

# WINTER 2024

29 recommended  
titles for dark night  
reading

IRAWA Booklist

Est. 2014





I am excited to be editing this booklist as my first in my role as Engagement and Communications Coordinator at IRW. We hope you enjoy this booklist as you settle into the winter months and find a book to share with a youngster in your life or maybe yourself.

In the words of the immortal Dr. Seuss,

*You're never too old, too wacky, too wild to pick up a book and read to a child.*

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!

Celine Martin, Engagement & Communication Coordinator

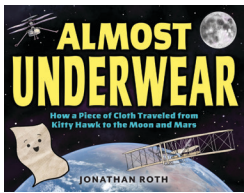
## PICTURE BOOKS



**\*\*A Tree is a Community**  
by David L. Harrison,  
illustrated by Kate Cosgrove

This picture book celebrates the community of insects and animals that are nourished and sheltered by a hackberry tree, inspired by a tree in the author's own backyard. Told through a lyrical poem that's packed with sensory details

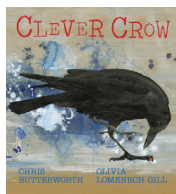
and punchy verbs, we visit creatures of all sizes and learn about their lives in and around the tree. The illustrations are both educational and charming, from the tiny possum family to the toes of the frogs.



**Almost Underwear: How a Piece of Cloth Traveled from Kitty Hawk to the Moon and Mars** by Jonathan T. Roth

A bolt of plain cloth originally used for making underwear is used by the Wright brothers to cover

the wings of the first Wright Flyer that flew for a brief 59 seconds in 1903. This brief flight proved it could be done! To honor the Wright brothers contribution, a piece of the same cloth goes to the Moon and Mars to again prove it can be done. Both informative and entertaining, follow some amazing "firsts" in this book from the humble perspective of a piece of cloth.



**Clever Crow** by Chris Butterworth,  
illustrated by Olivia Lomenech Gill  
Crows may not be flashy birds—but they sure are smart! You'll think about crows differently (and notice them everywhere) after reading this playful nonfiction book. Key facts outline crows' characteristics and their abilities to

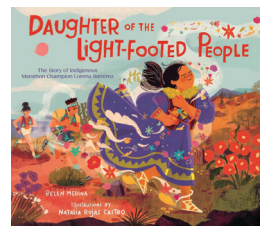
problem solve, remember, and play. The informational content is rich without being overwhelming, and varying text sizes allow the book to be easily abridged for younger audiences. The mixed-media illustrations are bold and striking, just like crows.



**Counting Winter**

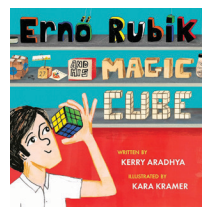
by Nancy White Carlstrom,  
illustrated by Claudia McGehee

This simple but stunning picture book counts up to twelve, celebrating the animals of winter. The prose is lively, lyrical and clever - written perfectly for a cozy read-aloud. The woodcut illustrations are gorgeous, including Animal Profiles in the backmatter and lovely endpapers.



**\*\*Daughter of the Light Footed People: The Story of Indigenous Marathon Champion Lorena Ramirez** by Belena Medina, illustrated by Natalia Rojas Castro

Meet Lorena Ramirez, an ultramarathon runner belonging to the Raramuri, an indigenous group from Chihuahua, Mexico. She made international news when she won the Ultra Trail Cerro Rojo, a 31 mile race. What makes this special is not only that she won the race, but what she was wearing. In the traditional clothes of her people, huaraches (rubber sandals) and a brightly colored skirt, Lorena beat 500 other marathoners. With gorgeous illustrations that transport you to the copper canyons of Mexico, the book follows Lorena through a 60 mile race. A wonderful story of persistence and staying true to who you are.



**Erno Rubik and His Magic Cube**  
by Kerry Aradhya

The story of the invention of the Rubik's cube by professor of architecture and design, Erno Rubik is an interesting one. When he designed the cube, he never intended to invent a puzzle at all and he didn't know

the way to solve it. Mathematicians, geometry lovers and puzzle solvers will learn how this puzzle was developed and many facts about it. For example, did you know there are 43 quintillion ways to scramble the Rubik's cube but only one solution?

### \*\*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.



### **Frost Fire** by Elly Mackay

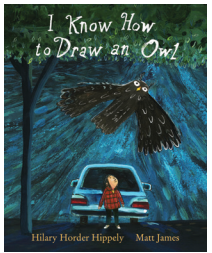
Two fox siblings set off into a winter kingdom after a fresh snowfall. Enchanted by her older sister's stories, little Celeste dreams of snow dragons and the frost-fire they breathe. Will they find a real snow dragon? Dreamy illustrations accompany this sweet story about imagination and snowy days.



### **\*\*\*How to Sing a Song** by Kwame Alexander, illustrated by Melissa Sweet

The third installment in their *How to...* picture book series, the dream team comprised of Newbery Medalist Kwame Alexander and Caldecott Honoree Melissa Sweet has outdone themselves this time! The joyful rhythm and meter of this book is expertly

paired with bold illustrations that celebrate sound with playful patterns and textures. This picture book would be a wonderful read aloud, and an opportunity to think about how we can artistically render different sounds. Don't skip the fun endpapers or back matter!



### **\*\*I Know How to Draw An Owl** by Hilary Horder Hippely, illustrated by Matt James

Belle can draw the best owl in his class, but is shy when his teacher draws attention to his art. He and his mother live in their blue car in a nearby park, where he had a beautiful, up-close encounter with an owl. This touching picture book is a tribute to unhoused children

and their families, and asks us to find empathy and courage in all circumstances. Subtle changes in Belle's expression ask us to consider what he's feeling as he tells his story, and finds solace in a wild owl.



### **Knight Owl and Early Bird** by Christopher Denise

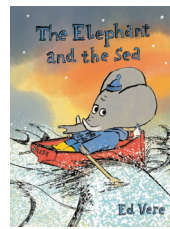
In this charming sequel, Knight Owl encounters the chipper, talkative Early Bird, who dreams of becoming a knight too. Irritated at first by the frequent interruptions to his daily naps, Knight Owl soon comes to realize there is a place for everyone's special talents,

especially when it comes to guarding a castle. Clever illustrations and cozy castle interiors make this a sweet read, and suitable for early readers to take on this picture book series themselves.



### **\*\*The Cat Way** by Sara Lundberg

What might happen if your pet was in charge of your daily walk through the neighborhood, instead of you?! Where might they take you, and what might you see? Do you think you'd enjoy going the cat's way? This picture book takes us on a charming adventure led by a willful cat. The beautiful fold-out spread lends a sense of awe and new perspective, sure to charm readers.



### **The Elephant and the Sea** by Ed Vere

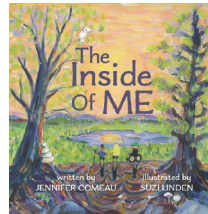
Ever since Gabriel was a young elephant living in a coastal town, he wanted to be on the lifeboat team, only to be told to wait until he was older. Well, he does, until he is too big to fit in the boat. Undaunted, he doesn't give up on his dream and comes up with his own solution. *The*

*Elephant and the Sea* is charming and will appeal to young children with themes of determination and bravery.



### **The Home We Make** by Maham Khwaja, illustrated by Daby Zainab Faidhi

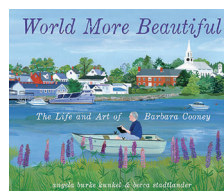
A young refugee girl tells her story of leaving home, traveling to a refugee camp, and emigrating to find safety in America. Told in a series of free verse, her story is filled with humanizing and grounding details that build empathy and understanding. This book seeks to help the reader understand the journey refugees take, and to consider the difficulty of leaving a home behind and creating a new one.



### **The Inside of Me** by Jennifer Comeau, illustrated by Suzy Linden

This poetic and inspiring story encourages children to connect with nature to nurture and nourish their minds and bodies. Its delightful and vibrant illustrations take the readers through various places in Maine with its gorgeous

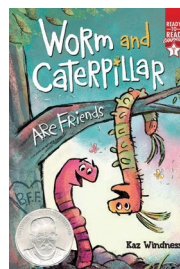
landscapes and wildlife. Readers will discover along the way the double meaning of the book's creative title. Be sure to check out the back matter which includes blank pages for children to draw a map of places they'd like to explore with the option to send a photo of it to the author! Also included are details about the featured Maine areas, nature activity prompts, and more!



### **World More Beautiful** by Angela Burke Kunkel, illustrated by Becca Stadlander

In *World More Beautiful*, Angela Burke Kunkel and Becca Stadlander tell the story of Barbara Cooney's life, from her days as a young artist experimenting

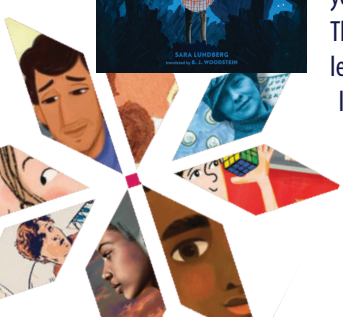
with paints to her travels around the world to gather inspiration for her books. The author chooses interesting details about Cooney's life and the book has the inspirational tone of Miss Rumphius. The illustrator's style is a good match for Cooney's—detailed, beautiful illustrations that celebrate the world through color. Highly recommended for anyone who wants to learn more about the person who created so many beloved children's picture books.



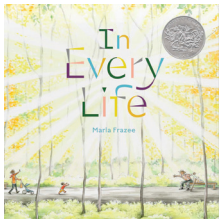
### **Worm and Caterpillar are Friends** by Kaz Windness

Worm and caterpillar are best friends. Worm thinks it's because they are so alike. But suddenly, caterpillar changes- a lot! This sweet story shows how worm and caterpillar find out their friendship can last even though they are very different. Both an early reader and a wonderful introduction to the world of graphic novels, it

includes a how to guide for reading graphic novels on page 4. Accessible vocabulary will invite even the most reluctant reader into reading and build confidence.







**\*\*In Every Life** by Marla Frazee  
In Marla Frazee's, *In Every Life*, we are reminded that life is a miracle and a blessing. With sparse but impactful text, each vignette tells its own story with beautiful two page spreads. In every life, there is love and loss, hope and joy, wonder and mystery and here it is captured beautifully. A great book for Visual

Thinking Strategies. Don't miss the front matter that explains what inspired it.



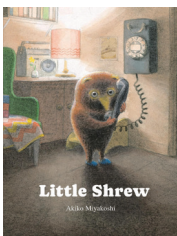
**\*Sole Man** by Shana Keller, illustrated by Steve Costanza  
Has anyone ever told you that something you wanted to do was impossible?! Have you ever had an idea for an invention? *Sole Man* follows the life story of lesser known Black immigrant inventor Jan Matzeliger, whose lasting machine revolutionized the shoemaking industry. Jan's big dreams and resilience are shown through bold, dynamic illustrations that draw from blueprints, gears and other mechanical devices for inspiration. A beautiful picture book biography that offers rich opportunities to dive into history and invention!

## EARLY READERS



**\*Stella and Marigold** by Annie Barrows, illustrated by Sophie Blackall  
When Stella first held her new baby sister Marigold, they both knew it was the beginning of something magical. Now that they are ages 7 and 4, adventures abound for the two imaginative sisters. From the talented author-illustrator team that created *Ivy + Bean*, comes this first book in a lively new series. Seven short chapters recount Stella and Marigold's escapades - both ordinary events like visiting the zoo, dealing with friend conflict at school, and being sick in bed, but also their fantastical stories and imaginary journeys! Cheerful, colorful illustrations brighten every page spread and contribute to the book's upbeat energy.

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**Little Shrew** by Akiko Miyakoshi  
Warmth radiates from this cozy book that honors the joy found in simple things. Rich, concrete language and carefully detailed illustrations draw readers into the life of Little Shrew. Over three short chapters, we see Little Shrew enact his daily routine, discover the wonder of a television, and enjoy a visit from friends. The straightforward text and

alternating black-and-white and soft color images create a soothing atmosphere. Readers will be inspired to think about the small things that make up their days and bring them purpose and happiness.

## MIDDLE GRADE READS



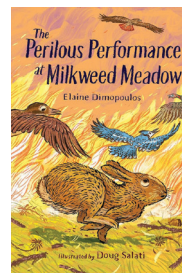
**Happy & Sad & Everything True** by Alex Thayer

Remember when you needed a break in middle school? Where did you go? The bathroom right? What if, when you went there, you could have gotten advice from a fellow student? This is what happens when Dee, while escaping from her own woes in the bathroom, encounters others who are also seeking refuge. But, as you can imagine, there are complications with being a bathroom counselor when you are in 6th grade. This is a story of resilience, empathy, and hope.



**The Glorious Race of Magical Beasts** by Alex Bell

Elijah is a librarian's apprentice with a secret; he's a book mage! He can use magical keys to visit any library in the world, he can take characters out of books and bring them into real life, and he can take people out of real life and put them into books. Elijah signs up for the Glorious Race of Magical Beasts in hopes that winning will help him buy a ruby that can heal his sick Nana. However, Elijah is not a fan of adventure! Could he actually win the race? And, much more importantly, will he even survive?



**The Perilous Performance at Milkweed Meadow** by Elaine Dimopoulos, illustrated by Doug Salati

Butternut the storytelling rabbit is back for another adventure in this suspenseful sequel to *The Remarkable Rescue at Milkweed Meadow*. Excitement abounds when a traveling troupe of wild turkeys invites the meadow creatures to perform in a musical. But the theatrical preparations bring challenges for Butternut, who auditions poorly. On top of that, she's the only one who senses looming danger. Courage and friendship, creative expression, overcoming mistakes and prejudices, managing anxieties, forgiveness - all are important topics in this book. Caldecott medalist Doug Salati's striking illustrations bring the myriad events and emotions to life. Perfect for animal lovers!

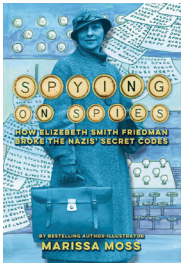


**\*Tree. Table. Book.** by Lois Lowry

Lois Lowry's *Tree. Table. Book.* focuses on an intergenerational friendship between two neighbors named Sophie. One is 11 years old and the other is 77. Despite the age difference, they have a special kinship and meet regularly for tea. The older Sophie is starting to have some problems with her memory and when her young friend finds out, she tries to help. This book features a Holocaust storyline (told through older Sophie's memories) that is woven in seamlessly to the present day story. This is a wonderful book that proves there are no age requirements when it comes to friendship.







## ***Spying on Spies: How Elizabeth Smith Friedman Broke the Nazis' secret code***

by Marissa Moss

Using the historical backdrop of the first 75 years of the 20th Century, this well-researched and well-written biography of Elizabeth Smith Friedman leads the reader through the story of a woman who used her nearly unique

analytical skills to help America win WWI, defeat gangsters during Prohibition, and save the US from Nazi-controlled espionage during WWII. Readers will be inspired, and intrigued, by the life of a woman who, despite always being under-appreciated, played a vital role in our history, and the emerging science of cryptanalysis.



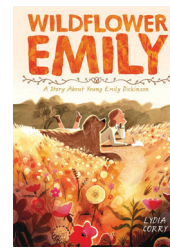
## ***The Color of a Lie***

by Kim Johnson

Can you even imagine what it would be like to live a life of lies?! Well, that happened to Calvin Greene, a black high school student, after moving from Chicago to Levittown, PA in 1955. Calvin's Dad hoped to start a new life, passing as a white family in a restricted housing development with a new high school. After all, Calvin and his dad had "passed" before when they did some

traveling to gather information for the Green Book. Calvin enters his new world, hoping to fit in without anyone knowing his true identity while white leaders of Levittown are committed to keep their community segregated. As the author leads us through real historical events of the time, we realize and appreciate the commitment and bravery of people of all ages who were striving for racial equality.

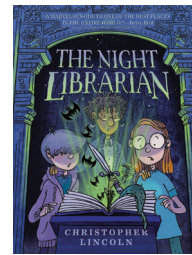
## **GRAPHIC NOVELS**



## ***Wildflower Emily*** by Lydia Corry

This young graphic novel is a wonderful introduction to the life and writings of Emily Dickinson. Soft pastels, botanical illustrations and interludes of poetry bring the world of Emily's childhood to life. Rather than focusing on her adult years and the mythology surrounding them, *Wildflower Emily* introduces her beloved dog companion, shows us Emily making friends at school, and follows the

creation of her beautiful herbarium.

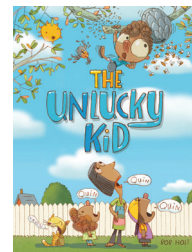


## ***The Night Librarian***

by Christopher Lincoln

When twins Page and Turner take their father's first-edition of *Dracula* to the New York Public Library for appraisal, it vanishes mysteriously. They soon learn that there's a strange phenomenon among books...that magic can build in them when a story is particularly old and beloved, resulting in the escape of their characters

off the page! Page and Turner are joined by the NYPL's Night Librarian and a crew of recognizable book characters in their adventures. This is a clever, funny graphic novel that will steal the heart of any great book lover.



## ***The Unlucky Kid*** by Bob Holt

Quinn is *The Unlucky Kid* and his adventures and misadventures are hysterical. No matter what he does or where he goes, something always goes horribly wrong. Like when he gets chased by a flock of seagulls shouting, "Fries!" or when he makes a plan to pull a loose tooth. Everyone in his family knows how unlucky he is and tells him to avoid certain situations but he

doesn't let a few setbacks get him down. A great graphic novel story collection from the creator of *Hallmark's Hoops and Yoyo* with wonderful illustrations for young readers. Don't miss the cat's deadpan asides!

## ***A special thanks to our team of volunteer Booklist Reviewers:***

Jean & David Evans, Alison Johnson, Kelsey Buckley, Abby Morrow, Jenna Jandreau, Becky Lloyd, Kim Campbell

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