called



witches, who each tell their own side of the story. Wonder abounds when the voices become intertwined and true identities are revealed. Lyrical and a little mysterious, readers will find themselves lingering over the beautiful illustrations, especially with

the way Luyken plays with dark and light. This is a story about crossing the divide to understand one another and the joy of shared experience. This book has a unique horizontal format that adds to its wonderful strangeness.

**In the Night Garden by Carin Berger



From this book's mesmerizing cover to its endpapers, and all the pages in between, readers will delight in a journey through the magic of a night garden. With dreamy illustrations, the story is filled with beauty and light, connecting the reader to nature and the vastness of the universe. A curious black cat, luminous

fireflies, moonflowers, the sky full of stars, among other enchanting sights, we are reminded that not all are asleep at night. A comforting and calming bedtime story, it can help soothe the fears of someone afraid of the dark. Be sure to check underneath the book jacket to experience more nighttime magic!

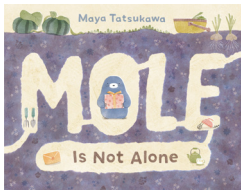
**Our Top Picks for the Whole Book Approach

What is the Whole Book Approach?

The Whole Book Approach asks children to look at books in their whole art form, including examining the endpapers, the jacket, the cover. By asking open-ended questions about the book and its visuals, we can create an interactive, rich learning experience.

*Maine Authors & IRW Alumni

IRW seeks out books by authors and illustrators who live in or have strong connections to Maine, and keeps our readers up to date on new books from the authors & illustrators we work with.



Mole is not Alone
by Maya Tatsukawa

A sweet story that will resonate deeply with introverts, *Mole is Not Alone* is a beautifully detailed illustrated journey of Mole on his way to a party at Rabbit's home. The pages follow Mole on his physical and emotional journey from start to finish. A great way to help children navigate social anxiety, Maya Tatsukawa's illustrations are a fabulous jumping off point for discussions about how Mole (and the reader) might be feeling.



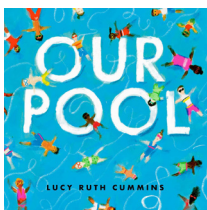
Night Owl Night
by Susan Edwards Richmond,
illustrated by Maribel Lechuga

For years Sova begs her mother to let her come along on the night-long journey to study the migrating saw-whet owls. Each year Mama tells Sova not yet, she must learn patience just like the scientists studying the owls. The time comes when Sova can wait and watch with her mother, but will they catch any owls? A charming, kid-centered introduction to a scientific approach, *Night Owl Night* includes informative explanations of the tools used in the tracking of migrating owls as well as QR codes to introduce readers to calls of a variety of owls. Lovers of nature, science, and parent/child adventures should not miss out on this one!



Oh No, the Aunts Are Here
by Adam Rex, illustrated by Lian Cho

The aunts have come to visit, and they've taken over—seeing the sights, giving smothering hugs, making themselves all too comfortable, and asking for the hundredth time if you like school. At first, our protagonist barely tolerates her bunch of quirky aunts, but it's soon clear that the aunts are there to save the day. Bold, colorful illustrations with silly details make this a fun, boisterous read. Perfect for your next hilarious read aloud. Don't forget to peek beneath the book jacket!



Our Pool by Lucy Ruth Cummins

Celebrating all the wonderful things a day at the pool brings with bright, splashy illustrations and punchy prose, this picture book will have you dreaming of summer. Though the story of a child visiting the pool with their mother is told in first-person, no one character is identified as the speaker, allowing the reader to identify with any of the happy pool-goers throughout the book. A joyful celebration of communal experience and a hot summer day.



Remember by Joy Harjo,
illustrated by Michaela Hoade

Poet laureate Joy Harjo's poem "Remember" asks us to take in the many wonders of our world, and to see ourselves as an integral piece. There are stunning lines in this book: "Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes, their families, their histories too. Talk to them, listen to them./ They are alive poems." Michaela Goade's rich, mesmerizing illustrations draw on imagery from her Tlingit culture. This book's author and illustrator are a perfect pairing—check the backmatter for the author's and artist's notes.



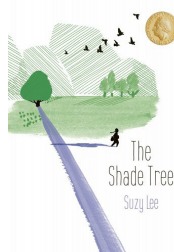
Something Someday
by Amanda Gorman,
illustrated by Christian Robinson

Presidential poet and #1 *New York Times* author, Amanda Gorman, and Caldecott Honor-Winning illustrator Christian Robinson have created a book that brings a sense of hope to all who read it. When things go wrong in our world and you feel as though you can do nothing to help, look for people who want to try to fix the big problems together. Even when some things don't work out, try again as you continue to dream, grow, and make a difference for the good of all. While this book is recommended for ages 4-8, it speaks clearly, with encouragement, to people of all ages.



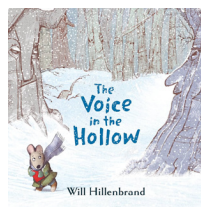
***The Pocket Book**
by Alexandra S.D. Hinrichs,
illustrated by Julia Breckenreid

This story celebrates all the wonderful things our pockets can hold: treasures, snacks, memories. A little girl goes on a walk with her mother and they fill their pockets together. Spare but lyrical prose encourages us to pause and examine ordinary objects for their beauty. The delightful "denim" cover and embroidered elements in the illustrations capture the joy of childhood. A must read for all those of us who are treasure-hunters and magpies!



The Shade Tree by Suzy Lee

When villagers enjoying the shade beneath a tree are shooed off by the rich man who owns it, a clever young man finds a way to outsmart him. Lee's illustrations are simple but powerful, more than the sum of their parts, and especially effective in the gatefold. *The Shade Tree* is a modern folktale about the pitfalls of greed and the joy of sharing.



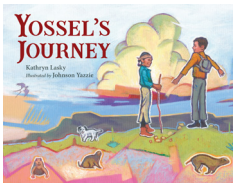
The Voice in the Hollow
by Will Hillenbrand

When the branch library (housed, of course, inside a tree) closes early for a blizzard, what's a small mouse to do? Hubert decides to take a shortcut through the Hollow, spooky though it may be, and is guided by an unlikely friend. Hillenbrand delivers us a wonderfully sparse and mysterious story where much is left to the imagination, while illustrations hint at what might be hiding within the Hollow. A small adventure story perfect for a chilly night!



There Was a Party for Langston
by Jason Reynolds, illustrated by Jerome & Jarrett Pumphrey

A joyous celebration of Langston Hughes' poems and legacy, as well as the power of words to bring us hope, freedom, and togetherness. Readers will spot famous black writers sprinkled throughout the book's pages, including IRW's late friend Ashley Bryan! In fact, this book was inspired by a photo of Maya Angelou and Amiri Baraka taken in 1991 at the opening of the Langston Hughes Auditorium at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Reynolds' first picture book is right on beat, snappy and triumphant, and beautifully accompanied by bold, playful illustrations by the Pumphrey brothers. A must-read for all "word makers"!



***Yosel's Journey** by Kathryn Lasky, illustrated by Johnson Yazzie

Yosel's family must leave Russia, where the houses smell of cinnamon and "touch shoulders." When they arrive in Arizona, many things are different, and it seems that Yosel will never again make a friend or tell a joke. It takes some time, but he discovers that playing games, sharing food, and learning one another's languages will earn him friendship and belonging with his neighbors on the nearby Navajo Indian Reservation. The backmatter reveals to us that Yosel and his family's story are inspired by real Jewish immigrants who settled in the American Southwest; check out the further reading section for more nonfiction and books for grownups with similar themes.

GRAPHIC NOVELS



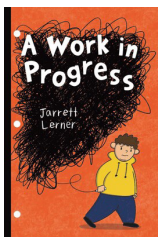
Mexikid by Pedro Martin

When Pedro was a kid, his family—all 11 of them!—crammed into a tiny RV for a long and winding road trip to Mexico, to bring his elderly grandfather to live with them. Pedro is a Mexican-American kid who loves American pop-culture, but he resents the way his older siblings, who were born in Mexico, make him feel lesser. Pedro's grappling with identity and growing up is relatable to readers of all ages, even in this "retro" setting. Hilarious, heartfelt, vibrant and sometimes a little gross, *Mexikid* is everything a life changing family road trip should be.



Sunshine by Jarrett Krosoczka

"I was sixteen when I first worked at a camp for kids with life-threatening illnesses. It forever changed the trajectory of my life." In *Sunshine*, Jarrett provides a window into an experience we should all be so blessed to have: for one week at camp, the campers get to be themselves. No one is staring at them or acting sorry for them because they're dealing with unimaginable hardships. The campers here are all in the same boat. They all get it. And they get to be outside, in the fresh air, going boating and being normal, even if it is with counselors being cheesy. This book is both heartwarming and heartbreaking.



A Work in Progress by Jared Lerner

Have you ever experienced someone say something to you that repeatedly echoes in your mind? Will, a fourth grader, struggles with body image, which intensifies from one child's unkind comment. Not only does this horrible comment replay in this mind over and over again for the next few years, it hinders his chances of making any friends or his ability to confront his school crush. This book takes you through a heartbreaking journey of improving self confidence, calming negative self thoughts, and alleviating body shame. Will feels the need to "slay the monster inside him" and drastically change his eating habits to earn the chance to fit in and feel comfortable in his own body. As he is dangerously changing his lifestyle, he meets another student that is dealing with his own challenges, yet teaches Will a healthier way of thinking. This book is such an important read for children, adults, anyone. Not only will this book encourage empathy but it may spark a much-needed conversation with people of all ages who may be dealing with mental health.

MIDDLE GRADE READS



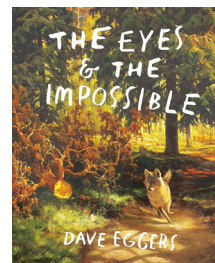
How to Stay Invisible, by Maggie C. Rudd

After being abandoned by his parents, Raymond, along with his dog Rosie, set up camp in the woods behind his school, and survive on their own by foraging, fishing, dumpster diving, and sleeping in a hollowed out tree. Raymond is determined to stay invisible to his classmates and teachers, because the one thing he doesn't want is to be sent to a children's home. But how can he make and maintain friendships when he has such a big secret to hide? Raymond's story draws out gratitude and appreciation for the caring loved ones in our lives: family, teachers, good friends, and—of course—irreplaceable companion animals.



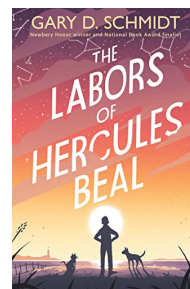
Simon Sort of Says by Erin Bow

Simon tells his new classmates he had to leave his last school because of an alpaca incident—which is not entirely true. He is counting on the fact that he moved to a town that has no internet, because he never wants anyone to figure out who he is. Trying to fly under the radar with a mother that runs a funeral parlor and a father that is a church bishop with a squirrel problem is hard enough, but when his friend, Agate, decides they need to save the town by sending messages into space using a confiscated microwave, things heat up. This book tackles the tragedy of school shootings and PTSD with sensitivity, humor and in a way that gives one reason to hope and room to process.



The Eyes and the Impossible by Dave Eggers, illustrated by Shawn Harris

Get ready to run faster than you've ever run in your life with Johannes, the wild dog who patrols a large urban park. Johannes sees all and reports to the park's three bison, who superintend the park and all goings-on from their enclosure. Every day brings surprises: new construction, mysterious objects, unpredictable humans, and unknown animals. On top of that, a brush with captivity gives Johannes a bold new idea: freeing the bison. Dave Eggers combines lyrical prose with the quirky energy of a dog's perspective, resulting in a book that is simultaneously thought-provoking and hilarious. The book has themes of freedom, friendship, and purpose.



***The Labors of Hercules Beal** by Gary Schmidt

Twelve-year-old Hercules Beal is coping with the recent loss of his parents—and now tasked with performing the twelve Labors of Hercules for a school project by his intimidating Language Arts teacher. In the words of Hercules: "Oh boy oh boy!" Hercules embarks on a series of silly and serious adventures, all loosely connected with classical mythology. Along the way, Hercules discovers strength within himself and support from his community—important landmarks on his journey through grief. Readers will feel at home with the cast of endearing and relatable characters (including one who will be familiar to readers of Gary D. Schmidt's *The Wednesday Wars*). A heart-warming story that is full of hope.



The Lost Library

by Rebecca Stead & Wendy Maas

When a little free library turns up unexpectedly in your town, go for it, take those books! You might stumble onto clues that will answer your town's mysteries just like Evan does in this book about facing change, overcoming guilt, and letting go. This book is told in three voices: Mortimer the cat, Evan who is a 5th grade boy nervous about going to middle school next year, and Al, a ghost librarian. All the pieces pleasantly come together when Evan discovers the Lost Library and takes two books that help unravel the story of the town's library, lost to fire 20 years before.



The Mossheart's Promise

by Rebecca Mix

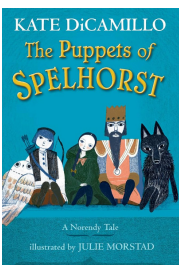
Her world is trapped inside a failing terrarium, but she doesn't know it. . . yet. With her mother sick and mold overtaking the land, 12-year-old fairy Ary Mossheart sets off on a perilous quest into the Underground to find a cure. Ary and her ragtag companions uncover secrets and battle dangerous creatures while racing the clock in this adventure-packed fantasy. Will Ary save Mama? What about her home? This book explores what it means to be a hero while alluding to modern environmental crises and acknowledging the unfair burden placed on younger generations. This is the first book in a duology and will hit the spot for readers who enjoy epic journeys and a dash of magic. Reminiscent of *The City of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau.



The One and Only Ruby

by Katherine Applegate, illustrated by Patricia Castelao

Did you know that elephants are a highly intelligent, social species? Ruby, a young elephant living at Wildworld Zoological Park and Sanctuary, is a confused baby elephant who helps readers understand the importance of finding a place in the herd. Through grief and loss, kindness and humor, Ruby tells her story from her early days in Africa to her life abroad through Uncle Ivan, her neighbor next door in Gorilla World, and Uncle Bob, the dog who lives nearby with his human friend Julia. As Ruby learns from her elephant aunts about her Tusksday, an important time of transition for young elephants, readers understand more about climate change, poaching, and the illegal ivory trade. Patricia Castelao's delightful illustrations and guide to elephant body language help bring Ruby's story alive. Ruby concludes, "I may be the littlest elephant, but I am also the luckiest!"



The Puppets of Spellhorst

by Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Julie Morstad

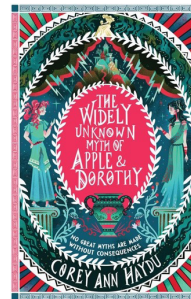
Five puppets—an owl, a girl, a boy, a king and a wolf—are purchased by an old sea captain, who leaves them inside a trunk with a letter. They are "all in a story together," though none knows what the story may be. DiCamillo's latest is charming, tender, and wise as ever—a simple but powerful story accompanied by Julie Morstad's wonderful illustrations. Readers will delight in DiCamillo's seemingly effortless magic-making once again, and will be pleased to know this is but the first installment in a new series, *The Norendy Tales*. This is an absolute must for fireside read-alouds this winter.



The Skull by Jon Klassen

Caldecott medalist Jon Klassen is sure to thrill kids with this spooky retelling of a Tyrolean folktale. Protagonist Otilla befriends a skull who lives alone in a big house in the woods. When she learns that the skull has a terrible secret, what will Otilla do? The spare, direct text and neutral-toned, blocky illustrations combine to create a story that is deliciously creepy while also oddly cozy.

Klassen's author's note encourages readers to ponder the dynamic nature of folktales. Perfect for kids who want something scary, but not too scary!



The Widely Unknown Myth of Apple and Dorothy

by Cory Ann Haydu

When you are a half-god living on Earth certain things are expected of you. You may be the granddaughter of Hera and must be perfect in every way, or you may come from Pandora's line—always questioning the way things are and making chaos. When Dorothy's mother decides not to climb the ladder one solstice, she no longer has immortality and when she suddenly dies from an accident shortly after, her family and friends try to make sense of her actions. This is a fabulous story for anyone interested in mythology, constellations, the ins and outs of friendships, loss, and love.

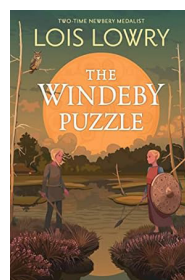


***From the Wild Robot series:**

The Wild Robot Protects

by Peter Brown

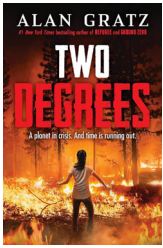
Since robot Roz's arrival on her island, life has been filled with adventure as she navigates the elements and wildlife in a quest to survive. In this third installment of the series, *The Wild Robot Protects*, dangerous waters have risen around the island, forcing its inhabitants inland, and struggling to find enough resources for all. Roz will be forced to undergo a journey to put a stop to the poisonous waters and save the place and animals she loves most. This series is a wild mashup of technology and nature writing that's heartfelt and thrilling.



***The Windeby Puzzle**

by Lois Lowry

Alternating between "History" and "Story" sections, Lois Lowry's *The Windeby Puzzle* combines creative nonfiction with a behind-the-curtain look at how a writer thinks about and researches a story. Inspired by a body found in a bog, Lowry combines research and imagination to bring the Windeby child to life in two different stories. Set in the Iron Age, this book covers a time period that many readers may not know a lot about. Anyone interested in history, archaeology, and good storytelling will get a lot out of this book. Lowry emphasizes the point that although not everyone is remembered forever, everyone's story has an important role to play in our collective history.



***Two Degrees* by Alan Gratz**

What could kids growing up in the California Mountains, Miami, Florida and the Canadian Arctic have in common? Turns out, a lot! All of the young people in *Two Degrees* are facing grave danger due to climate change. Gratz's book shifts through these disparate settings to follow three exciting plot lines, each that highlights an environmental, life threatening, catastrophe due to a warming planet.

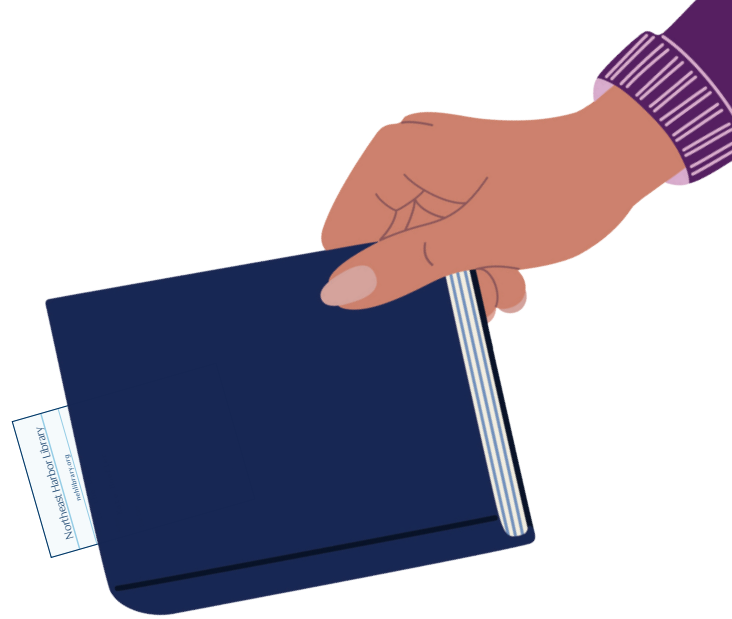
The very engaging and accessible plot culminates in a hopeful ending that encourages young people to become informed about changes to our world and push for environmental responsibility.



***What Happened to Rachel Riley?* by Claire Swinarski**

Anna, a new student at East Middle School, is determined to get to the bottom of a curious situation: Why is the formerly popular Rachel Riley now a social outcast? This captivating story is told in a multimedia format, with Anna's investigation pulling in text messages, emails, notes, and other documents. Anna and her classmates articulate

tensions experienced by many middle schoolers—wanting to fit in but also feeling uncomfortable, wanting to speak up but not wanting to cause drama. The book delivers a powerful message about standing up to sexual harassment, encouraging readers (especially girls) to be kind AND honest—and angry, in one's own way, when faced with injustice. A must-read for middle schoolers and anyone who knows one.



A special thanks to our team of volunteer Booklist Reviewers:

Molly Calder, Kim Campbell, Jean & David Evans,
Melissa Haas, Lisa Herrington, Jenna Jandreau,
Alison Johnson, Becky Lloyd, Ann Luginbuhl,
Abby Morrow, Dawn Severns, Lauren White

We hope you've enjoyed the Booklist!
Support IRW by shopping at BOOKSHOP.ORG.