



WINTER 2025

35 recommended
titles for winter
reading

IRW Booklist

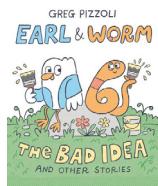
Welcome to our winter booklist! When the days grow frosty and the nights sparkle with snow, there's nothing sweeter than curling up with a good story. This collection is filled with stories that feel like soft blankets – tales that invite young readers to slow down, settle in, and let their imaginations wander. Enjoy!

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 to purchase any of the books on the Booklist – 10% of your purchase will support our programming.

HAPPY READING!

Celine Martin, Literacy & Community Relations Coordinator

EARLY READERS



Earl and Worm: The Bad Idea by Greg Pizzoli

Worm enjoys peace and quiet, but soon a loud neighbor bird named Earl moves in next door. Worm is angry at the intruder of peace. Who does this blue bird think he is? Regardless of Worm's protesting for quiet, Earl is unapologetically himself. He plays the saxophone in his garden and insists on inviting Worm into his loud, colorful world. But Worm isn't so sure. She enjoys her books, tea, and alone time. Can the two find a bridge to friendship? With the help of sweet lemonade, some good ideas, and poetry writing, a new friendship emerges. Pizzoli's new short stories do a wonderful job introducing friendship to young readers, showing that friendship can bloom even in the unlikeliest of circumstances.



Jasper Rabbit's Creepy Tales! by Aaron Reynolds, illustrated by Peter Brown

Charlie the marmot is getting his tonsils removed. He wants to put them in a jar and bring them to show and tell but things get creepy. On the day of his surgery, he finds his tonsils are already gone! Could it be that they are out for revenge? The first early reader chapter book from the team that created *Creepy Carrots* and *Creepy Underwear*. Young readers will enjoy this story for the ick factor (slime and tonsils in a jar?) and spookiness with some comedy thrown in for good measure. (Jasper Rabbit as Rod Serling, *Twilight Zone* style, introducing the story.)

*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.



*Lost Evangeline** by Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Sophie Blackall

Lost Evangeline continues award-winning author Kate DiCamillo's Norendy Tales series, a collection of novellas set in the magical land of Norendy. A teeny tiny baby is discovered in a boot by a cobbler, who takes her in and names her Evangeline. Together, they dream of one day adventuring across the sea. Because of her small size and sweet singing voice, others seek to capture Evangeline for their own gain. Along her journey, she meets a marmalade cat and a young tailor who help her escape danger so she may be reunited with her father. DiCamillo's gentle text paired with Blackall's enchanting illustrations bring both friends and foes vividly to life, offering a tender reminder to stay brave, kind, and true to oneself.

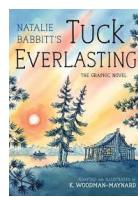
GRAPHIC NOVELS



Night Chef by Mika Song

A lonely raccoon secretly lives inside a fine French restaurant and dreams of being a chef. One evening, when Night Chef (the raccoon) cracks open an egg for her dinner, a baby crow named Ichi falls out! Despite being reluctant to leave her home, Night Chef steps into the wilds in order to reunite Ichi with his family.

And along the journey, she might just find a family to call her own too. Young readers will love this heartwarming story.



Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbit, illustrated by K. Woodman-Maynard

What if you could live forever? Winnie, the main character, is faced with that decision. With beautiful watercolors that bring the characters to life and quotes from the book in the illustrations, this 50th anniversary graphic novel rendition is as magical and wonderful as the original. A beautiful representation of the classic novel that will be a delight for new readers and devoted fans. Don't miss a conversation between Natalie Babbit's daughter and the author at the end of the book.

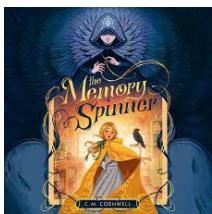
MIDDLE GRADE READERS



*The Danger Files: Real-Life Disasters**

by Anna Crowley Redding, illustrated by Robbie Cathro

Calling all junior detectives!! Have you ever wondered about what might have been done to prevent the sinking of the Titanic, the crash of the Hindenburg, the Flu Epidemic of 1918, the Molasses Flood in Boston, or the Great Chicago Fire? Investigative reporter, Anna Crowley Redding provides the reader with incredible background information, first hand observations, and simple but effective scientific experiments to uncover the who, what, when, where, how and why of the tragedies. Robbie Cathro's illustrations enhance the mystery and reality of each situation. Be prepared, curious readers, to do some detective work of your own. Uncover what really happened in major events that touched and changed so many lives!



The Memory Spinner by C.M. Cornwell

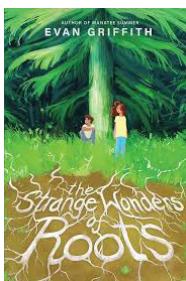
Lavender has terrible memory problems since her Mama died which causes problems for her as an apprentice in her father's apothecary shop. Worst of all, she is forgetting memories of her Mama. Secretly, she turns to an enchanted memory spinner to help

her regain her memories but in the process, she discovers that the memory spinner has a plot for revenge on the town. In exchange for Lavender's delivery of enchanted garments, the spinner will weave a cape for her that will bring her memories back. Will Lavender be able to save her town? There is plenty of magic and mystery in this book that will appeal to Harry Potter fans.



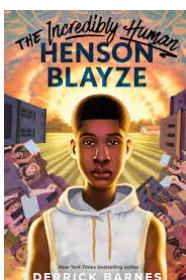
What Happened Then by Erin Soderberg Downing

Cousins Avery and Jax are going to their family cabin on an island in Crooked Lake for the first time with their extended family who haven't spoken in decades. There, they find a mystery. Why did their parents and aunts who went to the lake every summer suddenly stop? As their aunt gathers the family on the island for one last time before she sells it, they learn about the joy of family, however imperfect it may be, and try to bring theirs back together.



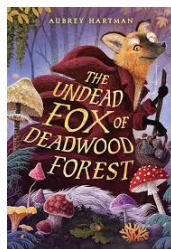
The Strange Wonders of Roots by Evan Griffith

Holly is visiting her uncle while her parents are off on their own adventures, and finds the town of Arden, where her uncle lives, quite different from any of the many places she's lived in or visited before. For starters, there's a grove of arden trees at the heart of the town that is under threat of being cut down and Holly, who is determined not to get too involved in yet another place and community that she'll soon be leaving, finds herself right in the midst of an environmental protection battle to save the grove. Can she do her part to help the grove without becoming attached to the place and its people?



The Incredibly Human Henson Blayne by Derrick Barnes

The Incredibly Human Henson Blayne by Derrick Barnes is a well-written, sometimes fanciful, book dealing with the balance between family, friends, and one's community. Henson is a scion of a black family that has been an integral part of their Mississippi community for generations, spanning antebellum to modern southern society. He is gifted with incredible ability in football, but must learn how to balance his skills between what the largely white community expects of its star, and the historical importance of the fortune that his family has used for social good for generations in the black community. The book gives the reader insight into the history and dynamics of a typical small southern town, birthed on native American land, first populated by black families that had escaped slavery, but then taken over by a white population that wants to forget the past.



The Undead Fox of Deadwood Forest by Aubrey Hartman

The Undead Fox of Deadwood Forest is a fantasy tale of a fox (Clare) who controls the gateway to life after death. He enjoys his work and is satisfied until the day a badger (Gingersnipes) comes into his once peaceful existence. Clare tries to usher them to the afterlife, but each time he tries it doesn't work. Together, they go on a dangerous

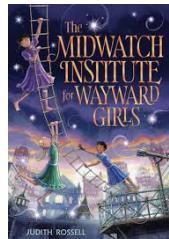
journey to get help in understanding the predicament where Clare discovers the truth of the issue in an upsetting turn of events.



Will's Race for Home by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Will's Race for Home was a Global Read Aloud book that starts off with Will and his family working as sharecroppers in Texas. His grandfather was a slave and so was his father until he was freed as a young boy. Will struggles connecting and understanding his father until he is allowed to accompany him to participate in the

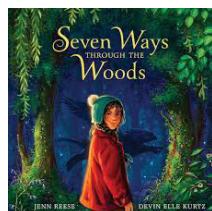
Great Land Claim of Oklahoma. Along the way, there are many dangers. They befriend a retired Civil War veteran, Caesar, and Will grows up a lot along the way by watching and learning from this man's actions. In the end, Will discovers the kind of man he wants to be while finally coming to understand his dad.



The Midwatch Institute for Wayward Girls by Judith Rossell

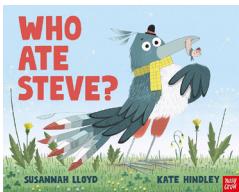
Good gravy! The dreary Midwatch Institute is not what it seems. New arrival Maggie Fishbone quickly learns that the grim facade disguises a spirited community of orphan girls being trained to fight crime. Maggie is swept into a world of interesting people and classes, "Observing, Contriving, and Hiding," to name a few. But trouble is brewing in the city as a night monster terrorizes the streets. When an elderly woman goes missing, Maggie and her friends are put on the case. It will take teamwork and all of their useful skills to solve the mystery. Full of undercover missions and daring escapes, this book will delight adventure-loving readers. Rossell's charming illustrations are generously scattered throughout the text. Short interludes between chapters teach, "Useful Things Every Girl Should Know." Lively, suspenseful (but not too scary), and brimming with good old-fashioned fun.

PICTURE BOOKS



Seven Ways Through the Woods by Jenn Reese, illustrated by Devin Elle Kurtz

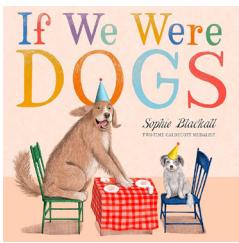
Need to make your way through the woods? In this beautifully illustrated picture book you will learn seven magical ways to get you there. Ride a griffin, weave a raft from crystal serpents, get help from other mythical creatures, or stray from the path and forge your own. *Seven Ways Through the Woods* uses creative writing and fantastical imagery to show children that there is no right or wrong way to be, as long as you are being kind to others and true to yourself. Children and adults alike will be delighted by the magic beasts on each page, and the important message will lead to great discussions on identity and acceptance.



Who Ate Steve? by Susannah Lloyd, illustrated by Kate Hindley

A fun, new read-aloud that invites kids to join in on the hilarity! Marcel is a big, lovable bird, and Steve is a wiggly worm with a cute sophisticated hat...

who keeps getting eaten by Marcel! Time and again, Marcel is asked to spit Steve out so the narrator can make a point about size (big vs. small), but Marcel just can't help himself. Will he ever keep it together for the sake of the narrator? Full of laugh-out-loud moments, playful participation, and a feline surprise ending, this book is sure to have listeners giggling and asking to read it again and again.



If We Were Dogs* by Sophie Blackall

Two-time Caldecott Medalist Sophie Blackall offers a sweet picture book that celebrates pretend play and imagination, with a silly surprise ending. A playful companion to Blackall's *If I Were a Horse*, but with a friendship-forward twist. Two friends dive into make-believe when one begins, "If we

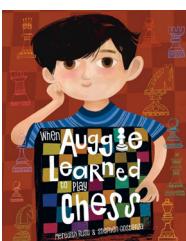
were dogs, I'd be a big dog! And you'd be a little dog!" But everything shifts when the other friend admits they don't want to be a dog at all. Lots of quacking then ensues in this sweet picture book that puts you right into the heart of childhood creative imagination and play. Don't miss the front matter, which holds an important clue to the story!



Hansel and Gretel*

by Stephen King,
illustrated by Maurice Sendak

Two famous artistic legends come together to create a new version of this classic fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm. Sendak's haunting, gothic-like illustrations—originally created for the Humperdinck opera of *Hansel and Gretel* in 1997—are sure to captivate fans of classic fairy tales, as well as admirers of Sendak's work. King's narration and retelling of this classic are rich with lyrical lines and captivating moments that will keep readers engaged from beginning to end. The narration is lengthy, but enjoyable, making this best suited for readers who can handle a longer storyline.



When Auggie Learned to Play Chess*

by Meredith Rusu,
illustrated by Stephen Costanza

When Auggie moves to a new place and goes to a new school, he struggles with adjusting and missing home.

When he finds a chess set in his house and his father teaches him how to play, things start to change. Gradually, he finds comfort in the game and begins to make new memories but he still feels like the pawn on the chessboard until he is reminded that the pawn is powerful too. As Auggie's confidence builds in chess and in his life, and he takes his own "gambit." Steve Costanza's illustrations are fantastic, especially the spread where kids at school are drawn like chess pieces and there are many similarities to a chess board with lots of squares. A great book about how chess can help build friendships and teach life lessons about patience, courage and taking risks.



Grandmother Moon

by Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason
illustrated by Trisha B. Waters
Have you ever been outside at night and felt as if the moon were following you? In *Grandmother Moon*, a Native girl learns the stories and teachings of the

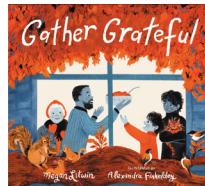
moon from her grandmother, who brings her from the city to the reservation every Friday. This is Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason's (Schaghticoke/Ho-Chunk) debut picture book, offering Indigenous stories and teachings while reminding us of the importance of passing these stories on to future generations. The book's backmatter includes an author's note, vocabulary, and information on the thirteen moons of the Moon Calendar.



Moon Song

by Michaela Goade

This absolute treasure of a picture book explores the beauty and magic of the world at night, and the way the moon comforts the land and its creatures. A young girl weaves a story of winter and light to help her cousin find peace in the darkness, blending in aurora borealis, bioluminescence, trees in the snow, and more. Phenomenal illustrations accompany this tender, powerful story, including a breathtaking fold-out page. This book is a lovely celebration of winter, and a perfect companion to Michaela Goade's previous picture book, *Berry Song*.



Gather Grateful

by Megan Litwin, illustrated by Alexandra Finkelday

In lovely, rhyming text and joyful, warm illustrations, this story follows wild animals and humans as they prepare themselves for Autumn's crisp air, shorter days, and gatherings. Readers will feel the coziness of the season and be inspired to think about what they are grateful for. Snuggle up with this nourishing story waiting to be shared with loved ones!



Island Storm* by Brian Floca, illustrated by Sydney Smith

With beautiful, encapsulating illustrations and poetic lines, this new work by Floca is sure to entice readers drawn to the boom and crash of a storm. An island storm is brewing: can you smell it? Can you feel the wind growling? Two siblings bravely seek adventure in the storm, witnessing firsthand how it transforms the look

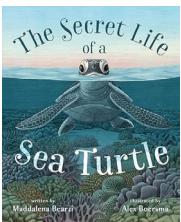
and feel of their little island. The stunning pictures of waves crashing against rocks and the dramatic changes to the island pull readers into the lyrical story. This poetic story with a warm ending is one not to miss.



Don't Trust Fish by Neil Sharpson, illustrated by Dan Santat

Some animals are mammals. Warm blooded. Fur. Easy to distinguish. "Fish don't follow any rules." They are rebels and outlaws. DON'T TRUST FISH." There seems to be a conspiracy amongst the fish. Are they out to get us? How do we know? With clever prose and hilarious illustrations

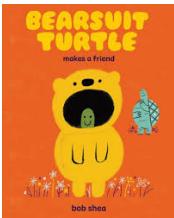
this creative pair take readers on a rumpus through the unexplained wariness humans might, could, should, have of fish.



The Secret Life of a Sea Turtle by Maddalena Bearzi, illustrated by Alex Boersma

"On a starry night within the fine sand of the shores of Ria Lagartos, a nature reserve on the Yucatan Peninsula, a female sea turtle is about to hatch." So begins our delightful entry into the life of a newborn sea turtle.

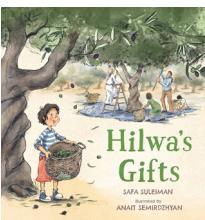
From hatching to finding her way to the lapping waves and beyond, we travel along. Danger presents herself in numerous ways creating obstacles seemingly unsurmountable. And yet our little gal persists. Full of lush illustrations and informative backmatter for nature lovers and inquiring minds, this newcomer in nonfiction picture books is a beauty.



Bearsuit Turtle makes a Friend by Bob Shea

What does it mean to be a "real" bear? And who exactly is the expert on that? As bearsuit turtle tries to convince his friend (also a turtle but not in a bear suit), that he is a bear, we are taken on an illustrated romp of hilarious adventures. From foraging for delicious snacks (ice cream

from the Froggy Treats ice cream truck, to smashing pumpkins) this wildly funny picture book will have everyone rolling on the floor.



Hilwa's Gifts by Safa Suleiman, illustrated by Anit Semirdzhyan

When Ali visits his grandparents in Palestine the first thing he does is go see the olive tree he planted with his grandfather. It has grown just like him! It is harvest time and Ali gets alarmed when his grandma, "Sitty," is hitting the trees but as he soon discovers, it is an

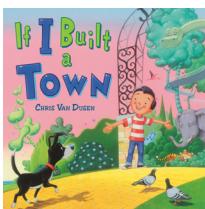
efficient way of harvesting the olives. Olives that are made into oil and soap and, yes, eaten too! An Arabic glossary aids the reader along with an author's note of her personal experience.



The Interpreter by Olivia Abtahi, illustrated by Monica Arnaldo

"Celia, you're up!" is the cry from her soccer teammates. But at the same time the big job of translating for multiple family members is pulling Celia in the other direction. When her family continues to say, "What would I do without you?" it is hard to say "no" and not be there

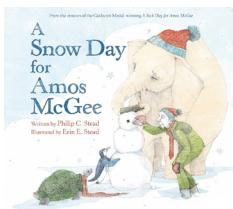
for them. From translating at the grocery store to the hair salon it all gets to be too much. After all, Celia's main job is to be a kid! This is a great book to help us all understand the pressures that can pile up on young children.



If I Built a Town * by Chris Van Dusen

Chris Van Dusen's fourth book in the *If I Built* series is a fun, futuristic imagining of a town complete with an open air zoo full of kind and gentle creatures, cars that zoom and hover and robots doing all sorts of jobs including a robo-barber! Jack's fantastic imagination

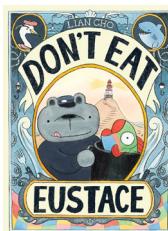
has dreamed up not only that but much more. Colorful illustrations and rhyming, engaging text bring it all to life. The end papers showing Van Dusen's ideas for the book are delightful and will encourage creativity from young inventors.



A Snow Day for Amos McGee by Phillip C. Stead, illustrated by Erin E. Steed

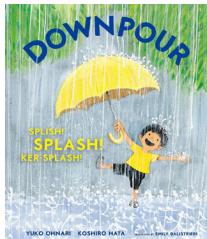
With soft, gentle, lovely illustrations, this is a heartwarming Winter story about imagination, patience, and hope. Along with themes of joy

and coziness, it highlights loving relationships between humans and animals. It may inspire you to join zookeeper, Amos McGee, and his animal friends in making snow angels! Be sure to check out the other Amos McGee books!



Don't Eat Eustace by Lian Cho

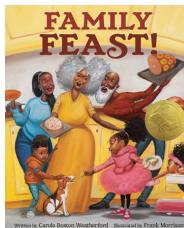
It's hard not to get "hooked" on a story featuring a bear lighthouse keeper and a fish named Eustace! After finishing work at the lighthouse, Bear heads to the shore to catch some lunch - and ends up catching both Eustace and a rainbow-checked sail. Eustace, not eager to become Bear's meal, cleverly distracts Bear by suggesting Bear use the sail to help others instead. Bear makes a new wing for a heron, a jacket for a shark, and even a cozy sweater and cap for themselves! Bear discovers that helping others feels even better than a good meal - and decides that friendship is far more satisfying than fish (Eustace) stew.



Downpour by Yuko Ohnari, illustrated by Koshiro Hata

Splish! Splash! Ker-Plash! Do you remember the feeling you had as a child when the rain first began to fall - the sights, the sounds, the fresh, earthy smells? *Downpour* celebrates the sudden burst of a rainstorm on a hot day, inviting readers to experience it through the senses of a young boy caught in the

excitement. With its beautiful illustrations and playful text, this story makes for a delightful family read. Originally written in Japanese, *Downpour* features an English translation that joyfully plays with the many sounds of rainfall - perfect for reading aloud and speaking "rain" together with fun sound words like Plip!, Fwish!, and Ker-Boosh! After reading this book, you'll definitely want to head outside the next time it rains!



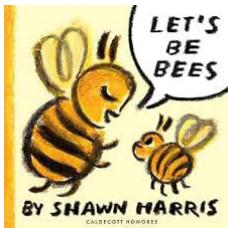
Family Feast!

by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Frank Morrison

"Tastes like home when family meet; a bond so warm, so strong, so sweet." This refrain in Weatherford's rhyming text for *Family Feast!* highlights the excitement and joy of loved ones gathering around a holiday smorgasbord.

Morrison's illustrations depict a large, multigenerational family coming together not only to enjoy the food, but to savor one another's company. This warm, welcoming read will have you reaching for your favorite family recipes - and the memories that go with them.





Let's Be Bees by Shawn Harris

Shawn Harris' *Let's Be Bees* celebrates the joy and playfulness that bloom when imagination takes the lead. In a delightful metafictive twist, readers begin by seeing the very book they're holding appear on the title page and again on the opening spread, where a child and an adult are shown reading it together. Rendered entirely in crayon, the illustrations follow the pair as they first transform into bees and then

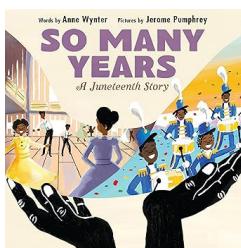
into a series of other imaginative forms - birds, trees, snow, even the Earth itself. With each page turn, readers are invited to join in by making the sounds that match each transformation, adding a lively interactive layer to a story time you'll want to enjoy again and again.



Alberto Salas Plays PAKA PAKA con LA PAPA by Sara Andrea Fajardo, illustrated by Juna Martinez-Neal

"In the Andes Mountains, where papas grow in thousands of shapes and colors, Alberto Salas is on a quest for the potatoes of the Americas." Why you might ask? How about because about a billion people rely on the potato as a source of food! And native potatoes that can grow in

a variety of climates are important to seek out and save in genebanks to develop potatoes that can withstand extreme temperatures and conditions. Read along and discover how Alberto, an "Andino" discovered his passion and how noticing led him to a world of discovery. A sweet and lively biography with fascinating back matter.



So Many Years by Anne Wynter, illustrated by Jerome Pumphrey

"How would you dress after so many years of mending your clothes with rags?" Life changed for many Black Texans on June 19, 1865, a day now known as Juneteenth. It is a day of celebration but also remembrance. "How would you eat after so many years of making meals from scraps?" Gorgeous and celebratory illustrations stir the readers feelings and demonstrate celebrations full of pride and joy.



A special thanks to our team of volunteer Booklist Reviewers:

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