

SUMMER 2026

Over 30 recommended
titles for summer
reading



IRW Booklist

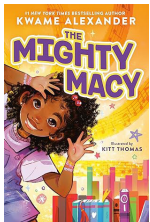
Summer is a season made for stories—long sunlit days, sandy toes, and just *one more* chapter before bedtime. This booklist is filled with adventures both big and small, from seaside discoveries to backyard imaginations, from friendships that blossom to journeys that surprise. Whether you're reading under a shady tree, in a hammock, or curled up after a day of play, these books invite young readers to dive in, explore new worlds, and let their imaginations roam as freely as summer itself.

If you're purchasing rather than borrowing books, you can support Island Readers & Writers by using our affiliate link on BOOKSHOP.ORG to buy any of the featured titles. Ten percent of your purchase will support IRW's programming.

HAPPY READING!

Celine Martin, Literacy Coordinator

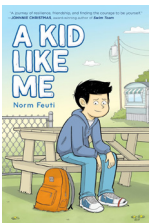
EARLY READERS



The Mighty Macy by Kwame Alexander, illustrated by Kitt Thomas

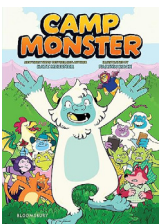
Macy loves her orange hi-tops, the poems her Dad writes for her, and reading! She worries when the school library hours are cut and makes a plan with her friends to speak at the school board meeting. The only problem is that she doesn't know if she will find the words to write a poem that expresses how she feels. Readers will delight in watching Macy find her voice and stand up for what she believes in. A sweet story that celebrates empowerment, libraries, and poetry.

GRAPHIC NOVELS



A Kid Like Me by Norm Feuti

The pressures of growing up and fitting in are front and center for Ethan as he starts middle school in this sweet and funny graphic novel. Figuring out who you are and fitting in is tough, but it's even more challenging when you have an ancient flip phone for a cellphone, a busted backpack, and discount clothing. As Ethan tries to adjust, he finds that other people have the same problems regardless of their background or advantages. In the process, he finds his own "retro" style and the courage to be himself.



Camp Monster by Kate Messner, illustrated by Falynn Koch

This delightful graphic novel takes a sweet and humorous look at the typical summer camp experience—but with monsters! After years of operating as *Camp Yeti*, Tasha and her family are rebranding and reopening as *Camp Monster*. Of course, bringing a variety of different beings together has its own challenges, and all Tasha wants is to recreate the fond camp memories similar to the ones her grandfather would tell. When the threat of humans looms large, the campers and staff have to look past their differences and work together for the sake of their newfound home away from home. Delightful characters and gorgeous illustrations, *Camp Monster* is sure to be a win in any camp-loving household!

*Maine Authors & IRW Alumni

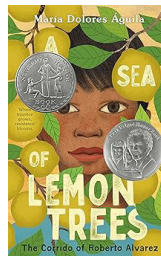
IRW seeks out books by authors and illustrators who live in or have strong connections to Maine, and keeps our readers up to date on new books from the authors & illustrators we work with.



The Ghost of Wreckers Cove * by Angelica Del Campo, illustrated by Liniers

A father brings his two daughters to the seaside to live in an old lighthouse keeper's house for the summer. It is remote. It is surrounded by nature. And there is no cellphone service. It's perfect for young Martha but her older sister, Christina, is miserable—and sarcastic. But when a ghost and a shipwreck enter the scene and there's a mystery around the missing lens of the lighthouse, Christina can't help but get sucked into her sister's imagination. The girls must don their Nancy Drew-like caps to investigate! A wonderfully illustrated graphic novel that reminds us to return to nature and our own creativity.

MIDDLE GRADE READERS



A Sea of Lemon Trees by Maria Dolores Aguila

Written in verse and based upon a true story, *A Sea of Lemon Trees* gives a lyrical account of a young Mexican-American's efforts to access mainstream American education, two decades before *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregated schools nationwide. Young Roberto and his friends were dismayed to discover that they were to be moved out of the Lemon Grove Grammar school into a segregated school that had once been an old barn. In short, beautifully written verses, the author describes Roberto's near-solo, but ultimately successful, efforts to change the Lemon Grove School Board's decision so that he and his friends can return to their beloved school. The book certainly deserved its Newbery Honor Award!



Growing Home by Beth Ferry, illustrated by The Fan Brothers

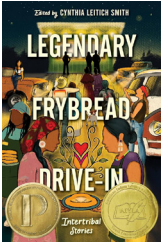
A grumpy, cheesepuff-loving goldfish in a magical antique fish bowl, a talking plant with superhuman strength, an intellectual spider with a typewriter, and an invisible plant that only wants to sing, all live together in the Tupper's antique-filled house. Just figuring out how to be friendly is hard enough, but when you add intrigue in the shape of a greedy man in purple shoes and the threat of losing their beloved home, they must put aside their jealousy and bad feelings to figure out what family and friendship really mean. Can they save the Tupper's home and stay together? Do they want to?



Landslide * by Betty Culley

Ten-year-old Nathan Savage has a special ability that allows him to notice movement that no one else can see. When he realizes the giant landfill across the street from his house is about to avalanche, Nathan does his research and finds out that other landfills around the world have done the same thing, and with catastrophic results. With help from his new friend Wilder, he learns all about the

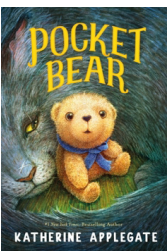
history of garbage. Together, they set up a plan to try and save Nathan's father, who drives a compactor at the landfill. This action-packed and heartfelt middle grade book keeps you wishing for better times for this small Maine town and Nathan's family.



Legendary Frybread Drive-In edited by Cynthia Leitch Smith

The many writers that contributed to this collection of short stories have given readers a real gift—a peek inside the lives of teens from a variety of Indigenous tribes and backgrounds, each finding their way to Sandy June's Legendary Frybread Drive-In. The many angles and avenues

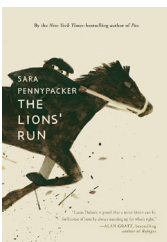
that lead each teen to the drive-in, and the way each story's details call back to and sometimes interweave with the others, bring to life the realm of this place-beyond-places. The Legendary Frybread Drive-In does not appear on a map, and it's not found in only one place! Instead, it appears to those who need it most, providing not only delicious traditional food, but welcoming access to Elders, art, music, and community.



Pocket Bear by Katherine Applegate

The story follows Pocket Bear, a good luck charm for soldiers, as he leads other older, well-loved stuffed animals at a house that serves as a second chance for toys. The characters are lovable, and the reader becomes empathetic towards them when the antagonist enters the

story and tries to steal a more valuable toy. Working together, the animals find the courage to save another friend.



The Lions' Run by Sara Pennypacker, illustrated by Jon Klassen

Thirteen-year-old Lucas DeBois is an orphan living in an abbey in a small town in France during WWII. Lucas feels almost invisible; he is insecure in his self-worth and bullied by older boys. He is teased and called "Petit Eclair,"

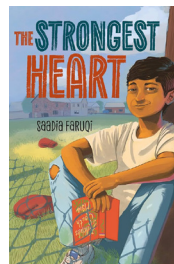
meaning soft like a custard. When Lucas tries to stand up to the bullies to save a litter of kittens, he meets an English girl, Alice, and her horse in a nearby hidden barn. Daughter of a horse trainer, Alice's goal is to get her filly to America for safe care. As a messenger boy for a local grocer, Lucas also befriends a young girl, Claire, who is housed at the Lebensborn, a maternity home, with her new baby Felix. Before long, Lucas learns of ways he can quietly help resist the Germans through the examples of others. This beautifully written and illustrated book shows that people can fight for injustice and make a difference no matter what their age.



The Moon Without Stars by Chanel Miller

From acne to first romance, seventh grade is a minefield for Luna and her peers. Luna's life changes unexpectedly when the uplifting zines she makes with her best friend Scott catapult her popularity. But being in the popular kids' group has a cost. Luna must ditch Scott and write "Fix-It" books, highlighting her classmate's flaws. Over the

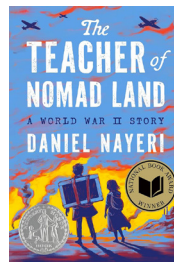
school year, Luna learns how her words have the power to help or hurt others. She faces the hard task of mending broken relationships and, even harder, forgiving herself. Chanel Miller's writing is honest, relatable, and often humorous, with short chapters and a myriad of anecdotes capturing the frenetic ups and downs of middle school life.



The Strongest Heart by Saadia Faruqi

The Strongest Heart follows Mo, a Pakistani American boy, as he moves to Texas with his father to live with his aunts and cousins. While his mother takes a job overseas, Mo is left to cope with his father's struggles with paranoid schizophrenia. As he adjusts to a new home and family, Mo turns to South Asian folktales to make sense of his

father's condition, his own cultural identity, and his feelings of inadequacy when comparing himself to his cousin.

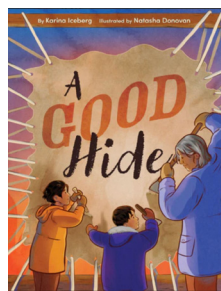


The Teacher of Nomad Land by Daniel Nayeri

The Teacher of Nomad Land follows two orphans, 13-year-old Babak and 8-year-old Sana, who are sent to live in separate households after their father is killed during World War II in Iran. Babak decides the only solution for them to be together is to run away and take on his father's role as a teacher to the children in nomadic tribes. He straps

his father's large blackboard to his back and they set off for the Zagros Mountains to join the Bakhtiari people during their annual migration. It proves to be a truly treacherous journey when they are rejected by the tribe and have to find their way on their own. Along the way, they are joined by a Jewish boy attempting to evade a Nazi spy. Ultimately, Babak grows from an insecure orphan to a confident mediator, bringing cultures together.

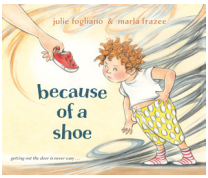
PICTURE BOOKS



A Good Hide * by Karina Iceberg, illustrated by Natasha Donovan

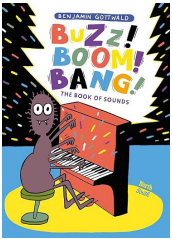
This debut picture book by Karina Iceberg (Aleut/Alutiiq) offers a vivid look at an Indigenous community working together during moose season in Alaska. Emphasizing gratitude, sustainability, and cultural tradition, *A Good Hide* shows how every

part of the moose is used and honored. Iceberg's text walks readers through the step-by-step process of tanning a hide—including the use of "brain goo" and even urine—while celebrating the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next.



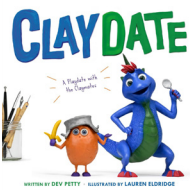
Because of A Shoe
by Julia Fogliano,
illustrated by Marla Frazee

With richly expressive illustrations, the feelings of both children and parents during a tantrum are validated in this wonderfully powerful picture book. The use of bright colors shifting to mostly darker colors and then gradually returning to bright colors depicts the range of emotions that both child and parent can go through during heated conflict. Readers are given the gift of perspective—that we can have strong feelings, express them in safe ways, rest, and come back together with continued love...and a dose of humor!



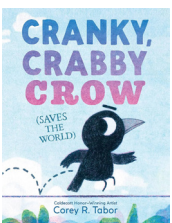
Buzz! Boom! Bang!
The Book of Sounds
by Benjamin Gottwald

Get ready to have the time of your life flipping through the pages of this creative, wordless picture book. You're invited to make up your own sounds, words, and stories to go along with the illustrations. Learn onomatopoeia, build vocabulary, and have endless conversations with every turn of the page. Great fun for all ages.



Claydate by Dev Petty,
illustrated by Lauren Eldridge

In the hilariously creative picture book, *Claymates*, readers are introduced to two curious blobs of clay who get into a bit of silly mayhem when their creator temporarily leaves her work area. The giggles, adventure, and imagination continue in *Claydate* as the original clay characters create some clay friends. The new friends, a unicorn-dragon and a potato shaped knight - have ideas and antics of their own, and who knows what could happen in their worlds! Pair this book with some clay and googly eyes and be inspired to explore your own creativity!



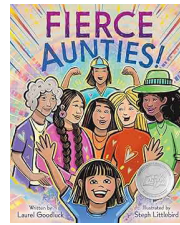
Cranky Crabby Crow
(Saves the World)
by Corey R. Tabor

Why is Crow so cranky? He doesn't want to play with Squirrel. He caws at Hummingbird and Rat and Bat. Cat tries to warn him that he won't have any friends if he keeps up such an attitude. But what is really happening with Crow? Perhaps clearing the area was his plan all along. A plan to SAVE THE WORLD. What is that plan? Well, we surely didn't see it coming! What a fun and unexpected story.



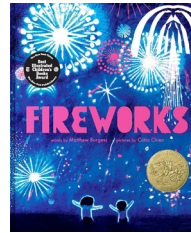
Every Monday Mabel
by Jashar Awan

Every Monday, Mabel wakes up early and waits for the best thing in the world—in her opinion. What is it you may ask? The book builds with anticipation as we eagerly wait with Mabel as she sits in her chair at the top of the driveway. What will it be? Until RRRRRR! Honk! Honk! It's here! The garbage truck is here! With delightful sounds and fun illustrations, this book captures the joy and wonder of being a kid.



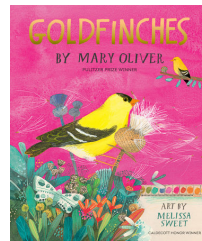
Fierce Aunties
by Laurel Goodluck,
illustrated by Steph Littlebird

Sometimes your parents and friends aren't the ones you need to have your back. That is when you need your FIERCE AUNTIES! They are feisty. They are strong. They are bold. And always ready for an adventure. With unconditional love and an eye for justice, these women will joke around and rib you but will always believe in you. A lovely tribute to Auntie warriors everywhere.



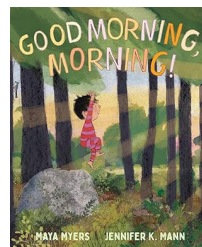
Fireworks by Matthew Burgess,
illustrated by Catia Chien

The exuberant, lyrical text of this 2026 Caldecott Medal winner captures a special summer day in the city (presumably July 4th). Concrete language teeming with alliteration and onomatopoeia draws the reader into the sights, sounds, and feelings of the day, from watermelon juice dripping from chins, a frolic in the spray from a leaking fire hydrant, to the hushed anticipation before the first firework. Bold, colorful illustrations explode across the pages, mirroring the energy of a fireworks show. Like fireworks, the echoes of this book will stay with you beyond the final page. A feast for the senses!



Goldfinches* by Mary Oliver,
illustrated by Melissa Sweet

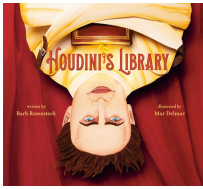
"Have you heard them singing in the wind, above the final fields?" Readers are invited to explore and appreciate the beauty of the natural world through this poem by renowned poet Mary Oliver, made accessible to young audiences through Melissa Sweet's illustrations. We follow the goldfinches as they wait for the thistles to bloom and go to seed, then line their nests with thistle down and lay eggs. Mixed media illustrations, including a photograph of an egg-filled nest, bring to life the images contained in the poem and offer additional scientific facts. Vibrant colors echo the poem's joy. Don't miss the richly detailed endpapers! A wonderful blend of art and science that can be used as a springboard for nature observation and journaling activities.



Good Morning, Morning!*
by Maya Myers,
illustrated by Jennifer K. Mann

Did you know your day can't start until you have officially greeted it? *Good Morning, Morning!* is a lovely ode to the natural world in all its glory. A young boy slips outside in that liminal space between night and day and observes the wonders of nature around him as he sets up to greet the new day. Lovely and poetic. Don't be surprised if, after reading this with your youngster, your door creaks open in the wee hours of the following morning!

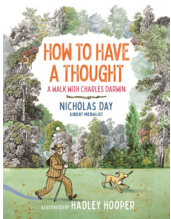




Houdini's Library
by Barb Rosenstock,
illustrated by Mar Delmar

Can you imagine having enough books in your home to need to hire a librarian? This fascinating story about the life of the world's most beloved magician, Harry

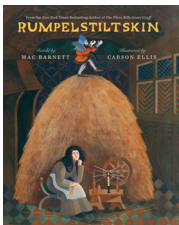
Houdini, and his love of books invites us to do just that. Born in Budapest, Eric Weisz's family moved to America where they fell on hard times forcing him to quit school at a young age. Self-taught through books, he studied and learned about magic. In his world travels, he always made time to visit bookshops and buy books until his collection grew to about 15,000 books, almost all related to magic. The oldest was written in 1586! A great story about how books transformed a poor, unknown boy into the great Houdini, with illustrations made from magical miniature scenes hand cut from paper.



How to Have A Thought
by Nicholas Day,
illustrated by Hadley Hooper

This book delightfully plays with the format of a picture book biography, cleverly breaking the fourth wall by its invitations to the reader. ("First, you need a rock. This was Charles Darwin's rock, but you can have whatever rock you

want.") Subtly funny and informative, Nicholas Day reminds us that Charles Darwin tackled some of our biggest questions imaginable while out on a simple walk. Multimedia illustrations bring the combination of natural science and curiosity to life.



Rumpelstiltskin by Mac Barnett,
illustrated by Carson Ellis

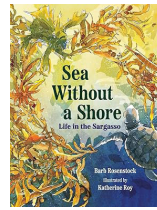
Author Mac Barnett and illustrator Carson Ellis are the dream team for breathing new life into (very) old fairytales. Rumpelstiltskin is just as clever as its title character, and has the tongue-in-cheek humor characteristic of Mac Barnett's work. Carson Ellis' illustrations are rich, serious, and feel like an old manuscript. All around, it's a beautiful retelling that is equal parts silly and somber.



Safe Crossing by Kari Percival

The perfect picture book for amphibian enthusiasts, environmental activists, and nature nerds everywhere! *Safe Crossing* tells the story of Big Night, the annual amphibian migration in the spring, and suggests ways

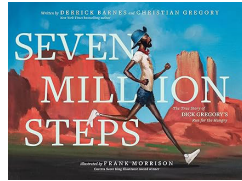
that people of all ages can help keep these creatures safe. This nonfiction picture book is playful, visually delightful, and informative with backmatter that adults and kids alike will pour over. Don't miss the scavenger hunt on the endpapers!



Sea Without a Shore
by Barb Rosenstock,
illustrated by Katherine Roy

The Sargasso Sea, created by five swirling currents, is "saltier, warmer, and two feet higher in the center than the ocean that surrounds it." Say what?! Follow the path of a bit of seaweed

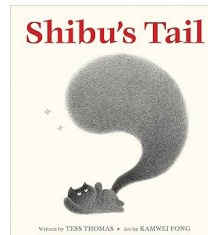
that changes sunlight into sugar, growing and spreading to become a magical place for crusty bryozoans, feathery hydroids, and spiraled tube worms. Fish, sea turtles, birds, and insects all come to explore and feed in the only sea that has no shore. But, in the middle of nowhere, a community thrives. Fascinating and beautifully illustrated.



Seven Million Steps
by Derrick Barnes &
Christian Gregory,
illustrated by Frank Morrison

This is the true story of Dick Gregory's remarkable

3,500-mile run from Los Angeles to New York City in 1976. Consuming only vitamins, sunflower seeds, water, and fruit juices, Gregory stopped in cities across the country to speak out against injustice and gained support from celebrities such as Muhammad Ali. A beautifully illustrated book with an important message, *What would you do if you had a bold idea to stand up for what you believe in?*



Shibu's Tail

Shibu's Tail by Tess Thomas,
illustrated by Kamwei Fong

Shibu the cat has the most expressive tail! When he's angry, the fur on his tail stands straight up; when he's happy, his tail likes to hug things. His tail reveals every one of his feelings. But when Shibu discovers that other cats don't communicate feelings through

their tails, he tries to hide his own. Keeping his emotions bottled up, however, only makes him feel as though he might burst.

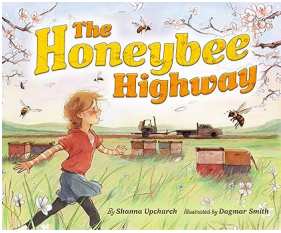


**Snowshoe Kate and
the Hospital Built for Pennies**

by Margi Preus,
illustrated by Jaime Zollars

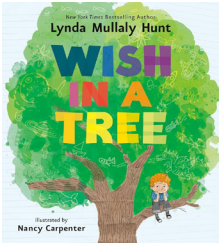
It's no secret that IRW is fond of picture book biographies, but we loved *Snowshoe Kate*. Like, really, really loved it. Kate's story is an absolute inspiration—she became a doctor before it was

considered a viable career for women, and worked in the rural communities of the Northwoods of Wisconsin, where she snowshoed to her patients. Even more moving is the story of the determined children who collected pennies to build Dr. Kate her very own hospital, where patients could come to her. The illustrations are a delight, cleverly depicting the hundreds of babies Dr. Kate delivered and the thousands of pennies collected by children. Don't miss the backmatter and the bibliography for further reading and definitely don't forget to peek under the book jacket!



The Honeybee Highway
by Shanna Upchurch,
illustrated by Dagmar Smith

Hooray for honeybees! This engaging picture book follows a young girl, her uncle, and a driver as they transport 40 beehives across the country to pollinate California's almond orchards. Along the way readers learn about the journey, the challenges the team faces, and how they care for commercial honeybees during the long trip. The story highlights the essential role bees play in pollinating our food crops, even blueberries in Maine! The book's back matter includes fun facts, helpful resources, and many ways readers can support pollinators.



Wish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hunt,
illustrated by Nancy Carpenter

Sitting still and staying focused are not easy tasks for young Oliver. As he notes, "My body bounces. My brain blazes." He simply cannot turn off his curiosity and wonder. Which makes it hard to fit in at school and follow the rules that seem so simple to the kids around him. "Must you be weird all the time?" asks a classmate. Is being "weird" really such a terrible thing? Sometimes people with the most active and strange brains do things that change the world. This book celebrates that. With characters from her middle grade novel, *Fish in a Tree*, Hunt introduces young readers to the idea that "different" can be awesome.

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

Molly Calder

Kim Campbell

David Evans

Jean Evans

Alison Johnson

Melissa Haas

Lisa Herrington

Jenna Jandreau

Becky Lloyd

Courtney Waring



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